

Royal Holloway, University of London

*Writing Pictures:*

*The Screenplay as a Form of Literary Modernism*

PhD Media Arts

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Jasmin Mirsal, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 14 December 2018

## Abstract

Thesis Title: *Writing Pictures: The Screenplay as a Form of Literary Modernism*

Is the screenplay a modernist literary form or merely an industrial blue-print? Despite increasing interest in the screenplay's form and its history, not much is known about the interaction between the screenplay's beginnings in the early twentieth century and the modernist movements surrounding it. There has been little examination of the screenplay's formal characteristics in the context of literary modernism or screenwriters' positions to the literary modernisms in their respective national settings. So how does the screenplay fit in the prevailing history of literary innovation, and can it be considered a form of literary modernism?

In order to provide an answer to this question, I have conducted three case studies covering prominent screenwriters of three well-known western film industries. The first case study, "Anita Loos & Middlebrow Modernism", investigates the development of the early American screenplay in the context of American Modernism and Imagism. The key objective of this case study is to trace the evolution of both the form and function of the screenplay in the growing American film industry and how it reflects and interacts with the modernist practices around it. The second case study, "Carl Mayer: The Screenplay between Weimar Modernisms" serves the objective of identifying formal, stylistic (and potentially literary) elements unique to the screenplay by examining Carl Mayer's formally distinctive silent film screenplays in the context of German Expressionism and New Objectivity. The third case study, "Adrian Brunel: The Screenplay as Professional Practice" examines the screenplay in the context of artistic professionalization during a period when cultural practice diverged between popular culture and private cultural practice, such as exemplified by the Bloomsbury Group.

In the three case studies, different visions for the screenplay emerge, which emphasise the tension between the development of new forms and their commercial application. Close readings of screenplay texts and their evaluation in context to canonised modernist practices of the period highlight that the screenplay did not develop in an industrial vacuum but was an organic part of the efforts to explore the limits of the written word.

The thesis concludes in proposing a broader definition of the screenplay that extends its capacity beyond that of an industrial blue-print but acknowledges that its industrial application has been a primary force in shaping its form. The thesis argues that there is no binary distinction between the screenplay as a commercial production tool and the screenplay as a modernist literary form, even as it vanishes into another form in the industrial film production process. As such, the screenplay in fact occupies a unique position as a quintessentially modern written form, linking words with images, artistic innovation with industry and the appropriation of the old for the new.

## Acknowledgments

As this thesis relies heavily on the assessment of primary texts and has therefore necessitated a considerable amount on archival research, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the archives that have allowed me access to original screenplays and private papers.

For the case study on Anita Loos, I wish to thank the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, and in particular Barbara Hall, for providing me with both access to and advice on the Anita Loos collection. For the case study on Carl Mayer, I wish to thank Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, especially Gerrit Thies, Lisa Roth and Cordula Döhrer for their assistance in accessing the Carl Mayer papers. Lastly, for the case study on Adrian Brunel, I would like to thank the BFI National Archive at the British Film Institute in London, in particular Jonny Davies, for providing me access to the Adrian Brunel collection.

Where possible, excerpts of primary sources have been photographically reproduced and, if unavailable, transcribed. Every effort has been made to transcribe accurately and to capture relevant stylistic idiosyncrasies.

All archival material quoted in the thesis has been included with the relevant permissions.

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## Introduction

A screenplay, of course, wants to become a film. But when that desire takes over, when it becomes the sole and supreme task, something gets lost.

(Rodman 2006: 86)

Film is a visual medium. The dominance of visual stimulus in the classic theatrical cinematic experience, the individual in a darkened room, saturated by the image in front of her, encourages the illusion that film is a self-contained visual narrative. Film swallows the signs of its construction, assimilating them into a seamless flow of images. This includes sound and performance but also a film's narrative axis: the screenplay. A film viewer is presented with a seemingly unified object: a narrative conveyed through assembled images, combined into a single screen work. The resulting dominance of film's visual dimension has influenced theoretical engagement with the cinema to the extent that film studies has consolidated as a discipline primarily concerned with the analysis of optical cues, reaffirming the visual as the primary articulation of cinematic expression. As a direct consequence, the screenplay has been absorbed to become an invisible part of the finished screen work, which has emerged as the primary object of study. With viewers of film generally removed from the screenplay as a physical object or a sense of the screenplay as a self-sufficient text independent of its visualisation, the screenplay as an aesthetic object 'does not exist' as its form is merely a provisional vector of narrative on the latter's journey to pictorial realisation. As a result, methodologies for reading films are based primarily on the analysis of visual clues. Yet, when probing beyond the immediate sensuous experience of the film-image, the multi-disciplined layers of a film provide a body of physical artefacts that need to be unravelled in order to analyse the screen work. The screenplay is one of these.



In its most rudimentary form, such as ‘skeletal outlines used in pre-production design’ (Deutelbaum 1978: 29), the screenplay emerged shortly after the invention of film itself and, as part of cinema’s ineluctable shifts towards narrative, developed throughout the first decades of the twentieth century to the standardised form that we are familiar with today. Its development, as part of the industrial and aesthetic evolution of filmmaking, coincided with fundamental changes throughout western societies triggered by accelerating industrialisation, the impact of World War I and the cultural responses these epochal and traumatic episodes provoked. The subsequent artistic reverberations expressed a conviction that previous modes of representation were no longer adequate in light of the changes brought on by these events. And while modernism – as these cultural responses came to be generally termed – in its broadest sense may be regarded as a reaction to the impact of modernity on western societies through capitalism, industrialisation, and global war, it is also defined by the impact of new forms of popular and mass culture on the cultural landscape. Just as responses to modernity differed, often depending on how a given society had experienced the transformations brought on by it and ranging from optimistic embrace (in the United States) to anxious acceptance (in late Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany), the critical evaluation of how the avant-garde responded to popular and mass culture diverges. The ‘great divide’, defined by Andreas Huyssen as ‘the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture’ (Huyssen 1986: viii) in his seminal *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986) has come under increasing scrutiny with Michael North asking:

How might it change current notions of a “great divide” between popular culture and modern literature to know more about the campaign on behalf of popular culture carried on by Gilbert Seldes, who first published *The Waste Land* in *The Dial*, or to see the long list of literary figures with

whom Charlie Chaplin started or renewed acquaintances [...]?  
(North 1999: 9)

As critics such as North have argued, the relationships between modernism and popular culture are neither reliably antagonistic nor consistently collaborative. Instead, they operate in a field of tension, which, as I will argue, the screenplay exemplifies through its competing attributes of formal innovation and industrial application. As a result, this thesis aims to locate itself in the field of modernist studies that recognises that ‘all culture contributes an equal amount to the experience of modernity, an experience which emphasises consumption’ (O’Sullivan 2017: 283). By acknowledging the shift of power from producers to consumers in cultural production together with a recognition that the screenplay’s evolution from skeletal outline to formally standardised written form was determined by cinema’s need to ‘become a narrative art in order to become a profitable mass-medium’ (Trotter 2007: 161), the thesis intends to show that it is this artistic utilitarianism, more than any formal considerations, that separates the screenplay from other forms of modern/ist writing. This is especially pertinent when considered against conservative notions of media specificity in modernism, which designated a form’s medium its determining characteristic. The modernist art critic Clement Greenberg influentially argued:

A modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium. [...] The arts are to achieve concreteness, “purity”, by acting solely in terms of their separate and irreducible selves.  
(Greenberg 1961: 139)

Greenberg’s doctrine that each art form has its own distinctive medium which distinguishes it from other art forms does not account for *intermedial* forms such as the screenplay and has been questioned by both Noël Carroll in his essay “The Specificity of Media in the Arts” (1985), in which he uses the example of the cinema to highlight the limitations of the media specificity theory in composite arts such as

cinema (Carroll 1985: 9) while acknowledging its utility in legitimising new arts forms through their unique characteristics (Carroll 1985: 17). Much earlier, Susan Sontag questioned Greenberg's strict delineation between art forms in her 1965 essay "Film and Theatre" questioning the notion of an 'unbridgeable division, even opposition between two arts' (Sontag [1965] 1974: 249). Against this backdrop, the screenplay is defined in contrast to the idea of media specificity, rather existing in a zone of uncertainty, reflecting an anticipated transmutation that will make its own form redundant.

Being formally invisible in the final screen work, the screenplay has, until recently, enjoyed little critical examination as the assumption of its existence as a transient technical device for film production (Rodman 2006: 88) went relatively unchallenged. But since the turn of the twenty-first century, new scholarly engagement with the screenplay has drawn a number of conclusions about its different identities (discussed in detail in Chapter One), including its similarities to different forms of literature. Given which, it is perhaps surprising that despite comparisons between the screenplay and modernist literary forms, such as Imagism, having been made on numerous occasions (Price 2010: 33-39, Boon 2008b: 260, David 1984: 92-93, Lindsay [1915] 2000: 157ff), as well as the suggestion that 'many of the most radical formal experiments of the twentieth century can be traced back to the association of word and image' (North 2005: 12), no broader assessment of the screenplay as a discrete and distinctive modernist form has been undertaken. Given the timeframe of its inception and evolution during the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as its distinct and novel formal specificity, I ask why the screenplay has been excluded from formal assessment in a modernist framework and whether this categorisation ought not to be revised. This assessment takes places on both a

formal level, through close readings and evaluation of primary texts ranging from the early 1910s to the late 1920s covering three different national film industries, looking at how both the screenplay and the screenwriter were positioned in relation to the cultural developments around them. Notwithstanding the (often substantial) differences both between different national modernisms and between national screenwriting practices at this time, parallels nevertheless soon become evident and justify the need for closer examination.

To explore the screenplay in the context of literary modernism has a number of benefits. Firstly, it provides a theoretical framework for the screenplay that takes into consideration its form – the written word – rather than assessing it only through the primarily visual paradigms of film studies. By placing the screenplay in the context of other written forms produced during a similar and delineated time period, it allows us to identify literary (i.e. modernist) influences on the screenplay that have hitherto been disregarded or under-discussed. Secondly, drawing on the idea of mutual interaction between different written forms – and foregrounding the screenplay's inherent intermediality – allows us to question definitions and parameters of literary modernism and how much such definitions are informed by canonical works and the very deliberate creation of modernist 'myths'. To look at the screenplay through a modernist lens requires us to think back to fundamental questions of what modernism may have been and what it became (North 2005: 208ff). It also forces us to consider the validity of the categories of 'high' and 'low' art and the interactions between the two. Lastly, to assess the screenplay via literary modernism can help us to understand narrative film better. The screenplay is undeniably linked to narrative film, owing its very existence to it. But in understanding how the screenplay can and does inform visual narration, and how its

formal specificity influences the film's visual form, we can also learn more about visual narration itself.

With the screenplay's function intrinsically tied to an industrial process within film production, its formal development took place in an industrial setting and was standardised to serve an industrial purpose (Price 2013: 76-77, Azlant 1997: 228, Staiger 1985: 138-139). In contrast, modernism has in the past often been framed as a reaction to (and against) the commercialisation of culture for the mass-market (Carey 1992: 72, Huyssen 1986: viii, Bürger [1974] (2016): 27ff) – but conversely, more recently also as an extension of popular culture (Jaffe 2005: 6ff, Cooper 2004: 23ff, North 1999: 10-11). As this thesis aims to show, the screenplay is part of a space less fully explored, if also less clearly defined, between more conservative notions of modernism as distinct from popular art, and the type of formally innovative, commercial popular culture that the screenplay facilitates and arguably embodies. Here, modernism and popular culture are complementary parts of a new, modern, cultural landscape that draw inspiration from similar ideas, techniques, and sometimes forms, to position themselves in a new marketplace. Andreas Huyssen asserts that 'to speak of modernism without mentioning capitalist mass culture is like praising the free market while ignoring the multinationals' (Huyssen 1986: 25). Hence, the suggestion that modernism is removed from the culture industry is unsustainable, as even an antagonistic reaction to the latter marks a self-positioning within the new cultural landscape created by industrialised, capitalist society. John Xiros Cooper writes in *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2004) that:

Modernism explored the brave new world of capitalist values in its earliest phases. Exemplary in their visceral understanding of the capitalist ethos, especially its nihilism, the early modernists were amongst the first to flourish on the new landscape of innovation and perpetual change. They did not necessarily participate in commerce as such, although many sharp ones (like Picasso) certainly did learn how markets worked,

including the canny use of stylistic update and constant rebranding of the modern.

(Cooper 2004: 29)

As Cooper highlights, canonical modernisms were not insulated from their societies and the changes around them, as they were in fact products of these very changes. Similarly, the screenplay is a form that, as will become evident throughout the thesis, consciously and unconsciously embraced modernist influences and the impact of modernist experimentation on the written word. During its evolution towards a standardised format, the screenplay adapted traditional written forms to create a unique narrative form to facilitate visual storytelling while doubling up as a functional aid for industrial production purposes. However, while the impact of the screenplay on the production process has been noted (Price 2013: 76-77, Azlant 1997: 228, Staiger 1985: 138ff), acknowledgment of the screenplay's formal achievement has been muted by virtue of its exclusion from syllabi at university departments examining canonised literary works from the early to mid-twentieth century onwards.

Partially, as an 'invisible object' in film, most spectators are only marginally aware of the screenplay's existence, unfamiliar with its actuality and not encouraged to become familiar. Ideas about it are therefore often held instinctively, almost on a common-sense basis. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the screenplay is mostly inaccessible to the viewer, and for that matter the critic. Its physical form separates it from the final screen work, and without access to screenplays, no investigation proper can take place. Given modernism's focus on innovating existing forms, the screenplay's unique formal mechanisms and its refunctioning of connected formal practices might have been expected to recommend it to modernist creators and theorists. This thesis aims to explore the reasons why this was, for the most part, not the case.

The lack of examination and the facile categorisation of the screenplay as a written aid in an industrial process (O'Thomas 2011: 237) has meant that the screenplay has been excluded from either an examination as part of the final product of film (having been transmuted into a visual narrative), or as a potentially novel written form alongside other written forms. There are a number of avenues to explore when considering why the screenplay would be considered differently to traditional modernist form of writing but as much scholarship has shown, previously perceived demarcations between aesthetic high modernism and commercial writing are in fact blurred (McCabe 2005: 12, North 1999: 9, Wicke 1994: 5ff) and, as James O'Sullivan argues in his recent essay "Modernist Intermediality: The False Dichotomy between High Modernism and Mass Culture" even

Joyce and Eliot were far more accepting of the culture industry than many scholars acknowledge: not only do they allude to the popular, but they also borrow from the instruments of mass production.  
(O'Sullivan 2017: 287)

Therefore, even when considering the previously documented initial reluctance of well-known modernists to popular culture (McCabe 2005: 45), given the omnipresence of new media, engagement with it was virtually guaranteed. Therefore, rather than merely focusing on the screenplay as a form aligned to popular art, it seems essential to consider the screenplay's specific role in the production of *industrial mass culture* when addressing the question of its differentiated treatment in comparison to other early twentieth century forms of writing, especially in the context of its long-standing exclusion from academic discourse. It can be suggested that the characteristic of being an 'industrial' form has been more of a hindrance to the screenplay's acceptance as an independent literary form than the association with a 'popular' art form, which ostensible demerit was relatively quickly transcended by cinema itself. It is therefore not as simple as a distinction between the elite and the

popular, or high and low art, but a further nuance within the popular that differentiates between ‘authentic’ popular art and an industrial product. What this thesis will argue is that it is in fact on this very intersection marked by professionalised artistic practice that the screenplay coincides with literary modernism, which in turn implies challenges to conceptions of modernism.

In attempting to assess a form such as the screenplay within the framework of literary modernism, it is important to remember that despite modernism’s focus on ‘the new’, it was never immune to the influence of tradition. Susan Stanford Friedman writes:

Relationally speaking, modernity is the insistence upon the now – the present and its future as resistance to the past, especially the immediate past. It establishes a cult of the new that constructs retrospectively a sense of tradition from which it declares independence. Paradoxically, such a tradition – or, the awareness of it as ‘tradition’ – might come into existence only at the moment of rebellion against it.  
(Stanford Friedman 2009: 22)

Modernists did turn away from tradition to revise aesthetic hierarchies, in the process becoming the new Establishment to be rebelled against (Stanford Friedman 2009: 23), a position achieved – at least in part – through modernism’s location in comparison to newly dominant cultural forms in the shape of popular mass-culture. That this move is based on differentiation rather than removal from capitalist society is highlighted by Jonathan Rose as he explains that ‘while modernists professed their dedication to pure art and their disdain for commercial success, they were intensely concerned with profit maximisation and the effective marketing of their work’ (Rose 2009: 182). Modernism was part of the new cultural order and it participated in it – even in the instances where it ostensibly opposed it.

Needless to say, there is not *one* modernism: the overarching term connecting the wide-ranging views and practices of widely divergent artists and thinkers across



different national (and trans-national) contexts relies strongly on the key overarching notion of rejection of old forms that were no longer suitable in a world made unrecognisable by the impact of the modern age. But equally, modernists differed in their outlook (specifically divided along national lines) as

[...] “modernism”, itself a complex and ambiguous designation [...] often denotes both a heightened and affirmative modern self-consciousness (a final attempt to be truly modern, to create in a radical and unprecedented way a form of life, indeed a sensibility, finally consistent with the full implications of the modern revolution), as well as an intense dissatisfaction with the sterile, exploitative, commercialised, or simply ugly forms of life apparently characteristic of social modernisation [...]. (Pippin 1999: 29)

And although often considered elite by virtue of its sometimes deliberate attempts to delineate itself from mass-market culture, Michael Levenson highlights that ‘modernism needs to be understood not as an elite craft refined in secret but as a complex exchange between artists and audiences’ (Levenson 2011: 3).

How different national modernisms reacted to and interacted with the world around them is in large part a story of how different countries experienced the rupture caused by industrialisation, amplified by the effects of World War I. In context of the screenplay, we must also especially consider the impact of rapidly evolving technologies – such as the introduction of sound – as the screenplay is a primary example of a traditional form (the written word) adapted for a technology-based medium, therefore introducing the machine into the human artistic process, which, in addition to transforming everyday life also radically transformed art (Huyssen 1986: 9).

Thus when we consider the screenplay in the context of modernist movements we need not constrain ourselves to formal considerations only. The ecosystem of the screenplay, its affiliations and implications, have informed how it has been conceived beyond its formal specificity alone. It is therefore imperative to ask how the

screenplay has interacted, absorbed or infiltrated other forms of writing during the periods when it evolved into the form we are familiar with today.

To gain a more comprehensive view of how the screenplay evolved and how it has interacted with different modernisms during its early development, the thesis examines the screenplay in three national contexts, namely the USA, Weimar Germany and England (as distinct from Great Britain as a whole). Viewed in the context of these varying national modernist movements that each coincided with the evolution of the screenplay in western countries, and the focus of these movements on the revision of written form, the question is posed of whether the screenplay is only a technical blue-print aiding a semi-industrialised film production process or whether it should be considered alongside the new modernist forms of writing during the period.

In order to assess this question, the first chapter of the thesis, the Literature Review, will provide a broad historical overview of the development of screenplay criticism with the aim to chart the progression from the binary conceptions of the early twentieth century to the more nuanced and diverging theoretical paradigms of today. This chapter aims to provide key contexts of investigation for the screenplay and to provide an introduction to past and current critical and theoretical engagements with it. The chapter will assess the concepts of the screenplay as blue-print, the screenplay as literature, and the screenplay as intermediary, and address the respective scopes and limitations of these approaches in contexts of literary modernism. The aim of this assessment is to identify critical and methodological gaps and provide an analytical framework for the subsequent case studies.

To investigate the questions raised in the Literature Review, the thesis presents three case studies which focus on the beginning of the twentieth century and

assess screenwriting in the United States, Weimar Germany and England by exploring the work of an individual screenwriter in context of respective national literary modernisms. The choice of these three case studies was based on the prominence and scale of national screenwriting traditions, together with the availability of relevant archives, as well as my ability to assess material in the source language rather than translation.

The first case study, “Anita Loos: Middlebrow Modernism”, examines Anita Loos, one of the first American ‘celebrity’ screenwriters who is, despite her much more prolific work as a scenarist, best known today as the author of the novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). Loos began her career at the very beginnings of industrialised American film production and continued to write screenplays until the 1940s, with her surviving screenplay texts providing insight into changing conventions of screenplay texts from prose outlines to standardised continuity scripts. Setting her work in context to both new forms of popular writing, such as women’s magazines, and Imagism, a prominent American modernist movement, the chapter shows how artistic forms were adapted to serve the new requirements created by modern mass culture. Applying a methodology of close readings of Loos’s work, including a comparison of novel, screenplay and stage play text for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (which contains satirical references to modernism), I aim to isolate distinct formal characteristics of the screenplay and explain how they compare to those of other forms during the period. Beyond this formal analysis, the chapter traces the development of early screenplay manuals (a genre to which Loos herself contributed) and how they were used by practitioners such as Loos to publicise their work and foster a ‘celebrity’ status similar to the ways in which American modernists in Europe tried to establish themselves at the forefront of literary innovation with the publication

of limited circulation ‘little magazines’. The chapter assesses the strands of formal evolution and public promotion, each in the context of the other, in order to show that while different parts of the cultural landscape reacted differently to the proliferation of cultural goods in the capitalist market place, the blunt distinctions between ‘low’ and ‘high’ art are insufficiently nuanced to plot accurately the overlapping space between literary modernism and Hollywood product. This analysis positions the screenplay as a form that, per Loos’s own example, creates a space that uses modes of modernist experimentation and uses it to create a product destined for the capitalist mass-market. It is, in effect, a creation of a popular, middlebrow modernism.

The second case study, “Carl Mayer: The Screenplay between Weimar Modernisms”, examines the work of Austrian screenwriter Carl Mayer, who, in contrast to Loos, only wrote screenplays and did not publish any manuals or prescriptions on either film or writing for film. The chapter discusses the relationship between Weimar modernisms, namely German Expressionism and New Objectivity, and Mayer’s screenwriting to explain how, in contrast to other western film cultures, the German film industry engaged with the modernist movements surrounding it. Emphasising that the traumatic effects of World War I informed Germany’s more pessimistic take on modernity and hence the tenor of its modernist movements, the chapter then focuses on the objective of identifying formal, stylistic (and potentially literary) elements unique to the screenplay by examining Carl Mayer’s formally distinctive silent film screenplays in the context of German Expressionism and New Objectivity. Comparing screenplays from different periods of his career, I show how Mayer utilised expressionist literary devices to create visual effects in the screenplay, as well as outlining how he later began to incorporate themes of New Objectivity.

Mayer has been highlighted by both critics and his fellow screenwriters (for example Adrian Brunel) as an exceptional scenarist who elevated the screenplay form to what has been called ‘film poetry’ (Kappelhoff 2003: 182, Kasten 1994:12-13, Luft 1954: 380, Brunel 1948: Dedication). Given that Mayer’s body of work is comparatively small and limited to silent films only, it provides a snapshot of the screenplay at a particular point in its development. It presents us with a distinctive – but transitional – form of the screenplay that is different to that put forward by his American counterparts. It provides the opportunity to consider an alternative path for the screenplay; one that provides clues to how the form might have developed if the standardised model driven by American studios had not become the global norm.

The third case study, “Adrian Brunel: The Screenplay as Professional Practice”, examines the screenplay in the context of artistic professionalization during a period when cultural practice diverged between industrially produced art and privately funded artistic practice in England. Using the Bloomsbury Group as an example of artistic practice that did not have to rely on participation in the commercial cultural discourse (as it was funded through private means), the chapter highlights how the traditional categories of the cultural worker, i.e. a craftsman producing cultural goods for a living and the amateur supported by private capital or patronage, were unsettled by the arrival of a new category: the professional. Charting Brunel’s career trajectory, I aim to show how the process of professionalization impacting a cross-section of society also effected cultural production and how specific societal structures, in this case a distinct social hierarchy, influenced the forms that were associated with different groups of cultural practitioners. Yet again, closer examination will show that binary distinctions do not capture the true level of interaction and infiltration between the different strands of cultural practices during

the period. As an example of the interaction between professional and amateur practitioners, the chapter includes a discussion of the Film Society, which played a significant role in proving, in the words of one of Britain's earliest film critics and co-founder of the Film Society, Iris Barry, that 'going to the pictures is nothing to be ashamed of' (Barry [1926] 1976: viii).

Brunel, similarly to Loos, produced a screenwriting manual but displayed a more direct focus on the formalisation of screenwriting practice, in contrast to Loos's utilisation of manuals to foster her 'celebrity' status. In contrast to the case studies on Loos and Mayer, this chapter focuses less on the formal characteristics of the screenplay but instead aims to highlight how the screenplay as a form and screenwriting as a professional practice were positioned in the cultural landscape during the first decades of the 1900s.

In the final chapter of thesis, I aim to answer the question of whether the screenplay can be considered a form of modernist literature. By comparing the outcomes of the three case studies and identifying the key characteristics that I consider to define the screenplay as a form and screenwriting as an artistic practice, my conclusion proposes a broader definition of the screenplay that extends beyond the idea of a technical blue-print while acknowledging that its industrial application has been a primary force in shaping its form and subsequent reception. Whether the screenplay can be considered a modernist form of literature partly relies on how we define literary modernism. With the impact of modernity rendering many cultural hierarchies obsolete, cultural landscapes not only changed but the power dynamics within them changed also. Popular art forms, by virtue of their mass appeal, gained a level of cultural currency that was previously reserved for the cultural elite only. Their power threatened, one could argue that the elite had to find new ways to

differentiate itself from commercial popular art. Modernist art forms, defined by their ‘difficulty’ and the requirement to possess specific cultural knowledge in order to consume them, can in this context be seen as a variation of a professional’s specialised knowledge elevating him from an amateur in an economic context. Specialisation allowed non-mass-market art to maintain not only cultural value but cultural validity as it offered a means to distinguish itself in the marketplace against increasingly sophisticated popular art forms.

The screenplay is a representative of popular art and an embedded facilitator of industrialised cultural production. Yet, despite this, the screenplay is also a relatively new and unique written form dating from the early twentieth century. What sets it apart from its contemporaries is that, despite its specialised form, one might even say ‘difficulty’, it became vastly influential in that its impact is visible across large parts of visual media. The screenplay therefore presents itself to us as a hybrid: it is stable but transient, dominant but ignored. On a formal level, the conclusions from the three case studies show that the screenplay defies facile categorisation as it borrows from and adapts different traditional forms to serve its unique purpose: to capture the image in words to be transcribed back into images. On a theoretical level, the screenplay has shown to be informed by its relationship to other art forms, by its intermedial status, its inbetweenness and its continuous otherness.

What this thesis aims to achieve is to contribute to the understanding of the screenplay as a distinctive form that employs *traditional* means (the written word) for *modern* purposes (the creation of a visual narrative by mechanical processes) in an *industrial* context. By examining the screenplay at its beginnings and considering its evolution in different national contexts, I aim to show that there is no binary distinction between the screenplay as a commercial production tool and the

screenplay as a modernist literary form, even as it vanishes into another medium during the film production process. As such, the screenplay in fact occupies a unique position as a quintessentially modern written form, linking words with images, artistic innovation with industry and the appropriation of the old for the new.



## Chapter 1: Literature Review: What is a screenplay?

Modernism in the arts represents neither a unified vision nor a uniform aesthetic practice.  
(Lunn 1982: 33)

What precisely constitutes a script?  
(Brik 1974: 95)

The creation of a narrative fiction film can be likened to the creation of a building.

The screenwriter resembles the architect who draws up the plan, sets dimensions, and allocates rooms and spaces for windows and doors. After finishing the plan, the building is created in physical reality. During this process, others construct the building from the architect's vision to a finished, functioning structure. Just as the architect's plan for the building is not the actual, finished building, a writer's screenplay is never the film one sees on screen. In this case, what is the screenplay?

What are the parameters of its specificity?

When the screenplay first emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as a simple and practical tool to outline a film (Price 2013: 23, Azlant 1997: 65, Stempel 1982: 5), aiding both narrative construction and industrial production processes (Price 2013: 5-10, Staiger 1985: 138-139, Staiger 1976: 173-192) it was neither immediately obvious that it was to evolve into a formally codified form of writing nor that it would be almost impossible to define within existing frameworks of literary production. But screenwriting was just one innovation during a time when the impact of industrialised modernity resulted in an increasing diversity of cultural forms. This period of cultural innovation at the beginning of the last century is often discussed under the broad umbrella of modernism. But equally, what is modernism? And can we treat it as a unified practice with defined characteristics and values? The simple answer is no, as

‘there is no such thing as modernism – no singular definition capable of bringing order to the diverse multitude of creators, manifestos, practices, and politics that have been variously constellated around this enigmatic term’ (Latham and Rogers 2015: 1). Therefore, when considering the screenplay within the context of what we (for lack of a more precise term) continue to call ‘modernism’, it is important to acknowledge that one is placing an object of less than stable parameters into a framework of equally unsettled parameters. And similarly to the multitude of definitions of the screenplay, definitions of modernism and its boundaries abound. Certain conditions are commonly agreed to have been the source of modernism, in that it was a response to

[...] accelerated societal change brought about by a combination of new technologies, knowledge revolutions, state formations, and expanding intercultural contacts contributing to radical questions and dismantling of traditional ontologies, epistemologies, and institutional structures.  
(Stanford Friedman 2001: 507)

Yet, despite its wide usage and familiarity, modernism can still be argued to be an essentially undefined term (Levenson 1984: iv). Modernism’s boundaries have contracted and expanded over the past century; placing the screenplay within them stretches them even further.

Investigating the influence of the photographic image and the impact of visual narration on literature (and on human perception as a whole), Michael North argues in his 2005 study *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth Century Word*, that

Many of the most radical formal experiments of the twentieth century can be traced back to the new association of word and image suggested by the photograph. In fact, it would not be too far wrong to say that modernism itself, as a pan-artistic movement begins with the critical interrogation of the relationship between text and image, brought equally into literature and the visual arts by mechanical recording.  
(North 2005: 12)

North’s premise, that the photograph and by extension, the means of mechanical recording of physical reality, had a profound impact on word-based narration,

suggests the screenplay as a key field of investigation for understanding literary modernism. While the idea that photography unsettled existing forms of artistic expression is almost as old as modernism itself, as Walter Benjamin questioned in his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935) ‘whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art’ (Benjamin [1935] 1973: 229), this thesis aims to extend this line of questioning to the screenplay. The thesis will explore, through its case studies, the differing responses to modernity that in turn had varying impacts on the development of the screenplay in its respective national and cultural contexts. My proposition is that the early screenplay reflects its national responses to modernity, which broadly align with the categories Richard Sheppard identifies to range from the ‘ultra-pessimistic to the mystical and the aestheticist to the positivist’ (Sheppard 2000: 72-86).

But in order to assess the screenplay within the context of literary modernisms, it is necessary first to outline the broad historical context in which such an assessment can take place. In the most basic terms, modernism is an artistic response rooted in formal innovation and aesthetic differentiation. Until the middle of the last century, the main distinction between critical assessments of modernism was found between Marxist critics, who assessed cultural practice through an economic and historical lens, and the New Critics, who

Unlike previous generations of scholars [...] saw themselves as rigorously trained experts (rather than simple people of taste) who performed their work primarily in universities. [...] They sought to avoid questions about morality and ideology by developing specific protocols [...].  
(Latham and Rogers 2015: 43)

The New Critics, closely associated with high literary modernism as exemplified by writers such as T.S. Eliot, set out to establish a canon of texts foregrounding formal experimentation and treated texts as self-contained aesthetic objects. This approach

conflicted with that of Marxists who objected from the start to the effort to separate artistic practice from its immediate historical and political conditions (Auerbach [1946] 2003:548). Nevertheless, there was commonality between New Criticism and Marxist criticism in that

In the cases of figures like Lukács and Adorno, they [...] shared the same basic canon of authors, artists, and texts. The arguments about modernism therefore took place in a relatively constricted space where a common set of works generated often radically different meanings.  
(Latham and Rogers 2015: 89)

Despite their fundamental disagreements on how to contextualise the modern text, New Critics and Marxists agreed on the importance of style and its relationship to tradition.

This premise of evolution based on tradition is where the German critic Peter Bürger influentially – and controversially – distinguished between modernism and the avant-garde as he argues that ‘the autonomy of art is a category of bourgeois society. It permits the description of art’s detachment from the contexts of practical life’ (Bürger 1974 [2016]: 46). Bürger’s stark distinction positioning the avant-garde outside the ‘institution of art’ has been widely criticised and critics have proposed more fluid models of modernist and avant-garde arts (Ardis 2002: 175). Nevertheless, it remains important to distinguish between the terms ‘modernism’ and ‘avant-garde’ despite the fact they ‘often overlap, especially in the 1910s when modern art [...] sought to displace the Victorian past and to undermine bourgeois culture through experimental practices’ (McCabe 2005: 11). In his essay “On Photography and Painting: Prolegomena to a New Theory of the Avant-Garde”, Dietrich Scheunemann discusses another aspect of Bürger’s theory which is significant in the context of the screenplay (and in the consideration of all modernist literature): that it fails to take into account the impact of photography on all artistic production, limiting its

influence to the fine arts by arguing that ‘in literature, there is no technical innovation that could have produced an effect comparable to that of photography in the fine arts’ (Bürger [1974] 2016: 32). Thus, argues Scheunemann:

Bürger overlooks the fact that significant changes in one art will normally also affect others, the more so if the changes are of such fundamental nature that they affect the principle of all arts, the task of *imitation naturae*.  
(Scheunemann 2000: 17)

As photography not only exceeded all previous artistic attempts to represent physical reality, it also forced a new focus on formal specificity to justify the continued existence of different media and art forms:

Although the strategies of the various movements differ, and each developed its own, unmistakable profile in terms of general aims and specific styles and techniques, they all have one moment in common: their aesthetic innovations emerged as a response to the advances of photography. They counter photographic imagery, the precise depiction of material objects, the illusionism of forms of representation striving for imitative functions.  
(Scheunemann 2000: 24)

The screenplay acquires a contrarian quality in the context of Scheunemann’s argument as it takes the opposite approach to ‘countering photographic imagery’: it actively aims to replicate the photograph’s mimetic capacity via a different medium. At the same time, its very existence as a written narrative, not just influenced but brought into existence by the premise of the moving image, provides a valuable counterargument to Bürger’s assertion that the impact of the photograph was limited to the fine arts.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century, in the wake of Frank Kermode’s pioneering notion of ‘multiple modernisms’ in *The Romantic Image* (1957), that the critical purview widened to consider the modernist text both outside the narrow Anglo-American canon and in wider context of not just history and

economy but also that of broader cultural phenomena. In what became later known as ‘new modernist studies’ critics

[...] moved toward a pluralism or fusion of theoretical commitments, as well as a heightened attention to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media, to collaborations and influences across national and linguistic border and (especially) to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged. (Mao and Walkowitz 2006: 2)

Yet, the expansion of modernist studies to include many mass-market activities, including advertising, popular music and cinema, the screenplay was not considered despite some obvious intersections. It continued to be

[...] still rather common to suggest that modernism sets itself off from commodity culture by a process of “aestheticisation”, as if the hallmark of modern commodity culture were not the fact that it has become progressively aestheticized. This is one of the main reasons why a reconsideration of modernism and modern culture must work from both sides, because the latter is often considered as cursorily as the former. It is not simply a matter of arguing that modernists were more positive in their attitudes toward mass culture than is usually assumed but rather of suggesting that this relationship is more complex because mass culture is more complex. (North 1999: 207ff)

North’s wide-ranging argument provides an entry point for another important consideration in the investigation of the screenplay as a form of literary modernism in his suggestion that mass culture is more complex than previously acknowledged, especially if we accept that ‘not all of the products of mass culture achieve success – or popularity – as commodities’ (O’Sullivan 2017: 286). Popular culture and mass culture are distinct categories that can – but do not necessarily – overlap. This distinction can provide a more nuanced view both on the screenplay and on institutionalised forms of literary modernism.

Intersections between modernism and popular culture do not need to be retrospectively applied either. As early as 1924, Gilbert Seldes, editor of the literary magazine *The Dial* (1840 – 1929), made a foray into the critical assessment of the

(American) popular art with the study *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924). *The Dial* was the magazine that first published the most canonically modernist poem of all, *The Waste Land*, in 1922. While this aesthetic high modernism, exemplified by authors such as Eliot, is usually associated with an antagonism towards popular culture, this assumption depends on an oversimplification of the engagement between aesthetic modernism and popular culture. Michael North explains that:

If it now seems somewhat remarkable that the same person [Gilbert Seldes] who made American popular culture a legitimate object of criticism also played a central role in formulating the public definition of literary modernism, and that he should have done these two things at exactly the same time, it is because antipathy to popular culture has become, over the years, an indispensable part of accepted definitions of modernism.  
(North 1999: 141)

In the examination of the case studies throughout this thesis, the aim is to position screenwriters within their respective national modernisms, foregrounding the varying responses and modes of engagements with popular culture, and highlighting the heterogeneous nature of both modernist artistic practices and the critical response they elicited.

Given the screenplay's evident role on the economy of industrial filmmaking, Eugene Lunn's study *Marxism and Modernism* (1982) provides a helpful point of departure to consider the screenplay in a less self-evident modernist context. Lunn considers modernism(s) in comparative perspective and outlines the attributes that provide an overarching framework. Firstly, he highlights key characteristics of 'aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness' (Lunn 1982: 34):

Modern artists, writers and composers often draw attention to the media or materials with which they are working, the very processes of creation in their own craft. [...] In doing so, modernists escape from the timeworn attempt, given new scientific pretensions in naturalist aesthetics, to make of art a transparent mere "reflection" or "representation" of what is alleged to be "outer" reality.  
(Lunn 1982: 34ff)

Lunn here highlights an increasing move towards a media-specific experimentalism in the visual arts necessitated by competition from the photograph which exceeded the traditional visual arts in the representation – or indeed replication – of physical reality. As Dietrich Scheunemann argues convincingly, ‘the search for new tasks and new techniques of painting is ex negativo determined by the fact that it must lead to modes of production perception that differ from those of the photographic camera’ (Scheunemann 2000: 21).

With the photograph, and by extension the moving image, shifting how humans could perceive the physical world around them as well as seeing, for the first time, recorded images from all over the world, the image assumed the role of ‘objective’ observer that could provide unmediated information. Given the screenplay’s inherent connection to the medium of film but its disconnection from the immediacy of the perceived ‘neutrality’ of the visual medium (Trotter 2007: 9) as a form of unmediated speech that ‘bypassed sound and spoken language to reach the mind directly through the eye’ (North 2005: 5), the screenplay is immediately positioned as an intermedial form that aims to replicate the visual experience via verbal means.

Once cinema started to synthesise structured narrative with photographic reproduction (beyond the implied narrative inherent in any visual representation), photography expanded its capabilities. A medium previously considered ‘neutral’ in its representation of physical reality, photography now had the same narrative capability as literature – and the screenplay facilitates this transference from written storytelling to visual storytelling. Visual narration, in the absence of sound, provided yet another opportunity: to make visual ‘speech’ a universal language, with the



capacity to transcend national boundaries and reach larger audiences than any verbal narrative before.

In the context of the increasingly self-conscious engagement with artistic responses to photographic representation, it is worth considering the functionality of the screenplay. When Ian Macdonald asks the question: ‘Can we accurately define the screenplay?’ (Macdonald 2004a: 89), his response is an observation of a specific form created to perform a specific function:

There are some things it clearly is; it is the record of an idea for a screenwork, written in a highly stylized form. It is constrained by the rules of its form on the page, and it is the subject of industrial norms and conventions. In what it can show and do in relation to the screenwork, it is partial; for example, with dialogue it is quite clear to the untrained eye, but with other aural components (such as music) there are injunctions against specification. The visual is only approximated, not completely specified. [...] 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 normally, by the start of shooting, the work of only one person, despite what it says on the cover. [...] It is not image-based (surprisingly), and despite being text-based it does not appear literary in any traditional sense, except possibly in parts.  
(Macdonald 2004a: 89ff)

Macdonald defines the screenplay as a tool in the box of film production, a stylized device to map the visual narrative in a written form. His argument emphasising the functionality of the screenplay as its primary attribute is also a historically dominant approach (Rodman 2006: 88, Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 134). He highlights the screenplay’s form as a utilitarian feature and asserts that the screenplay is only an approximation of the intended final artwork, the film. Significantly, he later also defines the screenplay as a ‘screen idea - a proposal for a screenwork’ (Macdonald 2013: 15), which implies that it is not a self-sufficient aesthetic object but rather a sketch or aide-memoire to support the creation of another.

In contrast, writing in the 1920s and 30s, German-Hungarian film critic Béla Balázs defines the screenplay as both a form of literary expression *and* the foundation of visual narration:

Not so very long ago it was difficult to convince the Philistines that the film was an independent, autonomous new art with laws of its own. To-day [...] it is also admitted the literary foundation of the new art, the script, is just as much a specific, independent literary form as the written stage play.  
(Balázs [1930]1970: 246)

Balázs's description emphasises the form of the screenplay, aligning it closer to its formal heritage than its functional destiny. While acknowledging that it is part of the production process of film, he insists that the screenplay is an entity in its own right due to its formal specificity. Furthermore, as the 'literary foundation' of an 'autonomous new art' (Balázs [1930] 1970: 246), Balázs inadvertently highlights a tension between the screenplay and film; because if film is truly autonomous, how can it be founded on, or grounded in, another form that is literary rather than visual?

The question of whether the screenplay should be defined primarily by its form or its function lies at the very heart of the difficulty in defining it. This is further complicated when one considers the screenplay outside its own form (the written word) and its function (a production aid) as a constituent component of a finished film. Rather than being a visible part of the film such as cinematography or set design, it is an invisible scaffold that can be seen as a predecessor to the creation of images. Osip Brik summarises the relationship between the script and the film by suggesting that:

A script is an *outline for a film*, set out in words. [...] The script is written in words. But this in no way makes the script a literary work, let alone an autonomous one.  
(Brik 1974: 96)

Brik also defines the screenplay's identity as that of a device to aid the filmmaking process and discounts it as an independent written form. Howard Rodman takes this position a step further in arguing that:

Screenplays are, to use James Schamus's fine phrase, brutally instrumentalist. They either become films, or they don't. Their worth is determined not by the quality of the writing but by which side of the previous sentence's comma they fall on.  
(Rodman 2006: 88)

As per this argument, a screenplay exists exclusively as a supporting form for film production and if no film is made from it, a screenplay is of no value (not at least according to the logic of the marketplace). But, on the basis of the screenplay considered as an object alone, how does a filmed screenplay actually differ from an unfilmed screenplay in meeting its objective? To assess a screenplay is, after all, to assess it *prior* to any visualisation. To imply that "worth" is merely defined by utility – defined after the fact in terms of marketability – sets the screenplay apart from other written forms.

In his 2013 study *A Philosophy of the Screenplay*, Ted Nannicelli aims to provide an ontology of the screenplay by working through a number of definitions and argues that neither a purely functional nor a purely formalist definition is sufficient. While acknowledging that there is no consensus whether the screenplay can be assessed independently from its visualisation, he argues that the screenwriter's *intention* is the determining factor as

[...] creators' successfully realised inventions determine artefact kind membership and cannot be overruled by screenwriting "gurus" or academics [...]. If a person has a substantive and substantively correct concept of what a screenplay is – one that largely meshes with that of prior screenwriters – and this person successfully realises her intention to create "one of those things", it is not possible that she has actually failed to create a screenplay.  
(Nannicelli 2013: 34)

Nannicelli's focus on intentionality stands in contrast to Rodman's market-oriented functionalism and asserts that a screenplay is an object that reflects the defined formal requirements of its intended form, regardless of its later utilisation or redundancy.

Such debates confirm that the screenplay's uncertain formal identity echoes much of the modernist vocabulary of instability, anxiety and fragmentation. Further, at the same time as being uncertain of its own status as an object, the screenplay's very existence is insecure as it is absorbed into another, more dominant form. In his essay "The Mind of Modernism" (1991), James McFarlane writes that:

The very vocabulary of chaos – disintegration, fragmentation, dislocation – implies a breaking away or a breaking apart. But the defining thing in the modernist mode is not so much that things fall *apart* but that they fall *together* [...]. In modernism, the centre is seen exerting not a centrifugal but a centripetal force; and the consequence is not disintegration but (as it were) superintegration.  
(McFarlane 1991: 92)

The idea of things 'falling together' provides a new perspective on the screenplay in that it highlights the collision of the written word and the moving image in narrative film. McFarlane suggests the reconciliation of sets of opposites, mainly the mechanistic and the intuitive (McFarlane 1991: 87) and explains that 'what is distinctive – and difficult – about the modernist mode is that it seems to demand the reconciliation of two distinct ways of reconciling contradictions, ways which in themselves are also contrary' (McFarlane 1991: 87) and that 'dauntingly then, the modernist formula becomes both /and, and/or, either/or' (McFarlane 1991: 88). Therefore, to be modern is to be two things at once and nothing and all, which the screenplay reflects in its word-based, visual duality.

Definitions of the screenplay often differ according to the status it is afforded. It is therefore useful to ask when the screenplay first emerged and how it became situated on the periphery of the critical discourse. While Steven Maras describes the

search for a ‘first screenplay’ as unhelpful because ‘the search for firsts and origins can have the tendency to ‘fix’ the landscape in particular ways, leading to a reductive view of the development and institutionalisation of screenwriting’ (Maras 2009: 29), Kevin Boon opens *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (2008) with the statement that ‘the history of the screenplay begins about sixteen years after the birth of film, in the 1910s, around the time Thomas Harper Ince began making films’ (Boon 2008a: 3). There are examples of ‘written plans’ pre-dating Boon’s proposed timeline, beginning in the early period of silent film, such as Tom Stempel’s example of a blow-by-blow account of the 1897 Corbet/Fitzsimmons boxing match that was staged and re-enacted for the Lubin company (Stempel 1982: 3), but Steven Price casts doubt on the existence of what we would recognise as a screenplay:

Something was happening, but there is little surviving textual evidence of scenarios prior to 1904. One reason for this is conceptual: pre-production documents of some sort must have existed, but they cannot properly be called scenarios because the conventions that would define them as such were not yet in place.  
(Price 2013: 24)

In contrast, Marshall Deutelbaum suggests that while no formalised system of preparing films in a written form was in place, rudimentary outlines were used that already incorporated some of the later screenplay’s aims:

The first scenarios were probably not actual screenplays but rather skeletal outlines used in pre-production design. A careful analysis of early Lumière films (usually considered ‘actualities’) indicates a manifest sense of orderly process or consequential activity, suggesting a pre-production sense of structure.  
(Deutelbaum 1978: 29)

The debatability of these assertions, based on reconstructions of the functional nature of non-extant early scenarios, is that a lack of empirical, verifiable research essentially consigns assessments to assumptions with little quantifiable evidence. What these approaches amplify is that historical tools are only partially able to

identify the formal roots of the screenplay and that maybe, early conceptions of the screenplay (such as skeletal outlines) set the tone for how the screenplay is regarded still. After all, as we shall see, a ‘written plan’ could take a variety of forms, from a list of shots, to a short story in prose. Both of these served the purpose of pre-planning without conforming to a defined industrial standard. As narrative film evolved, the screenplay evolved alongside it and was rendered an increasingly specialised form not only on the basis of meeting the ever-changing requirements of the film form but more significantly, that of an increasingly industrialised film business (Price 2013: 50, Loughney 1997: 282-283, Staiger 1976: 173-192). The point when exactly this shift between ‘skeletal outline’ and specialised written form took place can only be assigned speculatively. What is certain however, is that the screenplay was a new form. Further, it was a new form that directly resulted from an imperative created by an industrial force in a capitalist market society.

The screenplay in all its iterations, from prose outline to photoplay to continuity script is an engagement with how to express the visual world verbally (where one word can equal one image but also infinite images). The ‘view’ a screenwriter takes is a construction of a relative perspective and while she might be certain of how she reads / visualises the screenplay, it remains ambiguous as no visualisation (especially by anyone other than herself) can be a ‘true’ approximation of the written narrative. What remains curious when trying to answer the – seemingly simple – question of what a screenplay is, is the fact that while its form is highly specialised (and importantly, standardised), and its function is clear, there remains a high degree of ambiguity as to its actual nature. The following section aims to provide a broad historiographical overview of the development of screenplay criticism in order to outline the dominant paradigms through which the screenplay has been

previously assessed and to provide a starting point for my assessment of the screenplay in relation to modernist literary practice.

### 1.1 Practice to Theory: A Historiographic Overview

There is no comprehensive, agreed definition of the screenplay beyond the basic description of ‘the script from which a motion picture film is produced’, as per the Oxford English Dictionary (OED Online: Accessed 31 August 2011). Yet, despite the screenplay’s evolution in parallel to other developments in filmmaking, its form and function remained largely unexplored in comparison to camera-based practices of film production. Narrow ideas about the parameters of the screenplay went mainly unchallenged until the 1960s when a wider theoretical engagement with the film medium began to take place. The following section aims to outline the progression of the critical engagement with the screenplay from early, practice-focused criticism to the range of theoretical paradigms evident today.

The screenplay’s history is not that of an independent form. Instead, it is closely intertwined with the history of industrial filmmaking and has subsequently often been assessed as such (Macdonald 2004a: 89ff, Foreman 1972: 30). While the screenplay’s beginnings were not simultaneous with those of the recording of moving images, it was not far behind, with Roy McCardell ‘widely cited as the first person hired for the specific job of writing for motion pictures’ (Conor 2014: 15) for Biograph in 1898 (Azlant 1997: 230). The emergence of longer, structured narrative films accelerated the evolution of the screenplay from a basic pre-planning device to the specialised, medium-specific form we are familiar with today (Price 2013: 80-81, Staiger 1985: 138-139). After screenwriting became an established part of the filmmaking process in the 1910s (Azlant 1980: 162-163), it soon started to be categorised according to the varying views and motivations of filmmakers and critics alike. While it served a similar purpose to all filmmakers, it prompted diverging critical receptions, often informed by the perceived tension between the attempt to establish film as an



autonomous visual art form and the screenplay's continuing ties to written narratives (Eisenstein [1929]1988: 134).

In the Soviet Union, in contrast to western countries, the treatment of the screenplay became part of the discussion on how film production should be organised. The written screenplay's part in cinematic expression versus its identity as a written – and potentially literary – narrative was controversial and Steven Maras explains that:

In the Soviet Union in the 1920s and beyond, the film script was a contentious topic. Debating the nature of the script – whether it was an autonomous literary work or a 'memo' for the director – had importance. (Maras 2009: 33)

He continues that:

Comments by key figures such as Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin can be divided roughly into one of two schools of thinking about the script: those who did not want to situate the script into production (Vertov, Eisenstein) and those who did by developing the idea of the script as a filmic plan (Kuleshov, Pudovkin). (Maras 2009: 33)

Eisenstein's essay *The Form of the Script* ([1929] 1988) in particular pinpoints the distinction between literary language and visual language but highlights that it is the interpretation of the director that creates the physical reality of the image:

We do not recognise any limitations on the visual exposition of the facts. Sometimes the purely literary arrangement of the words of the script means more to us than the meticulous recording of facial expressions by the writer. 'A deathly silence hung in the air'. What does this expression have in common with the concrete tangibility of a visual phenomenon? Where is the hook in the air that silence was to be hung on? (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 135)

In contrast to Eisenstein's delineation between screenwriting and filmmaking with the director as the creator of visual narrative, Pudovkin perceives the screenplay as a part of the actual filmmaking process, in which the writer records 'externally expressed plastic images that he describes in these words' (Pudovkin 1958: 55). This view designates the screenplay a type of narrative recording device but discounts the multi-

layered means by which written language can (and must) convey meaning. To treat the screenplay as a 'neutral' form is to position it much more closely to what 'fascinated modernist writers about cinema, [which] was the original, and perhaps in some measure reproducible, neutrality of film as a medium' (Trotter 2007: 5). This contrasted with 'European Marxist critics [who] were never willing to see form as a neutral element or a purely aesthetic category' (Latham and Rogers 2015: 57).

Béla Balázs proposed to move beyond a binary division between the written screenplay and film and explored the option of *interaction* between a literary script and the visual means of the cinema, suggesting the screenplay as an *intermedial* form:

The screenplay, on the basis of which a film is made, cannot simply be a product of the literary imagination. It requires a very specific, naïve-concrete imagination which does not require visual transposition.  
(Balázs [1924] 2001: 36)

Balázs suggests that it is possible, through a specialised form of writing, to align screenwriting with visual representation and that the unique characteristics and requirements of the screenplay need to exceed, rather than match, the requirements made of traditional literary works. This suggestion has a number of implications: On the one hand, it expands the screenplay's scope and indicates that literary capacity can increase when aligned with photography. However, by suggesting that the screenplay anticipates its own visualisation – that it is 'always already' visual(ised), this proposition also challenges both literature and film. To some extent it can be perceived as a threat to their self-sufficiency with the intermedial position in contrast to that propagated by realist critics (such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer) who insisted on 'photographic representation as the essence of the film medium' (Carroll 1996: 4).

In parallel to early critical considerations in the Soviet Union and Europe, where screenwriting practice was contested within a framework of traditional versus

experimental art, early screenwriting discourse in the United States displayed a distinctly more commercial emphasis. As Hollywood studios established story departments (Stempel 1982: 4) and found themselves under increasing pressure to produce original story material, they began to advertise to the public for original scenarios. This activity, which was marketed to the public and resulted in ‘a massive amateur film writing movement and possibly in the largest movement of public creative production in the history of the American film industry’ (Liepa 2011: 10) culminated in the hiring of an increasing number of salaried employees (many of whom were women) (Conor 2014: 15-16), who wrote for studios where screenwriting practice could be likened to an assembly line function. While screenwriting practice professionalised in Hollywood, a less expected development took place concurrently: the first screenwriting manuals appeared in what can arguably be called one of the earliest forms of commercial screenplay ‘criticism’ as part of a move towards an industrial screenplay aesthetic which ‘codified and normalised screenwriting practices that were already in place in silent cinema’ (Bailey 2014: 213). As early as 1913, the Home Correspondence School published the title *Writing the Photoplay* by J. Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds and Eustace Hale Ball published *Photoplay Scenarios: How to Write and Sell Them* in 1915. Soon, professional screenwriters published their own screenwriting guides with one well-known example of this being the 1922 manual *How to Write Photoplays* by husband and wife John Emerson and Anita Loos. Celebrity screenwriting manuals like this created an important new intersection between the film industry and its consumers by providing a direct link and therefore an illusion of accessibility.

This attempt to shape the public perception of and discourse on their discipline highlights one key similarity between screenwriters and modernists in the Anglo-Saxon world: self-publicity. Mark Morrisson explains that is no accident as

[...] the 1920s was the decade in which twentieth-century consumer culture, and the publication and advertising institutions that shaped it, consolidated and became firmly established in their modern forms in both Britain and America.  
(Morrisson 2001: 203)

The concept of ‘celebrity’ links screenwriters (and the industrial film industry at large) with modernists who aimed to establish themselves both as outstanding and at the forefront of artistic practice. Jonathan Goldman goes as far as to propose in *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (2001) that

[...] by showing that modernism and celebrity perform similar cultural work on the notion of the exceptional individual [...] celebrity is the missing sort of link between two domains that our culture has spent the last century categorizing, respectively, as high and low.  
(Goldman 2001: 2)

It is this focus on the ‘exceptional individual’ that both the modernists and the film industry actively developed and used to market their wares. The elevation of the individual became most pronounced in and well-known through the Hollywood star system, but modernists equally utilised capitalist forces to market themselves and position their particular brands of modernism. John Cooper writes that ‘modernism, to put it bluntly, is, and always has been, the culture of capitalism’ (Cooper 2004: 23), which highlights that both industrial and avant-garde art in the west were not only integrated in the capitalist societies from which they had originated but were expressions of it. Jonathan Rose adds that ‘while modernists professed their dedication to pure art and their disdain for commercial success, they were intensely concerned with profit maximisation and the effective marketing of their work’ (Rose 2009: 182). This intention to benefit from a system that (at the very least aesthetic)

modernism ostensibly opposed, underscores the previously highlighted paradoxical identities of modernist writers trying to position themselves in the market place. In

*Marketing Modernism* (2003), Catherine Turner writes:

Authors like Hemingway and Fitzgerald may have been anxious about commercial success, but they also helped to write their own advertisements. In fact, between the two world wars, advertisements for modern literature taught consumers in the United States that modernism, like many other new products of the time, was good for them as long as they used it correctly. These advertisements were not simply gross misrepresentations of modernism created by commercial hucksters; they were created by editors, professional advertising writers, and literary authors who hoped that they could educate consumers about new styles and create a market for modernists.  
(Turner 2003: 3)

The key point in Turner's assessment here is the positioning of modernism within the capitalist market place. The implication that modernism could be consumed 'correctly' or 'incorrectly' made it an aspirational form and added a degree of exclusivity, where one might even see a parallel to how Hollywood aimed to create glamour around its stars. But the appropriation of the 'modern' was not limited to the arts. In fact, the concept of the 'modern' itself became commodified and 'ubiquitous in advertisements for everything from razor to lights bulbs to bricks and insurance policies' (Latham and Rogers 2015: 30). The 'modern' was so pervasive that distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art were blurred rather than perpetuated:

Under the guidance of editors and contributors like Seldes, *Vanity Fair* made popular forms like burlesque intellectually fashionable while also introducing a larger public difficult works from the avant-garde. It was not unusual in the course of 1922 to find articles by Cocteau [...] next to advertisements for the new line of automobiles [...].  
(North 1999: 153)

In this context of appropriation and reinvention, the question of how to utilise established literary forms for commercial filmmaking was an important consideration for Hollywood studios. Recognising that an engaging narrative told skilfully was key to gaining audiences, American studio executives saw the potential of investing in

well-known writers to ‘replicate’ popular literary successes for the screen. There were a number of occasions when established literary figures ventured to Hollywood to write for the screen but most notably, in 1919, Samuel Goldwyn tempted an original ‘Eminent Authors’ group, including Basil King and Rupert Hughes, to come to Hollywood (Stempel 1982: 52). The fact that critically acclaimed authors offered their skills for hire in Hollywood generated sceptical responses, such as:

The eminent authors who were lured out to Culver City (Cal.) by the seductive scent of Goldwyn gold, have sponsored a great deal of press matter, in which they have frantically attempted to justify their motives in devoting themselves to this new and somewhat more lucrative form of literary endeavour.  
(Sherwood 1921 in Schultheiss 1971: 14)

For whatever reasons, the importation of the ‘Eastern’ writer to Hollywood generally failed (Schultheiss 1971: 14). What transpired from this failure was the recognition that the screenplay requires specific skills to produce it; a good story is not enough.

With the emergence and consolidation of a studio system during the 1910s and 1920s, an institutionalised process for the procurement and development of story material, as well as the pre-planning of film productions gained importance. This was due to both a move towards narrative fiction films and their increasing length / narrative complexity throughout the period. Edward Azlant explains:

Obviously, the pre-production design of narrative films fit well into this evolving studio system, as written design was by its very written nature distinct from other aspects of production. Thus, in addition to the intrinsic factors of the narrative mode itself and the increasing length of films, the extrinsic factors of large scale production and the evolving studio system surely helped institutionalise screenwriting.  
(Azlant 1980: 85)

Within an industrial framework, screenwriters became increasingly aware of both their significant contribution to the filmmaking process, as well as their marginalisation within the power equilibrium of the American studio system. In an environment where a division of creative labour fostered the notion of screenwriting

as simply one of many steps in an industrial process, John Gassner and Dudley Nichols advocated the view of screenplays as a distinct form of literature. Yet it was only in 1943 that their collection *Twenty Best Film Plays* presented both a critical assessment of the screenplay assigning it literary merit, as well as a repositioning of the screenplay within the filmmaking process. Steven Maras explains that:

Their collaboration is not only significant in terms of the history of publishing collections of screenplays, giving rise to a new genre of sorts, but also marks a key moment in the screenplay as literature tradition theory. Even if the anthology resisted putting the word ‘screenplay’ in its title, Gassner’s introductory essay began with the declaration that ‘There is now a literature of the screen – the screenplay’.  
(Maras 2009: 51)

The act of ‘declaring’ the screenplay a form of literature is at least somewhat reminiscent of much earlier modernist manifestos ‘declaring’ their respective movements (such as, amongst many others, the Futurist Manifesto in 1909/1914, Imagist Manifesto in 1912 and Dada Manifesto in 1916) and could be seen as an example of how screenwriters appropriated comparable methods of positioning and self-publicity. Further, by gaining at least some definition, the screenplay could acquire a degree of formal recognition.

Alongside critical self-assessments of screenwriters and their work, screenplay criticism continued to be based in an industrial context during the 1940s and 50s. Writing in the *Journal of the University Film Producers Association* in 1953, Clara Beranger simultaneously places the screenplay in the traditions of dramatic writing and the film production process:

The success of a picture is not accidental but the result of a screenplay developed according to well-defined principles of drama. [...] Dramatic laws for the motion picture are similar to those of the stage play, because the motion picture is essentially a drama that is ‘a literary composition to be acted upon the stage’. Thus, although a screenwriter must have some knowledge of the technology involved in transferring the written word to visual images [...].  
(Beranger 1953: 1)

The relationship between the stage play and the screenplay is presented as almost inherent by Beranger – it is the medium to convey the drama that is substituted while the dominant dramatic principles remain unchanged. This contrasts with Noël Carroll's later argument that unlike theatre (and the other performing arts), 'cinema is not a two-tiered art form. There is one, and only one artwork in cinema – the *finished* film or video' (Carroll 2008: 68). Such ambiguity led practitioners such as the former MGM Head of Production Dore Schary to assess the screenplay in terms of its position between the cinema and literature:

It is a form of literature that sees itself finally expressed in a visual form. Its initial creative urge starts in the mind of one person and demands the collaboration of hundreds of other persons. [...] It begins with a word and ends with an image.  
(Schary 1954: 136)

Schary's instinctive connection is not reflected in contemporary literary criticism as, until the 1960s, lack of interest in cinematic narration was generally not only confined to the screenplay but to film on the whole. Béla Balázs highlights the lack of engagement when he notes that 'in our universities, literature and all arts are taught. No one speaks about film' (Balázs [1930] 1970: 8). Furthermore, once film studies emerged as a discipline and theoretical frameworks to read films developed, the screenplay did not initially emerge as an object of study either. In 1958, during a period of still relatively embryonic scholarly engagement with the cinema (Polan 2008: 93ff), Rudolf Arnheim's study *Film as Art* (1958) was published, containing many of the author's writings on film, which had originally been published in German in the 1930s. Arnheim's engagement with the cinema takes place through the paradigm of the visual arts, via the lens of a media specificity thesis which Carroll described as suggesting 'that each art form has its own domain of expression and exploration. This domain is determined by the nature of the medium through which



the objects of a given art form are composed' (Carroll 1996: 26). The focus on the importance Arnheim places on the visual in cinematic narration is evident in his discussion of Dreyer's silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928):

Long discussions take place between priests and the Maid. This is an unfruitful theme for the camera. The real interest of these scenes lies in the spoken word. Visually there is little variety to be extracted from the endless confrontations of arguing speakers. The solution of the difficulty is surely to avoid putting scenes like this into a silent film. Carl Dreyer decided otherwise, and mistakenly.  
(Arnheim 1958: 42)

Per Arnheim's analysis, it is explicitly cinema's singular capacity for visual expression that provides possibility for the medium rather than a simple combination of image and speech. A focus on dialogue (that Arnheim laments in his discussion of Dreyer's film) aligns the screenplay closer to the stageplay, in which dialogue takes primary importance over what is seen.

Interestingly, it is precisely Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* that Kevin Boon chooses to discuss the 'literary quality' of the screenplay in 2008. On the dialogue scenes that Arnheim criticises as redundant he comments:

They presented dialogue that was not yet technically possible, but was nonetheless presumed to be necessary. [...] Instead of shaking its dependence on words, films embraced them. As it turned out, film's evolution was more than the advancement of the visual image.  
(Boon 2008a:16)

What transpires from the shift between Arnheim's and Boon's positions is that criticism of the screen text has moved beyond its predominantly visual focus to consider not only factors such as sound but also to theorise the intersection between word and image. The screenwriter Carl Foreman argued that it was this intersection that defined the role of the screenwriter:

During those first twenty-five years of the cinema, the so-called scenario writer was, on the whole, a supernumerary. Given an 'original' story, a novel or a play as a basis of a film, the 'scenarist' was generally called upon to contribute little more than a highly flexible outline... [...] But the

coming of sound and the revolution it caused in the cinema made entirely new demands on the actors and at the same time called for an entirely new kind of writer.

(Foreman 1972: 30)

Foreman places primary importance on dialogue to the extent that his argument implies that there were no true screenplays before the introduction of sound / dialogue. Foreman's position assigns merit to the screenplay upon the condition that it is closely aligned with the play. It is the demand of dialogue that, for him, marks the distinction between an outline and a *play*. Foreman's assessment stands in contrast to early practitioners such as Patterson and Eisenstein and theorists such as Arnheim who see the capacity of the cinema, and by extension that of the screenplay, in its visual prowess (a view that will be tested in the assessment of Carl Mayer's silent screenplays in Chapter Three). Again, the reoccurring theme of a division between the capacity of the word and the capacity of the image emerges. Foreman aligns sound film with drama, which relies heavily on dialogue, and therefore assumes that the writer of the sound film is qualitatively more closely aligned to the playwright than to the writer of the silent film. Yet, the question of what distinguishes the screenplay's expressive capability and what exactly constitutes its specific formal mode of invoking a narrative cinematic image, remains unanswered.

With theoretical investigation into the film medium gathering pace in the 1960s, the 1970s saw a move towards a more nuanced discussion of the screenplay. A revived (but nevertheless minor) interest in theoretical assessments of the screenplay coincided with 'an increased interest in film's relationship to the representation and construction of culture, gender, ethnicity, and social class' (Boon 2008a: 28ff).

Douglas Garrett Winston's *Screenplay as Literature*, published in 1973, refers back to Gassner's efforts to establish the screenplay as literature utilising films by Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni as case studies (both directors who were notably

also screenwriters). Winston references a reticence of film practitioners to think of the screenplay as literature by stating, that ‘the author realises that for many lovers of cinema, *literature* must be a repugnant word suggesting something stuffy and precious, not vivid and alive’ (Winston 1973: 21). This assertion is reflective of earlier attempts to differentiate film from literature on the basis that film was a new form and literature a traditional one, which had been superseded by something more ‘vivid and alive’ (as well as rooted in a representation of physical reality via photographic means). While Winston draws comparisons with drama and the novel by discussing film adaptations of novels (Winston 1973: 51ff) and the relationship between film narration and epic narration (Winston 1973: 54ff), his analysis does not address the formal characteristics specific to the screenplay, therefore limiting the scope of his study.

The publication in 1985 of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson marked a new direction in the scholarly study of the screenplay, by for the first time, assessing the screenplay in its industrial application within American studio production. In her contribution, Janet Staiger influentially argued that the screenplay functioned as an almost ‘administrative’ tool within the commercial framework of film production, noting how industrial requirements shaped the development of the screenplay form. Highlighting the aspect of specialisation in the production process of American filmmaking during the studio era, Staiger defines the move towards standardised script formats during the 1910s in economic terms:

A written script which included descriptions of each shot and its adjacent shots provided a long-term cost advantage. It was cheaper to pay a few workers to prepare scripts and solve continuity problems at that stage than it was to let a whole crew of labourers work it out on set or by retakes later. [...] Most importantly, these continuity scripts became the design blue-print for the workers in the central producer system of production.

(Staiger 1985: 138-139)

A key consideration Staiger isolates in this context is the division of labour. In the ‘assembly line’ of the studio system, screenwriting moves away from execution, or filmmaking, and becomes a separate entity, a pre-amble to filmmaking itself. One can therefore suggest that the removal of screenwriting from the physical process of filmmaking has possibly contributed to the isolation of screenwriting in the discourse of film studies as a whole. Similar to Winston, Staiger is less concerned to analyse the form of the screenplay, focusing instead on the implications of the economic framework surrounding it in the context of film production, which privileges the impact of industrial standardisation over formal and aesthetic considerations.

Since the publication of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* in 1985, critical interest in the screenplay has intensified and the 1990s and 2000s have seen an increase in the number of studies dedicated to the screenplay, with titles such as Claudia Sternberg’s *Written for the Screen: The American Motion Picture as Text* (1997), Tom Stempel’s *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film* (2000), Kevin Boon’s *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (2008), Steven Maras’s *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (2009), Steven Price’s *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (2010), the collection *Analysing the Screenplay* (2011), edited by Jill Neldes and most recently additions of Steven Price’s *A History of the Screenplay* (2013), Ted Nannicelli’s *A Philosophy of the Screenplay* (2013), Bridget Conor’s *Screenwriting: Creative Labour and Professional Practice* (2014) and Juliane Scholz *Der Drehbuchautor: USA-Deutschland, Ein historischer Vergleich* (2016) providing a range of in-depth analyses ranging from broader positioning of the screenplay within historical and comparative frameworks (Scholz 2016, Price 2013, Maras 2009) to theoretical considerations of the form itself

(Nannicelli 2013). These more recent critical engagements with the screenplay have provided a number of theoretical paradigms, namely the ‘blue-print model’, which discusses the screenplay as a technical document dedicated to film production only; the ‘screenplay as literature’ model, which conceives the screenplay as a literary expression in its own right, and the ‘screenplay as intermediary’ model, which assesses the screenplay as a source text in a type of adaptation or approximation. The sections below aim to explain each approach while also outlining their respective limitations.

## 1.2 Dominant Contemporary Paradigms

### 1.2.1 The Blue-Print Model

A contemporary, industry-standard screenplay is instantly recognisable to readers through its numerous formal conventions such as 12-point Courier font and markers such as INT / EXT. Claudia Sternberg summarises:

In addition to conventions of indentation, the balanced co-existence of image, sound and dialogue elements are among the most striking features when first looking at the typescript form of a screenplay. Rather than simply adapting Roman Ingarden’s terms ‘main text’ and ‘side text’, generally used by used in drama theory to distinguish speech and non-speech passages, the less hierarchical terms *dialogue text* and *scene text* are introduced here to demarcate the dividing line between drama and screenplay.  
(Sternberg 1997: 65)

Sternberg’s observation that the screenplay formally differentiates itself from drama is further supported by the screenplay’s preference for ‘action’ over dialogue and an emphasis on ‘visualised’ writing of ‘tell what you can show’, shifting the emphasis of the screenplay to a descriptor function, away from introspective information. She elaborates:

The standard rule of thumb whereby one typescript page equals one minute of film time applies regardless of the number of lines spoken by

the characters. This differs from drama which typically has fewer non-dialogue instructions: plays with little dialogue are generally shorter than those with more.

(Sternberg 1997: 65)

The ‘one page per minute’ rule is significant because it tells us something about the character of the screenplay that ties its formal characteristics directly to an industrial standard. Stringent compliance with such specific instructions makes it easy to categorise the screenplay as a technical document or what Bridget Conor calls a ‘fully industrial creative labour form’ (Conor 2014: 46), reaffirming Janet Staiger’s previous positioning of screenwriting practice within the industrial dynamics of the film industry.

Accordingly, one of the most ubiquitous definitions of the screenplay has been the idea of the ‘screenplay as blue-print’. In the 2011 collection *Analysing the Screenplay*, edited by Jill Neldes, Mark O’Thomas opens his article “Analysing the Screenplay: A Comparative Approach” with the definitive statement: ‘Screenplays are functional objects – they exist to provide a blue-print for filmmakers to construct their films’ (O’Thomas 2011: 237). In contrast, Steven Price in *The Screenplay:*

*Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (2010) is a good deal more nuanced:

Although it is only the metaphorical usage of the blue-print figure that can properly be applied to the screenplay, the insidious connotations of the literal meaning have proven consistently damaging.

(Price 2010: 46)

These ‘insidious connotations’ argues Price are wide-reaching as they devalue both the screenplay as an independent text and the screenwriter’s contribution to a film.

Screenwriting as blue-print production segregates written narration from visual storytelling. Yet, despite effectively curtailing the screenplay’s status as an

independent aesthetic object, the blue-print metaphor is adopted by some

screenwriters. Ronald Harwood, Oscar-winning author of screenplays for *The Dresser*

(1983) and *The Pianist* (2002) argues that ‘the screenplay is not literature, it is a technical document, [rather] the blue-print for a film’ (Harwood 2010: Lecture).

This argument positions the screenplay as part of the larger production process, it also presents a number of difficulties. The written screenplay exists independently from any film that may (or indeed, given the realities of commercial film production, more probably may not) be derived from it. The majority of screenplays never become a film. What does the blue-print metaphor mean for these screenplays, especially if we accept Ted Nannicelli’s argument that the screenplay is primarily a document describing intention? And how would they be classified under a system that does not acknowledge their existence outside of a completed film? Torey Liepa suggests:

The concept of film writing as a blue-print for production [...] fetishizes film writing as a continuity script – a form that served a specific function in the history of the production process, but which, in fact, was only one of many historical iterations of film writing.  
(Liepa 2011: 10)

Liepa’s argument emphasises that conceiving of the as blue-print, something to be amended and replicated within an industrial process, is to limit to serve a single function alone and risks disregarding the numerous historical varieties of screenplay forms and their diverse applications. The notion of the screenplay as blue-print may narrow its scope unduly, to the point that it is considered only as a practicable industrial device serving a designated purpose within a commercial framework. It may disregard the significance of the screenplay’s formal specificity and the relationship of this specificity to other written forms, both of which highlight the screenplay’s singular capacity to bridge verbal and visual narration.

### 1.2.2 Limits of the Blue-Print Model

Thus, while useful in assessing the screenplay's function in the production process and in discussing one dimension of the relationship between screenplay and film, the blue-print model limits opportunities to gain a more nuanced understanding of screenplay form as it assigns it a definitive – and restricted – function and ultimately defines it as an auxiliary form only. Ian Macdonald notes Sergei Eisenstein's description of a 'hint fixed on paper' when arguing that

The script refers only to the screen idea in the head. We might consider the scripting process as telling us more about those 'hints' than it does about the final screenwork [...] the term 'blueprint' becomes redundant. (Macdonald 2013: 187)

Macdonald's view positions the screenplay as a textual articulation of visual storytelling but does not account for its formal specificity beyond the desire to note visual cues. As such, Macdonald, while questioning the blue-print model, equally does not recognise the screenplay as an independent entity but one that needs to relate to the screenwork by definition. This raises questions about the ontological status of the screenplay outside its place in film production. For while the screenplay is used to create the story we see on the screen and is effectively rendered invisible in the production process, it has not ceased to exist as an object. In a film, the screenplay form vanishes yet at the same time traces of its structure are omnipresent. This spectral presence of the screenplay in the definitively visible field of (the) film is both close at hand and yet impossible to grasp. Claudia Sternberg argues that it is 'only the dialogue text – in the form of "spoken text" – that reaches the spectator directly' (Sternberg 1997: 28). Yet, Sternberg's argument is only partially valid. The screenplay's form has been lost and hence its only instantly recognisable elements are the dialogue, yet, the screenplay contributes something much more, though obscured,



to the final film: structure, rhythm and of course, narrative – all of which exceed the function of an ostensible blue-print.

As screenwriting is part of an industrial process, divided between conception and execution, the screenplay is, by definition, always one step removed from its execution as this execution is based on the transmutation of the narrative form from the written to the visual. The relationship between the screenplay and the eventual film is therefore based on a set of largely invisible references. Steven Price astutely notes that:

The film refers back to the screenplay without incorporating it, just as the screenplay looks forward to a film without becoming it. The screenplay is a form of *doppelgänger* in the film, seemingly physically separate and yet operating as a second, parallel form that can never wholly be repressed. (Price 2010: 53)

Price's argument emphasises the limits of the blue-print model as it highlights the *interdependent* relationship between screenplay and film. The film would cease to exist without its narrative base, the dialogue of the script, its presence within the images. Hence, if the blue-print model is insufficient, does it prove more helpful to assess the screenplay strictly by the rules of its own form, the written word?

### 1.2.2 The 'Screenplay as Literature' Model

Is the word only transitional or is it the final form of literary creation? (Arnheim 1958: 169)

Those who have attempted to validate the literary quality of the screenplay have almost invariably done so by comparing it to other forms, running the risk that it will appear merely a shadow of them rather than an object worthy of study in itself. (Price 2010: 32)

The idea of the screenplay as literature can be contextualised alongside the emergence of a visually specific 'film language' as well as literary modernism's attempts to represent the visual in a written form. With language intrinsically tied to the word and

a narrative film's structure also instantiated via the medium of words, it is possible to consider the screenplay a form that combines word and image on the basis of its specialised form (depicting the visual via the means of the written word) and function (structuring the visual narrative basis of film with words). Yet, the word has been a topic of some difficulty in screenplay theory. If one accepts the image as the exclusive tool of a cinematic 'language' by which, solely, it conveys information, then one also discounts the notion that words can capture the image in constructing a visual narrative. As film (like photography before it) was heralded as a form of utopian, universal speech (North 1999: 157) that reaches everyone, regardless of background in an unmediated fashion (North 2005:4), transferring a screenplay (necessarily composed in one language) to film could be conceived as a translation exercise that aims to convert the specific to the universal. It is the interaction of word and image that is considered meaningful and – as highlighted previously by Beranger and Arnheim – the introduction of sound (and therefore dialogue) was feared to undermine cinema's potential as universal (visual) language. The introduction of sound was resisted by many across the spectrum of spectators and artists (North 2005: 83-105) and it added another layer of complexity to the relationship between the identity of the written screenplay and its transference into a visual narrative.

On a formal level, Kevin Boon compares the screenplay's attempts to verbalise the visual to Imagist poetry (Boon 2008b: 59-271) in that it shares formal properties:

Like the poetry of modernists such as William Carlos Williams and Robert Frost, screenplay descriptions often, if well-executed, present concentrated images. Their concision and economy share the poetics of Imagist poetry.  
(Boon 2008b: 260)

However, Boon was far from the first to detect a connection between the screenplay and modernist attempts to ‘write pictures’. In the extended edition of his 1915 *The Art of the Moving Picture*, Vachel Lindsay writes:

[...] the Imagist impulse need not be confined to verse [...] There is a clear parallelism between their point of view in verse and the intimate-and-friendly photoplay, especially when it is developed [...] from the standpoint of space measured without sound plus time measured without sound [...] Imagist photoplays would be Japanese prints taking on life, animated Japanese paintings, Pompeian mosaics in kaleidoscopic but logical succession, Beardsley drawings made into actors and scenery, Greek vase-paintings in motion [...] Scarcely a photoplay but hints at the Imagists in one scene.  
(Lindsay [1915] 2000: 157ff)

Lindsay implies that Imagism and the screenplay could, in fact, merge into one form with the defined aim of representing the image in a written format but, significantly, ‘from the standpoint of space measured without sound plus time measured without sound’ (Lindsay [1915] 2000: 157). Instead, the screenplay is composed as template of an image to be populated in the process of filmmaking. To compare the imagist poem to the screenplay is therefore to compare a composition of a final image to a composition of a sketch for a final image.

It is this formal instability, most notable in its permanent state of incompleteness, that is often used to distinguish the screenplay from forms of writing. Ian Macdonald suggests that:

There is never a definitive version of a screenplay of a film; by definition it must relate to the screenwork, but also by definition it cannot, as more work precedes the final outcome.  
(Macdonald 2004a: 95)

Macdonald’s assertion that there is no definitive version of the screenplay is certainly true, yet, it is, strictly speaking, also the case for other written narratives. The manuscript a novelist submits to an editor will almost never be the ‘final’ printed version. A version is only deemed ‘final’ at a certain point in time because one has

ceased to make amends. Yet, the screenplay, through the (industrial and collaborative) process of its transposition to film, continues to change and could therefore achieve a number of ‘final’ versions (including published post-production screenplays that are transcriptions of the film). It therefore remains questionable if a (at least produced) screenplay can ever be ‘final’.

While the idea of ‘finality’ can offer an illusion of stability, it is not unshakable. Through its connection to another medium, the screenplay provides more insight than other written forms into this inherent instability of the written text – yet, nor is it a property unique to it. If then the screenplay offers insight into challenges experienced by all literary forms, conversely, can – and should – it be assessed on literary terms?

If one considers the most basic definitions of the term ‘literature’, the Oxford English Dictionary provides the following:

- 3. a. Literary productions as a whole; the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general. Now also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.
  - b. The body of books and writings that treat of a particular subject.
  - c. colloq. Printed matter of any kind.
- (OED Online: Accessed 31 August 2011)

The above definitions of the term ‘literature’ do not exclude the screenplay; manifestly they include it. So why has the screenplay found itself defined in anti-literary terms so often and why there is even a discussion if it should be considered a literary form?

The screenplay emerged as a new written form during the same period that the influence of visual media became noticeable across the cultural spectrum affecting literary forms and traditional visual arts such as painting (Scheunemann 2000: 15). Previously defined boundaries between media were suddenly more porous and

disciplines were forced to define and position themselves in this new landscape.

Julian Murphet explains:

Literature's desire to be a thing [...] is a desire that leads the entire system of the arts, in the critical years 1910-1914, to refashion itself as a "media system" proper, both in order to accommodate itself to the categories of newer mechanical media, and to protect the gamut of its own practices. (Murphet 2009: 5)

The screenplay is by virtue of its function already 'accommodated to the categories of the new media' but it shares (through its specialised form) literature's aim of differentiating itself from preceding forms and appropriates traditional aesthetics for a new use. But the screenplay's inherent connection to a visual medium caused ambivalence in the screenplay's identification as literature due to its perceived lack of media-specificity.

Almost a century ago, Frances Patterson made the argument that 'the motion picture should be a story told without words' (Patterson in Decherney 2000: 453). Even more unambiguously, Eisenstein states that 'a script is merely a shorthand record of an emotional outburst striving for realisation in an accumulation of visual images' (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 134). The terms Eisenstein uses here are revealing in the sense that 'a shorthand record' aligns the screenplay more with an itemised list than a crafted object and the 'emotional outburst' further distances it from a considered (not to say rational) practice. It is also noteworthy that Eisenstein's description does not explicitly stipulate that this 'shorthand record' need be in words – it could arguably also be in another form. In direct contrast, Marion Faber (adopting the now-familiar 'blue-print' metaphor) makes the argument that the screenplay serves more than one purpose:

The film manuscript is originally a blue-print for [...] director and film crew, [but] it is also a text for the critical reader. It calls upon him to read not dramatically, but cinematically, taking into account the rhetoric of camera angle and movement.

(Faber 1978: 160ff)

The implication that one reads the screenplay ‘cinematically’ is notable as it names the process that arguably takes place every time we consume narrative text. But the suggestion that the reading of this particular kind of text goes beyond visualisation, that it can include an implicit translation between media, sets the screenplay apart from other forms of writing.

But when considering the screenplay as a literary form, it is, in its inherent connection to the film medium, at risk of being considered an auxiliary, rather than an independent form. Noël Carroll takes this approach when he suggests that screenplays ‘are ontologically ingredients in the motion pictures with which they are associated rather than being independent artworks’ (Carroll 2008: 69). If a screenplay is an ‘ingredient’ it cannot be appraised autonomously from its subsequent realisation. He continues:

The movie scripts that come to us in published form are not the scripts used during the production process – which were quite frequently altered as the movie was being made – but are more of the nature of transcriptions or records of the words that finally wound up being said in the finished product.  
(Carroll 2008: 69)

Carroll’s argument differentiates between the ‘screenplay used during the production process’ and the screenplay he presents as a post-production ‘transcription’, assuming firstly, that all screenplays will have been filmed and secondly, that they will be subsequently rewritten to ‘transcribe’ the film produced on their basis. In his article ‘Why Can’t Screenplays Be Artworks’ (2011), Ted Nannicelli offers a robust rebuke to Noël Carroll’s arguments addressing the screenplay’s ontological status. He highlights what he terms Carroll’s ‘transcription’ argument, which suggests that screenplays ‘depend on the existence of [...] films for their own existence’ (Nannicelli 2011: 408) and counters that to term a screenplay a

‘transcript’ of a film is a misuse of the term (Nannicelli 2011: 409). He continues that the failure of the transcription argument undermines Carroll’s more substantive ontological argument that screenplays are inseparable from film if they ‘are ontologically ingredients rather than being independent artworks’ (Carroll 2008: 69). Highlighting Carroll’s omission of ‘screenplays that are never shot’ (Nannicelli 2011: 410), Nannicelli emphasises the (easily overlooked) fact that screenplays *do* exist as independent entities regardless if they have been produced or not and that they ‘can be autonomous artworks insofar as they are, like theatrical scripts, verbal objects – and, furthermore, special kinds of literary works’ (Nannicelli 2011: 412).

But given that the screenplay was indeed conceived as a supporting artistic practice (in contrast to a stand-alone cultural product), it quickly became compliant to the demands of industrial film production. Steven Maras explains:

Battle lines are drawn between film and literature, the cinematic potential of cinema and the literary influence of the script. A defensive attitude prevails, whereby the autonomy of the script is made subservient to the demands of the production process. [...] [There is] an alternative road: namely, that there is an interaction between the developing art of cinema and the newer art of scriptwriting *that goes both ways*.  
(Maras 2009: 47)

He continues that ‘the script is not literary because it is part of the literary side of production, but rather the script becomes a unique literary form because of the demands the cinema makes of it’ (Maras 2009: 47). While Eisenstein had claimed that the screenplay was just a ‘shorthand record’ (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 134), making its form irrelevant and therefore not requiring it to adapt to the demands of film, Maras asserts that it is the interaction between film and the screenplay that informs the screenplay as a literary form.

While Howard Rodman claims that in order to assess the screenplay comprehensively ‘it [the screenplay] needs to be freed from its utility. It, too, needs to

forget its planned itinerary [...]’ (Rodman 2006: 87), I suggest that utility informs intent, and if intent is central to informing the screenplay’s identity then removing it would render the screenplay redundant. Rodman presents form and function in opposition to each other although, given that the screenplay’s form is informed primarily by its function, an evaluation of the screenplay’s formal characteristics needs to take place in context of its utility. We therefore need to explore the screenplay within its industrial context to understand its literary specification.

In order to assess if and how the screenplay shares characteristics with literary forms, and in particular with modernist literary forms, it is necessary to explore its formal characteristics in more detail and within a comparative framework that takes into account both the context of the screenplay’s formal evolution (i.e. its place in film production) as well as proximate modernist forms. This assessment need not however be based on general ideas of what constitutes the ‘literary’, given that the screenplay standardised in a period when the definition of the ‘literary’ was multiplying and ever changing. It is therefore useful to compare the screenplay directly to specific modernist forms of writing in order to draw out parallels and differences in a narrower and more meaningful comparative framework.

### 1.2.3 Limits of the ‘Screenplay as Literature’ Model

The screenplay is clearly a formally distinctive *written* form that exists in its own right, regardless if a film has been made on its basis or not. But this fact does not in itself resolve the question of its ‘literariness’. The fact remains that the screenplay exists for a purpose other than itself. A literary narrative is assessed as an aesthetic object, as the enjoyment of a piece of literature derives not only through its narrative content but equally through the pleasure in the beauty or skill of its construction. The



screenplay does not satisfy these requirements as it does not aim to exist as an independent aesthetic object but is informed rather by its transitional nature (whether aspirational or actually realised). Taking this argument one step further, one might claim the beauty or skill of a screenplay is expressed in its capacity to transcend its own form rather than how well it displays it.

The screenplay's form is unstable and bound to be discarded for its narrative to be realised in a different medium. It is created with the primary goal to eventually become something other than itself. Ian Macdonald explains that 'we not only read it (the screenplay) as a literary text but also as a cinematic one; that is, including within it another set of meanings as well as the literary cues' (Macdonald 2004b: 263). The anticipated transcendence of the screenplay's form is therefore not only evident in its form but also in how it is consumed by its readers. But when we read a screenplay do we really 'see' more than in other texts? In his 1977 article "The Scenario is a Structure Designed to Become Another Structure," Pier Paolo Pasolini recognises that 'the author of a scenario requires from his viewer a particular collaboration, which consists of endowing the text with a 'visual' completion, which is absent but to which it alludes' (Pasolini 1977: 58). (Note Pasolini's use of the word 'viewer' instead of 'reader' of a screenplay.) Pasolini elucidates a theoretical distinction between the screenplay as a literary form in its own right and the screenplay as a form that only becomes itself via the participation of its reader/viewer. Therefore, the screenplay does not claim *to be* a visual narrative, it aims to *become* one. Pasolini's argument further endows the screenplay with the ability to be to be two things at once, both literary and visual, one overt (the words on the page) and the other implicit (the implied image of the description). What this shows is that the 'screenplay as literature' model cannot stop at the written screenplay alone. It needs to take into

consideration the visual context in which the form exists and the demands this visual framework makes of it. Neither the unfilmed nor the ‘realised’ screenplay are self-contained entities that are delivered to an audience for consumption. Ultimately however, it is important to recognise that the screenplay is a form aimed at a specific function and on account of this function, the screenplay is destined to be transformed into something other than itself. This ‘transformation’ provides the basis for the following ‘screenplay as intermediary’ model.

#### 1.2.4 The ‘Screenplay as Intermediary’ Model

Considering the assessments of the screenplay as possibly more than a ‘blue-print’ and maybe less than an independent form of literature, it might seem simple common-sense approach to term the screenplay an ‘intermediary’; a form that sits in-between and facilitates between verbal and visual narrative. This account of the screenplay captures what Claudia Sternberg terms ‘a literature in flux’ (Sternberg 1997: 27), a formally distinct piece of writing that is nevertheless unstable and altered according to the needs of another medium. Yet, while the screenplay does display characteristics of in-betweenness, in that it is *intermedial* – i.e. it aims to ‘stand in’ for the film by conveying the visual narrative in verbal form – to suggest the screenplay as an *intermediary* deprives the screenplay of both authorial stability and the claim to a self-sufficient existence. It also provides a framework to view the screenplay through a modernist lens that echoes instability and fragmentation:

[...] modern scientific thinking is characterised by a multiplicity of models, competing paradigms, and, because of the limitations of reason, the impossibility of unitary and final solutions. [...] Similarly, language for the modernist proves to be equally limited.  
(Sheppard 2000: 62)

As a form of writing set insecurely within conventional literary parameters, the screenplay could be considered a type of paraliterature, i.e. a form of literature not usually deemed as such. Rosalind Krauss argues that:

The paraliterary space is the space of debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of constituting the work of literature.  
(Krauss 1980: 37)

Applying Krauss' analysis, the screenplay can indeed be defined as a form of literature that references and adapts established literary forms in order to anticipate an artistic expression in another form. To use her terminology, it 'reconciles' the competing demands of the word and the image while its form is 'betrayed' in the 'partisan' relationship between the word and the image. Krauss' language is reflective of some of the concerns of modernist practice in the sense that 'unity' and 'coherence' are characteristics that literary modernism paradoxically and simultaneously both rejects and aims to rebuild. The screenplay, by virtue of embracing its instability and its anticipation of another form, aligns itself with this discourse and creates specificity out of instability.

If a screenplay is fulfilling the promise of its inception – to be made into a film – it loses formal stability. This points towards an important distinction between screenplays: those that have been filmed and those that have not. This distinction is crucial because screenplays that have been filmed have lost their 'independent' existence as written works and will always co-exist with films made of them, while screenplays that have not been filmed exist entirely on their own merit, but unfulfilling their intended destiny. Therefore, it must be asked if we can, in fact, study the filmed screenplay as an independent object or if it always needs to be assessed in the context of its visualisation. Jean-Claude Carrière states that he 'fails to see how you can dissociate a screenplay from a film, appreciate them separately' (Carrière

1995: 147). The screenplay is implicated in the technical process of filmmaking from the outset and it continues to function as an intermediary until the film has been completed and takes over from the screenplay as the primary narrative. Further, when a film is in production, the screenplay might be re-written to accommodate changes. This fact transfers the screenplay's formal instability onto its author too. Jean-Claude Carrière writes:

The screenwriter works hemmed in by a throng of technical constraints and commercial demands. He commits himself to a project that must necessarily be transformed beyond all recognition. Denied the novelist's comfortable introspection, he is usually required to describe his characters from the outside in. He knows his work is doomed to disappear; he himself is usually unknown to audiences, even by name. He therefore spends much of his life asking, 'How can I ever give expression to who I am? How can I – like other, better-known artists – make my voice heard as well?'  
(Carrière 1995: viiii)

Carrière's analysis is relevant because it pinpoints the dilemma of the screenwriter, who is the author of a work that is being consumed via a different medium without there being a clearly defined space for the appreciation of his screenplay as an aesthetic object. The screenplay *is* the film while yet being formally absent from it. Although this is a distinct characteristic, it is not unique to the screenplay or to film. A similar process takes place in the performance of music (which follows the structure of a written score) or the stage play (which is based on a written play) although the 'text' is constituted in a different way in these media, as film is a singular realisation of a screenplay text while a musical or theatrical performance is one of many realisations of a stable source text. The notion of a stable source text is important as, in contrast to the screenplay, both a music score and a playtext can reach their audiences irrespective of their transpositions into other media. Recalling, again, Eisenstein's comparison of the screenplay to a 'short hand record' (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 134) it is especially interesting to make the comparison with a musical score

which could be considered a shorthand transcription of arranged sounds. But the point of ‘transcription’ is where the difference lies and where the screenplay’s intermediary function becomes significant. A musical score allows for interpretation, not for creation. In contrast, the screenplay is a written conception of a narrative that is to be visually created. It does not possess the tools to transcribe the visual (which raises the question why the screenplay needs to be written rather than be presented in storyboard or even comic format). It is ironic that the screenplay, so specialised and defined by its formal characteristics, does not in fact seem to require the written word to perform its function at all (if one were to adopt for example a storyboard approach instead). A complete absence of medium specificity is assumed for the screenplay by Carrière when he suggests that

[...] a good screenplay is one that gives birth to a good film. Once the film exists, the screenplay is no more. It is probably the least visible component of the finished work. It is the first incarnation of a film and appears to be a self-contained whole. But it is fated to undergo metamorphosis, to disappear, to melt into another form, the final form. (Carrière 1995: 148)

This position is not only unequivocal about the necessity of the screenplay ‘disappearing’ but also implies that the ‘screenplay scaffolding’ needs to be removed to allow what he calls ‘the final form’ to come into being. The written narrative is set in physical reality while the film transcends it. And while Carrière acknowledges the screenplay’s narrative capacity to be part of a film, as an ostensible ‘ingredient’ (Carroll 2008: 60), he nevertheless effectively reduces it to a tool of communication informing a ‘final form’ in the (filmmaking) process.

One approach utilised to assess the screenplay as a communication tool between narrative source and target medium has been adaptation theory. Adaptation ties in directly with the idea of the screenplay as an intermediate art form – in this case, the intermediary between a source text (i.e. a novel) and a screen adaptation.

Thomas Leitch explains that ‘the study of moving images as adaptations of literary works was one of the very first shelters under which cinema first entered the academy’ (Leitch 2003: 149). He further argues that the lack of a cohesive body of adaptation theory has prevented adaptation theory from ‘fulfilling its analytical promise’ (Leitch 2003: 149). The applicability of adaptation theory to the screenplay seems clear: with a written narrative that is transposed into a different, visual medium, one can isolate and assess sets of formal properties. Further, a vast number of films are based on narratives first published in other forms, hence the urge to ‘compare and contrast’ is a natural one. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that adaptation of a formally defined source text into a visual narrative is conceptually different from the creation of a narrative which was designated to be told visually from its inception. The adapted screenplay serves much more clearly as an intermediary between written and visual forms, while the original screenplay may be something else again. Still, adaptation theory highlights two concerns the screenplay has been confronted with: fidelity and originality (Cardwell 2002: 52). If based on a source text, how closely do (and must) the screenplay and the film align themselves with it and how original can the result of an adaptation ever be? These questions are arguably more pressing for screen than stage adaptations. The sense of ‘realism’ of (mainstream commercial) film narratives demands a more ‘faithful’ representation than the (more obviously) physically reconfigured representation on the stage. The screenplay needs to navigate this requirement for realism while simultaneously distorting the narrative to transpose it. In order to achieve these objectives placed on it by film production, the screenplay employs techniques of other written forms to meet competing needs.

Before comparing the screenplay to other narrative forms however, it is important to consider how the screenplay conveys the meaning it is tasked to

articulate. Pudovkin writes in *Film Technique and Film Acting* (1958): ‘In order to write a scenario suitable for filming, one must know the methods by which the spectator can be influenced from the screen’ (Pudovkin 1958 in Mehring 1990: 5). Pudovkin emphasises the specificity of the screenplay’s requirements, meaning that a screenwriter must first understand the means of visual narration before attempting to outline a visual narrative with words. This again highlights the impact of photography on all artistic production. Michael North writes:

It is clear that the habit of seeing photographically has affected modern experience to such an extent that certain oddities of the camera, especially its tendency to frame particular points of view and to isolate one moment from another, have become second nature for human observers [...]. Recent studies of photography and literature have therefore shown in some detail how camera vision affects the motives and perhaps even the perceptions of influential modern writers.  
(North 2005: 3)

It is the influence of seeing mechanically, via a frame, that therefore focuses the writing gaze to describe what can be seen, while inferring what cannot. The screenplay attempts to bridge this gap between the verbal and visual, but elevates the visual requirement above the verbal expression. Screenwriting manuals capture this by asking aspiring screenwriting to ‘show’ rather than to ‘tell’. Tom Stempel refers to ‘unfilmable’ written descriptions such as internal reflections or character back stories as ‘How do you show this?’ lines (Stempel 1982: 47).

Yet, by what means *does* the screenplay convey meaning? While primarily employing descriptive means

[...] the screenwriter may even include literary imagery which cannot be directly turned into screen images with the assistance of the comment mode. Through the use of comparison, simile or metaphor, screenwriters are able to substantiate moods and emotions. Screenplay imagery generally assumes the form of simple, easily decidable constructions.  
(Sternberg 1997: 87)

Sternberg's point is significant because the deliberate use of literary devices for a desired effect shows that the screenplay's intermediary status does not preclude it from employing literary means to achieve non-literary effects. Sternberg elucidates further that:

When comparing the literary text substrata of film and stage, it is clear that the multi-medial devices (i.e., non-verbal acoustic and optical codes) are laid down more extensively and more specifically in the screenplay [than in the stageplay]. It is through their use that the particularities of filmic realisation and a writing style characteristic of the text-type are manifest.  
(Sternberg 1997: 66)

The screenplay employs such 'optical codes' in order to externalise the action of its narratives. Kevin Boon explains that 'screenplays differ from modern fiction and contemporary fictions in the limits placed on a screenplay's ability to present introspection and psychological machinations' (Boon 2008b: 270).

The limits of 'introspection and psychological machinations' can be observed most succinctly in comparison with the novel, which has 'explored the simultaneity of experience in a moment of psychological time, in which it concentrates past, present, and future' (Lunn 1982: 35). The screenplay's adoption of literary techniques is pragmatic and focused on improving how it can 'write the image'. Boon's analysis of the screenplay's similarities to Imagism illustrates such characteristics as condensed writing, succinct expression and visualised description (Boon 2008b: 14-16). When compared to the novel on the basis of their similarities in creating narrative arcs, the screenplay is, as discussed, constrained in how it conveys information without the ability to convey inner reflection of its characters. It therefore utilises either action or dialogue in order to convey information but is restricted in communicating psychology or metaphor directly.



Despite the notable differences, the comparison between novel and screenplay has persisted due to the reason that novels have traditionally lent themselves to adaptation for film. The close association of the ‘story in book form’ with the ‘story in film form’ has created a connection between the two that is rooted, again, in function rather than form. But what the comparison between screenplay and novel shows is that form is only one consideration. Furthermore, in the case of the screenplay, is the nature of the medium verbal or visual or both?

There are critics who argue that while the screenplay may be an ‘intermediary’ rather than an ‘end product’, it is nevertheless an artistic expression that requires critical examination. James Boyle writes:

Admitting that the screenplay is an intermediate art form, it may be compared to a sketch that a sculptor makes while designing a bronze statue. The actual finished product might be a life-sized statue in three-dimensional form, which is comparable to the three-dimensional reels of emulsion in film cans which is the actual release print. Both the charcoal sketch on paper (two-dimensional) and the typist’s ink on paper (two-dimensional script) are stop gaps. But consider that the sculptor might be Picasso or DaVinci or Michelangelo. Then those scraps of charcoal sketches would be on display in a museum. So, too, some Academy Award winning films have their screenplays on display at museums. The day may come when a screenplay does not have to be produced and released to be considered worthy of being included in the museum’s collection.

(Boyle 1983: iv)

Could the screenplay therefore be considered an artefact of the ‘journey to the screen’? One cannot grasp film in a physical sense – reels of film are not artistic objects. Projected film is a play of light that outside of projection would be invisible. The screenplay is the physical ‘object’ of a film narrative that remains – and indeed, as we will see in the case studies in the following chapters, they are not infrequently more durable than the films made from them. Its form can offer unexplored clues to a narrative core of a film that the projected images cannot provide.

As has been outlined, intermediary forms are diverse and not restricted to narrative forms alone. The screenplay's form as intermediary equally spans a wide range from a 'short-hand' aide-memoire to a faithful transposition of a novel to a film. The screenplay is not an accurate transcript of a film. It holds multiple identities from how it is perceived by the writer who created it in comparison to the person who creates from it. Furthermore, the screenplay's instability and inbetweenness allows us to make connections between the verbal and the visual and the interactions between different written forms.

#### 1.2.5 Limits of the 'Screenplay as Intermediary' Model

The screenplay lends itself to be viewed as intermediary as it seemingly stands between written and visual narratives, incorporating characteristics of other written forms. It is dramatic writing with the concision of poetry and the narrative scope of the novel (Boon 2008a: 260). It is a utilitarian form, crafted not to be read by a wide audience but to be transformed into a visual narrative (Carrière 1995: 148). It also invokes the notion of a 'sketch' that precedes the final artwork (Boyle 1983: iv). However, these comparisons offer limited insight into the relationship between the screenplay and film as a translation *between* different media. Translating a written narrative into a visual narrative can be considered as a form of *transmutation* as per Roman Jakobson's definition: 'Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems' (Jakobson 1969: 351). While the sketch for a painting provides a useful metaphor for the aesthetic value of an intermediate art form, a sketch will always be more suggestive of the final painting or sculpture (if any) because it suggests its final physical form through simplified means in the same (or similar) medium. The screenplay is suggestive of a

visual narrative but does so in an altogether different medium. The verbal form of the screenplay is almost entirely removed from the visual expression of the final film, except in dialogue or subtitles. This disparity further complicates the comparison of the screenplay to other intermediate forms. While a painting or a statue address their audience the same way as their initial sketch does, the mode of communication between screenplay and film changes. Once the narrative has been transformed into film the screenplay's form has become unrecognisable. There is no physical resemblance between the screenplay and its cinematic realisation.

While the likeness of the screenplay to other literary and non-literary forms has been identified, the notion of the screenplay as a hybrid of literature and film has remained unexplored. Although the screenplay is a written form, its capacity for visual representation arguably exceeds that of other narrative forms, even those that make it their explicit aim to represent the visual (such as Imagism). It therefore remains to be investigated if the formal attributes of the screenplay are an indication of an essentially *intermedial* nature, one that is based on reciprocal relationships between different media, or if the screenplay's adoption of innovative formal modes is purely pragmatic or even coincidental.

When considering the screenplay through an 'intermediate' lens, it is also important to recognise that adaptation theory can only provide limited tools to investigate the screenplay. Leitch is correct in his assessment that it has been one of the first shelters of cinema in the academy (Leitch 2003: 149) but this inclusion is based on the notion of the cinema as an extension of literary studies rather than a discipline in its own right. As has been highlighted throughout this chapter, one of the cinema's first aims was its demarcation from literature (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 135) and while there is, of course, a connection between the two (not least due to the

screenplay), it does not follow that the primary way to assess cinematic texts, or even screenplays, is to discuss them in terms of their relationships to literary texts (even when films or screenplays are based on them). Adaptation theory has focused on the transitional processes between source texts and target texts (e.g. a source text such as a novel and a target text such as a film). The screenplay always exists before the film. If the screenplay is original and not based on a source text such as a novel, it could logically be regarded as the source text. Yet, given the screenplay's specific function as a written text to be transposed into film, the analogy fails. Adaptation theory neglects this point by disregarding the screenplay's functional specificity that is reflected in its form.

### 1.3 Questions of Authorship

A script is a cipher. A cipher communicated by one character to another. [...] The director comes along and translates the rhythm of this conception into his own language, into film language; he finds the cinematic equivalent of literary expression. In this lies the heart of the matter. (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 134)

Perhaps more than other creative jobs, screenwriting is a highly collective practice, surrounded and restricted by industrial norms and requirements, the first of which is that the screen idea must be shared, if only with a crew. It is very difficult to conceive of the screenplay as a singular expression of genius emanating from a unique individual [...] It is even more difficult when one comprehends that the screenplay is not intended to be permanent, nor an end in itself. (Macdonald 2004b: 265)

Bridget Conor explains that 'scholarly opinion has generally shunned the idea that a traditional conception of authorship can be applied to the cinema' (Conor 2014: 48). Nevertheless, the screenplay, both prior and post visualisation, is still by definition a text and a text invites considerations of authorship, even if it is not assigned to a single, named individual. Ian Macdonald addresses this by emphasising the fact that a screenplay is produced as a collective effort within a wider context of filmmaking.

This view of the screenwriter would seem to stand in stark contrast to how the author is usually positioned within modernism. In *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (2001), Jonathan Goldman writes:

Notoriously suspicious of mass-reproducible images, modernist technique conceives of the author as an idealized, incorporeal entity, a self that carries on a perplexed relation to the body and to any picture of that body. (Goldman 2001: 11)

And while the following case studies will show that some screenwriters did aim to position themselves as an ‘incorporeal entity’ in the Hollywood mould, i.e. as a celebrity, the distinctly collaborative nature of filmmaking and the industrial settings of their practice have imposed limitations on the screenwriter to be conceived as an author of an independent narrative. There are however significant differences between how the screenwriter was perceived in different national contexts and the case studies will aim to show how the screenwriter found herself in both alignment and at odds with the traditional notion of the ‘sole author’, as some national cinema industries, unlike Hollywood, awarded more creative control to screenwriters than directors (in contrast to the Hollywood model that eventually prevailed) (Thompson 2004: 349-351).

Roland Barthes characterises the difference between author and writer: ‘The author performs a function, the writer an activity’ (Barthes 1982: 86). Michel Foucault provides further elucidation of this premise by arguing that: ‘The coming into being of the notion of an ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of *individualisation* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences’ (Foucault 1984: 101). This idea of ‘privileged individualisation’ is pertinent in the context of the director/screenwriter relationship, as it is the director (or, for some Hollywood historians, the producer) who is, in the now commonly accepted hierarchy of filmmaking, granted the privilege of *individualisation* in the filmmaking

process. S/he is the one who personalises the visual expression that is being conveyed to the viewer. In contrast, the screenwriter loses all control over the expression of his narrative and sees his work morphed into that of another. Steven Price describes how the notion of authorship functions within a dominant Romantic tradition in that ‘art is the product of one man working alone to carve a personal vision out of the marble of his sensibility’ (Price 2010: 8), before adding, that ‘the screenplay text is clearly a product of the kind of advanced industrial practice to which Romanticism is in direct ideological opposition’ (Price 2010: 9). This direct opposition to Romanticism aligns the screenplay with modernist practice but as Jonathan Goldman explains ‘modernism makes style its basis for objectifying the inimitable individual, the modernist author as exception to the norm. In doing so it claims to disavow its relation to its cultural-historical context, while implicitly acknowledging it’ (Goldman 2001: 7). Authorship in the modernist mould is therefore inextricably linked to form and expressivity, which proves problematic for the screenplay as its form is not only unstable but designed to be replaced. Before the screenplay enters the industrial context of filmmaking it is an independent aesthetic object with an intent and it can (sometimes) be in fact be the labour of one solitary individual. It is therefore the moment of visual realisation where the issue of authorship becomes most significant for the screenplay.

As the screenplay turns from page to screen, authority over the narrative text moves from the creator of the word (the screenwriter) to the creator of the image (the director). Andrew Sarris describes:

We seem to be fencing around with the roles of the director and the screenwriter [...] Where we grapple most desperately and most blindly is in that no man’s land of narrative and dramatic structure. And here I think the balance of power between the director and the screenwriter is too variable for generalisation. I tend to agree with Joseph L. Mankiewicz that every screenplay is a directed movie and every directed movie is a screenplay. That is to say that writing and directing are fundamentally the same function.

(Sarris 1975: xv)

This, almost conciliatory, approach ultimately implies a form of multiple authorship in film. The limitation of this approach is that it confuses the role of the director instead of clarifying the role of the screenwriter. By conflating the different functions into one joint effort, we lose sight of formal specificity inherent in each step of the filmmaking process. This is, however, not necessarily straightforward as, in addition to narrating a story, the screenplay has the opportunity to anticipate the film medium's technical possibilities in its narrative framework and can guide the camera's gaze. It therefore establishes itself not only as a verbal, but a visual narrator. In his argument, Eisenstein aims to resist this overlap in arguing that 'the script sets out the emotional requirements. The director provides its visual resolution' (Eisenstein [1929] 1988: 135). While Eisenstein insists on the director as the guiding capacity, one can argue that the director of a film is merely the executor of the screenplay's narrative legacy.

Therefore, considering screenwriting as both an individual and collaborative process within the industrial context, the *practice* of screenwriting raises further questions. Steven Maras points out that 'screenwriting is a practice of writing, but it is also a discourse that constructs or imagines the process of writing in particular ways' (Maras 2009: 12). In auteur theory, the idea coined as *caméra-stylo* by Alexandre Astruc (Winston 1973: 16) is commonly used to imply that the director 'writes with the camera'. In a reversal of this idea one might argue that the screenwriter 'films with his pen'. One is likely to be as true or false as the other. What is the case, however, is that the screenwriter writes a narrative conscious of the fact that it is to be transposed into a visual narrative. Nevertheless, in the process of moving from page to screen, it sometimes becomes evident that what reads well on the page does not

translate to film. Gary Carey writes about Anita Loos that at the beginning of her career:

Many of her scripts ended up filed rather than filmed. [...] Directors were disappointed with Miss Loos's scripts because they rarely turned out as amusing on screen as they promised on paper. The problem was that much of her humour was contained in the turn of a phrase, a witty description, even a wise-cracking line or so of dialogue, all lost on the silent screen which still used the subtitle only as a terse guide to audience comprehension of character locale, or plot.  
(Carey 1972: 39ff)

While during the studio era the process of writing was organised into the 'assembly line' model in ways that removed it from the process of production (i.e. principal photography and post-production) (although many directors were revising scripts), *auteur* movements such as the French Nouvelle Vague were characterised by writer/directors who often wrote their own screenplays in an attempt to realise the ideal of the *caméra-stylo*. Although writer/directors of course abound today, the screenplay as discrete artefact has taken on an increasingly important economic function. Tom Stempel explains that:

As it had been in the studio days, the screenplay was still the blue-print for production in independent filmmaking. But now the screenplay also became the basis for the setting up of the deal to make the film.  
(Stempel 1982: 17)

Yet, rather than its economic currency strengthening its position in the filmmaking process, the screenplay became a flexible negotiation tool, adding further to the constraints of the screenwriter.

Paradoxically, the reasons which deny the screenwriter the status of *auteur*, namely the restrictions caused by such forces as industrial production [...] are seen as challenges for the director against which he, or less often, she can pit his or her *auteurist* strength. [...] It would be mistake, however, to believe that the *politique des auteurs* brought an end to a flourishing critical investigation of the screenplay; these investigations did not exist even before the triumphs of the *auteur* critics.  
(Sternberg 1997: 16, own italics)



Sternberg's assessment highlights key issues around the screenplay's authorship. While the *auteur* theory has presented challenges for the screenplay, the 'cult of the director' does not lie at the heart of the screenplay's struggle for recognition. Instead, it is the screenplay's formal instability and its precarious position in the filmmaking process that designate it a peculiarly insecure form. In addition, this condition is perpetuated due to – rather than despite – its formal and functional specificity. The question of authorship therefore requires investigation on a formal level, assessing the relationship between the written text and the visual text, in order to be answered.

#### 1.4 Technical Document or Modernist Literary Form?

A major problem with film scripts is establishing a text.  
(Morsberger and Morsberger 1975: 52)

The relationship between the screenplay and film can be conceived in fatal terms: The death of the screenplay gives birth to the film and the destiny of a screenplay is its formal destruction:

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has been linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life. [...] As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.  
(Foucault 1984: 102-103)

The screenplay does the opposite of 'warding off death', in fact, if it is successful, it will disappear completely. Its author, consequently, is then indeed 'reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence' (Foucault 1984: 103). This fatal description implies that a screenplay and its visual representation do not co-exist in the final screenwork. However, given that the screenplay provides the narrative axis for a film, it of course continues to exist within a film but – significantly – it loses its form.

Even if we do not subscribe to the argument that artistic practices are purely tied to the terms of their respective media (Greenberg 1961: 139), the form of an aesthetic object is nevertheless significant and a gateway to exploring its identity. And while the approaches outlined in this chapter have continuously emphasised the role of the screenplay as a technical document in the film production process, they also highlight the screenplay's formal specificity, which is emphasised, rather than diminished, through its inherent intermediality.

In order to approach, or rather, to get a hold on the screenplay, critics have often aimed to isolate an individual characteristic (such as its similarities to other written forms or its role in adaptation), disregarding that the screenplay is informed to a large degree not only by its interdependence with the visual medium, but also its relationship to other literary forms, in that it incorporates many of their techniques for a new purpose. As a result, the screenplay finds itself at the threshold of both verbal and visual discourse but is confronted with resistance from both. A written document, it serves a technical purpose, dissolves into a film, and culminates in a sequence of images on the screen. At the same time, it displays literary features but is distinguished by instability, anxiousness and dislocation – all concerns of modernity at large (McFarlane 1991: 92).

In the last set of his overarching characteristics of modernisms, Eugene Lunn describes 'dehumanization and the demise of the integrated individual subject or personality' (Lunn 1982:41) as follows:

It was not [...] until the late nineteenth century that the full implications of the new market situation, taken together with the cultural changes [...], were to be felt in a radically altered aesthetic form and perspective: the modernist stress upon art as a self-referential construct instead of as a mirror of nature or society. [...] By the late 1880s and 1890s, many writers and artists, breaking fully from mimetic aesthetics, were more than ever thrown back upon their own selves or their own craft as a central object of their work, with only an "avant-garde" circle of initiates to share

it with. As with other groups of intellectuals by the last third of the century, they too were becoming “experts” within a delimited field. (Lunn 1982: 37)

The screenplay shares a number of the characteristics Lunn outlines here in an adapted form. Most significantly however, Lunn highlights specialisation (later professionalization), which is (as I will discuss in Chapter Four) key to understanding how the screenplay can be positioned in relation to both, industrial and modernist discourses.

The review of the different frameworks for assessing the screenplay has emphasised its uncertain status and has shown that we need to expand our methodologies in order to analyse it better. While there is no fully agreed definition of the screenplay, I would argue that the categories of blue-print, literature and adaptation are not mutually exclusive. To explore the screenplay in a comparative framework has the advantage of allowing an engagement without imposing artificial constraints. The relatively recent upsurge of interest in screenwriting has led to a wider visibility and availability of screenplay texts. The practical problems of accessing scripts have been partially alleviated by the availability of online archives of current screenplays and the conservation efforts of studios and film archives to make original copies of screenplays available to researchers. Nevertheless, screenplays are yet to become preferred texts for the evaluation of films as in the hierarchy of interest film studies will always favour the visual:

Even the screenplays of literary luminaries such as William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Vladimir Nabokov are ranked somewhere below their personal correspondence and are often mentioned only out of historical curiosity. (Boon 2008a: 30)

The dominant perception of the screenplay as a technical document incorporated in the production process has led to a lack of enquiry into more detailed formal

assessments. While the screenplay is undoubtedly a technical document, it is also a highly complex written form that has not been subjected to the same level of formal analysis as other forms of writing. It is my aim to show that it is through mutual infiltration that the screenplay has evolved into its current, standardised form.

The following case studies aim to examine the form and function of the screenplay to explore the tension between the screenplay's existence as a technical document and its relationship to various forms of literary modernism with the aim to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the simple, yet, as this chapter has demonstrated, persistently unanswered question: What is a screenplay?

## Chapter 2: Anita Loos: Middlebrow Modernism

To speak of a culturally authoritative text in the twentieth century is to speak of the discursive practices, embedded within specific institutions, by which it is produced and recognised as valuable.  
(Strychacz 1993: 26)

“Won’t you tell us, Miss Loos, something about the present condition of the cinema in Hollywood?”  
(Bryher [1928] 1998: 49)

In April 1928, novelist and modernist patron Winifred Ellerman aka Bryher interviewed the screenwriter Anita Loos about the condition of American filmmaking for the modernist film journal *Close Up* (1927-1933). It was a brief conversation in a London hotel and yielded little information for readers other than Loos’s affirmation that smaller, independent production companies are conducive to establishing films as art (Bryher [1928] 1998: 49). Yet, despite being a brief encounter, it is a significant one as Loos – one of America’s most successful commercial screenwriters and a regular in popular fan magazines such as *Photoplay* (1911-1980) – was being quoted about her thoughts on the state of cinema in a privately funded modernist film magazine that Gilbert Seldes had called ‘the fascinating international magazine of the cinema-aesthetes’ (Seldes 1929: 116).

Bryher’s interest in Loos’s contribution to the film industry, one that began when Loos was only 19 years old (Beauchamp and Loos 2003: 9) and started to submit brief stories to production companies, is noteworthy, as Loos was a Hollywood screenwriter known to the public primarily as a popular author after the publication of her humorous short novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in 1925 and *Close Up* had proclaimed itself to be ‘the first review to approach films from the angles of art, experiment and possibility’ (POOL advertisement, *transition* 6 (September 1927): front, in North 2005: 88). But it is curious that Bryher does not mention the well-

known novel once during the interview, especially as the first film adaptation of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1928, now lost) was due to be released that very year and had earned Loos not only bestseller sales but endorsements from an audience congenial to *Close Up*'s own readers, with Aldous Huxley claiming to be "enraptured by the book" (Carey 1988: 98).

At first sight, Loos seems anything but an intuitive candidate to be featured in *Close Up* as the magazine focussed mainly on reviewing films that presented the aesthetic possibilities of films as explored by the European avant-garde with occasional contributions by writers such as Gertrude Stein and Marianne Moore adding to a highbrow reputation. But, as recent analysis by Chris Townsend shows, the modernist cache of *Close Up* was not necessarily based on the background of its contributors with the majority of regular contributors in fact 'associated with the commercial film industry either through participation in its productions or commentary on its output' (Townsend 2019a: 4). As such, Loos was therefore an apt subject for the magazine, because of, rather than despite, the fact that her work was prominently distributed via commercial channels. For her part, Bryher appears almost star-struck in her report of the encounter, noting that 'forgetting all text books on 'how to begin an interview' we began if rather too quickly, with much eagerness' (Bryher [1928] 1998: 48).

So why should we consider this particular encounter between Bryher and Loos significant and what can it tell us about the screenplay's relationship to literary modernism? This chapter will argue that exploring the intersection between modernist literary practices – such as the Imagist poetry produced by later *Close Up* contributor and POOL member H.D. – taking place in concurrence with formal innovations in popular mass culture – such as the screenplay – can highlight the inherent similarities

and reciprocal relationships connecting both. It is in the context of American modernist poetry, or more specifically Imagism, in which I wish to explore Anita Loos' work as a screenwriter and suggest a point of exploration for the screenplay form as a whole.

In 1912, Loos had become one of the first regular amateur contributors to the Biograph Company, arguably America's most prominent silent film company, rising swiftly to become one of the first widely known professional screenwriters who worked both as a freelancer in the early 1910s and later a contracted screenwriter in the studio system. She was one of the first writers to utilise the nature of mass marketing to promote herself as part of the Hollywood product, both through features in film magazines and the publication of screenwriting manuals, in the process establishing screenwriting as both a commercial practice and a celebrity endeavour. The beginnings of Loos's career, writing film scenarios in short story format during the 1910s, coincided with the literary responses by American writers confronted with technological developments that unsettled existing artistic hierarchies, many of which were grouped as an American modernism. Expressed artistically, politically and culturally, American modernism distinguished itself from its British and continental European counterparts through its broadly pragmatic, progressive and optimistic aspect. Its responses to the changes generated by modernity tended to embrace rather than reject or denounce technological and industrial innovation and 'refused to succumb to [...] mindless irrationalism, or nostalgia' (Sheppard 2000: 86). Concurrent to new, more experimental literary forms, modern commercial genres also flourished, ranging from popular journalism to advertising and the advent of professional public relations. These commercial genres, in a manner that extends to screenwriting, supported the professionalization of writers and fully embedded the

outputs of literary practice as products of the capitalist market economy (Turner 2003: 3).

However, in a market economy, differentiation is key. Therefore, a principal strategy for demarcation from commercial literature was to distinguish one's work formally, particularly by rendering it outwardly esoteric. Through the establishment of groups and movements, modernists formed communities of 'insiders', based around a specialised use of language and set of references, often making it difficult for the general public to enjoy – or even understand – their work without required initiation. Conversely, journalists and magazine writers aimed to popularise their writing and expand readerships to capture the largest possible share of the profitable mass market.

When considering writing for the mass market in comparison to modernist publications that reached smaller audiences, it is important to reiterate the difference between popular and mass culture as mass culture does not necessarily equal popular culture. James O'Sullivan astutely argues that 'popular culture is the culture of the people, reified as though cultural products were democratically elected. In other words, popular culture is mass culture having survived societal selection' (O'Sullivan 2017: 285). As such, mass culture and modernist culture both compete to be 'popular', even if popularity means different things for each of them. It is in this shared space where the deliberately aestheticized and the intentionally populist meet, situated at the intersection of high modernism and popular entertainment, where we can find angle of particular interest for the exploration of the screenplay: the so-called middlebrow.

Aspiring to 'high culture' while targeting the mass population, middlebrow culture can be described as a phenomenon characterised by its focus on ambition and



improvement manifested as an extension of consumerism through its concentration on the acquisition of cultural goods. Margaret Widdemer describes the middlebrow as ‘men and women, fairly civilized, fairly literate, who support the critics and lecturers and publishers by purchasing their wares’ (Widdemer 1933: 433-34). It is characterised by publications such as *Vogue*, which, ‘with five international editions by the mid-1920s [...] [aimed to] appeal not only to readers who were exceedingly wealthy but also to those who actively aspired to be members of the upper class’ (Garrity 1999:32). Therefore, the requirement to meet targeted demands for readers accelerated the professionalization of writers in the early part of the last century and created communities of professional creative workers who operated within professional networks, developing exclusive knowledge resulting in restricted access to these professions (Scott 1983: 13). Reflecting a shift towards consumer-led production, these creative professionals aimed to anticipate their consumers’ tastes while incorporating their own tastes, therefore embedding a new degree of interaction between producers and consumers that retained the values of their sometimes elite creator in an accessible form (Leick 2009: 198).

While commercial cultural production increased, privately subsidised artistic practice did not disappear as a result. The work of the POOL Group, founded by H.D., Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson, with the latter two being the core editorial team of *Close Up*, is an example of how production of modern cultural goods, such as film, continued to take place in the context of the previously prevalent (but increasingly outdated) model of private patronage. POOL, as similar groups at the time (namely the Bloomsbury Group), was made up primarily of individuals with personal connections and relationships, with H.D. having relationships with both Bryher and Macpherson. However, as Chris Townsend shows, even these private

networks eventually opened up to industry professionals, such as the writers Oswell Blakeston and Robert Herring, who furnished them with ‘technical expertise and networks of communication within the mass-media that were otherwise unavailable to the modernist intellectuals who started the project, and [...] they were desired attributes’ (Townsend 2019a: 21).

As such, the knowledge (if not necessarily the values) of professionals became valuable to artists outside of the popular mainstream. These interactions were not restricted to craft alone; commercial and modernist artists began to employ increasingly similar tactics to publicise themselves as leading authorities in their fields. Publicity strategies that screenwriters such as Loos had adapted from those used by Hollywood stars (see Fig.1) were equally apparent in the work of well-known modernists such as Ezra Pound, who had initially ‘created’ H.D. as the quintessential imagist in the public eye, therefore ‘serving as her conduit to the publishing world, [giving] her a public identity’ (Stanford Friedman 1990: 103). Whereas the differences and interactions between the aims and strategies of popular culture and high modernism have been extensively explored, with examples such as Jonathan Goldman’s *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (2001), Catherine Turner’s *Marketing Modernism: Between the Two World Wars* (2003), John Xiros Cooper’s *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2004), and Aaron Jaffe’s *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New* (2009), the affinities between the more nuanced concept of the middlebrow (as distinct from popular culture as a whole) and its modernist counterparts remain ill-defined. In particular, written forms in close proximity to popular culture, that are nevertheless separated from mass consumption, such as the screenplay, have not been evaluated as part of the early twentieth century’s cultural landscape.

Hence, in this first part of the chapter, I will assess Anita Loos against the backdrop of American modernism, with a particular focus on Imagism, with the aim to uncover similarities, differences and appropriations. Recognising the concurrent efforts in popular culture and amateur modernist practice to address visual experience in written form, as well as equally concurrent attempts to gain position via the utilisation of the new tools presented by media-driven self-publicity, this chapter seeks to explore points of intersection and divergence between the early American screenplay and the identified subset of American modernist literature. Exploring the screenplay in the context of American modernist practice, the aim is to identify if, and to what extent, Loos's work should be deemed part of a broader American modernism, specifically when considering the screenplay's direct connection to photographic representation and the literary responses this new medium elicited. Comparing the early American screenplay with the poetry and critical writing of imagist poet, actor and filmmaker H.D., the chapter will assess how the early American screenplay can be situated as part of the cultural framework of American modernism and how its industrial setting in the American film industry shaped its development as a written form as well as its place in the developing critical discourse of the period. Beyond the formal analysis of texts, the chapter will identify and evaluate key overlaps between early American screenwriting practice and American modernism. Lastly, this first part of the chapter will discuss Loos's novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and its adaptations to both screenplay and stageplay as a case study for the overall assessment of Loos's and the screenplay's relationship to American literary modernism.

## 2.1 Modernity's readers

Anita Loos's screenwriting practice is but one example of the landscape of commercial forms of writing that expanded during the first decades around the turn of the last century. Magazine journalism, the reach of which had grown exponentially, moving from about 700 titles and a circulation of four million in 1865 to over 6,000 titles and an audience of sixty-four million readers in 1905 (Kitch 2001: 4), continuously adapted to target one particular, ever increasing, consumer group: the growing urban middle classes. Established fashionable magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* (from 1867), and their more conservative equivalents, such as the *Ladies Home Journal* (from 1883), employed staff writers and freelancers to produce original content on subjects ranging from fashion to poetry and often reached readerships of up to two million readers (Weaver 2010: 27) while 'large circulation magazines directed at a slightly more select audience (*Vanity Fair*, from 1913, *Vogue*, from 1892) were able to narrow their messages more specifically' (Weaver 2010: 27).

Even more specific, and targeting smaller circulations, but larger ambitions to become cultural tastemakers, were the modernist 'little magazines' such as *Poetry* (from 1912) and *The Dial* (1840 -1929) which became 'the quintessential genre of modernist publication – and one of modernism's many contributions to twentieth-century literature' (Kalaidjian 2005: 18). These 'little magazines' differentiated themselves from their larger circulation counterparts by being primarily aesthetically-oriented, and produced by small groups of like-minded individuals rather than larger national and international publishers. As such, much modernist poetry and prose was first published in 'little magazines' and became available in book form later. Their small circulations, and therefore self-selected audiences of mainly educated urbanites, lent these, often self-referential, publications an air of forbidding exclusivity – an

attribute which later came to be seen as a key characteristic of high modernism generally.

As mass market magazines such as *Vogue* widened their remit to join the cultural conversation in the early 1920s, publishing film reviews by the film critic (and former poet) Iris Barry and pieces by emerging modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf (Hankins 2004: 489, Garrity 1999: 37), modernist magazines did not immediately extend their reach. Yet, it would be misleading to argue that little magazines did not attempt to be commercially viable. In his discussion of *Close Up*, Chris Townsend notes that its principal financial backer, Bryher, was focused on making the magazine commercially sustainable and, when promoting a special edition, sought ‘publicity not simply from the first tier of national British newspapers but less important regional publications. This [...] came just at a point where *Close Up* has gone from its original print run of 500 copies all the way to 1,500’ (Townsend 2019a: 7). Here, *Close Up* proves to position itself similarly to what Weaver called magazines for ‘slightly more select audiences’ (Weaver 2010:27) such as *Vogue*, in that it targets self-selecting readers but still actively solicits them. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that even in their efforts to increase circulation, ‘little magazines’ had no true expectation to make any significant commercial profit and relied on private funding. It is therefore an interesting consideration that little magazines were ostensibly positioned as if resisting commodification and absorption into the mass market but equally promoting an aspirational image to potential consumers.

In contrast to how little magazines employed forms of formal codification as commercial differentiation, the production of the screenplay in a codified format was a direct consequence of its conception in a trade setting, intended to increase the

commercial potential for both its writers and industry readers. A standardised screenplay was an efficient screenplay, and efficiency was a key consideration in the growth of the American film industry. Although commercial screenwriting became increasingly industrialised, systematised and conventionalised in terms of how a narrative was presented on the page, it was also innovative in its synthesis of narrative forms readers were already familiar with. Contemporary women's magazines relying on 'formula stories, most of them romances, with archetypal characters, conventional plots, and unrealistic endings' (Honey 2003: 91) provided templates for commercially successful, mass-market narratives, often leveraging stories audiences had previously consumed through a different medium. Publishers of commercial magazines also realised the potential of recurring references, in particular in relation to advertising revenue: written features and visual advertising were placed alongside each other and often reflected each other in content (Churchwell 2003: 137). Commercial magazines featured fiction and poetry in addition to their primary focus on clothes and entertaining, seldom differentiating between independent fiction, which was produced outside the scope of the magazine and re-printed, and dedicated fiction, which was produced specifically as magazine content (Honey 2003: 91). Cultivating a literary persona defined by frequent publication and appearances in such mass market magazines, writers like Dorothy Parker and many of her contemporaries 'became celebrities partly through the dissemination of their work and their name through these periodicals; in turn, their growing fame sold magazines' (Hammill 2007: 40). The strategy of using publications to create celebrity and to then increase circulation of these publications through the self-generated publicity is similar to Hollywood's approach to use film magazines to promote their prestige productions and assert their screenwriters' status as star-screenwriters (Shail 2008: 181-183), as well as the

appearances of more established commercial writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald in the society pages to add a real-life dimension to his writing. This emergent cult of personality became a dominant feature by the 1920s with '[...] the relationship of modernism to celebrity as not only that of twin cultural phenomena with shared origins and systems, but also as manifestations of the same impulse' (Goldman 2001: 17). As such, it was seized upon to enhance the public profile of 'writing personalities' both in mass market publications as well as highbrow publications by explicitly seeking to promote and position the writer (modernist or otherwise) as an exceptional individual.

The way modern tactics of publicity were employed to create a literary 'brand' can be elucidated using the case of Imagism, which shares a number of characteristics with the screenplay, recommending it for comparison. To approach the screenplay through the lens of forms contemporaneous to its early development, such as Imagism, shows that some of the screenplay's distinctive characteristics are in fact shared attributes, which is important when aiming to place it within a larger universe of early twentieth century writing. Furthermore, the expansion of popular magazine journalism with the fluent movement of its personnel as well as the increasing collaboration of artistic professionals with previously self-contained 'private' artistic groups shows that – if not an integration – a rapprochement between popular and modernist art was taking place through the means of modern media.

On the most fundamental level, Imagism and the screenplay share a guiding objective: the aim to *make visible*. Both direct responses to photography's capacity to represent physical reality, Imagism and the screenplay however diverge in their alignment to photography and the cinema. While Imagism had set itself the ambitious objective 'to present an image' (Lowell 1915: vii) in an independent written form, the

screenplay was born of necessity to structure the film production process and was never a self-sufficient form. Therefore, while comparing formal characteristics and even brand positioning tactics, it is important to keep in mind the differing intentions of Imagism and screenwriting practice, especially if we remember Ted Nannicelli's argument that it is 'creators' successfully realised intentions [that] determine artefact kind membership' (Nannicelli 2013: 34).

Dubbed 'Les Imagistes' in print by Ezra Pound in 1912 (Connor 2004: 28), the imagist movement can be dated roughly around the years 1909-1917, and the first imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes*, edited by Pound, was published in 1914, assembling poems by poets including Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), H.D.'s husband Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell, F.S. Flint and James Joyce (Gage 1981: 8). According to the poet Richard Aldington, 'H.D.'s were the first [poems] to appear with the Imagist label,' (Aldington 1941: 135ff) after Ezra Pound convinced her to sign the three poems he had chosen for the January 1913 edition of *Poetry* with 'H.D., Imagiste' (Aldington 1941: 135). And although H.D.'s imagist phase was only continued for the duration of the ephemeral movement itself and her later work displays a much wider range of influences, she is still frequently associated with Imagism as one of the movement's most recognisable names. It is less frequently noted that, prior to adopting the Imagist label, 'her first publications were prose – short sketches written sometime after 1907 and published in newspapers between 1910 and 1913' (Stanford Friedman 1990: 4). Pound *designated* H.D. to be an imagist in *Poetry* to formalise (and in a way to trademark) what he considered to be a specific and innovative use of verse. And while H.D. wrote both prose and criticism, Aldington considered H.D.'s bond with the imagist style so considerable that he later stated, 'the imagist movement was H.D., and H.D. the imagist movement' (Aldington 1941: 136). And although the



movement itself was short-lived, its focus on ‘the visual’ continued to influence many former contributors beyond their association with the movement. H.D.’s later involvement with POOL’s film productions and film criticism, and even her tribute to Freud – with whom she had undergone psychoanalysis in Vienna in 1922 – suggest that ‘it was I [...] who was seeing the pictures, who was reading the writing or who was granted the inner vision’ (H.D. in Edmunds 1994 :110). Therefore, while acknowledging that H.D. was not exclusively an imagist, I will focus on her imagist poetry for the purposes of the comparison between American modernism and the screenplay.

H.D.’s first collection *Sea Garden* (1916) was correspondingly praised by Pound as ‘objective – no slither, direct – no excessive use of adjectives, no metaphors that won’t permit examination’ (Pound 1950: 11), all distinctive attributes of the new imagist style. The poem *Sea Poppies* from *Sea Garden* is representative of this style of concrete imagery:

*Sea Poppies*

Amber husk  
fluted with gold  
fruit on the sand  
marked with a rich grain,

treasure  
spilled near the shrub-pines  
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root  
among with pebbles  
and drift flung by the sea  
and grated shells  
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,  
fire upon leaf,  
what meadows yields  
so fragrant a leaf  
as your bright leaf?

(Doolittle [1916] 1940: 28)

The notion of an *exact* word, so central to Imagism, suggests that there is only one image for each unique experience, which should be captured as crisply and concisely as possible. With photography (and film) providing the means to record physical reality in a more literal fashion, Imagism – as all written narratives – had to adapt its strategies to create a similar effect via its non-visual medium.

In her imagist poetry, H.D. focused almost exclusively on classical themes, drawing heavily on her intense interest in Hellenism, and often paired nouns with adjectives to intensify the viscosity of her descriptions and create a pictorial effect. Comparing the way in which H.D. aimed to capture the visual in her poems, one important difference to the screenplay becomes evident which highlights a key difference between both forms: the use of adjectives. In the screenplay, adjectives are deliberately *reduced* to an absolute minimum, while they are key to H.D.’s composition of a verbal image. In his comparison of the screenplay with Imagism, Kevin Boon highlights the following differences but does not address the use of adjectives specifically:

The only rhetorical distinctions between the screenplay and modern fiction involve length, dialogue markers, verb tense, and transitional devices. Beyond these, screenplays differ from modern fiction and contemporary fictions in the limits placed on a screenplay’s ability to present introspection and psychological machinations.  
(Boon 2008b: 270)

As such, when considering H.D.’s use of adjectives as ‘visual descriptors,’ the screenplay’s limitation of adjectives appears counter-intuitive. In fact, what it shows is that despite both imagist and screenwriting practices being exercises in ‘writing visually,’ the imagist poem and the screenplay have fundamentally different aims: while the imagist poem aims to capture a specific image, the screenplay does not

transcribe. Boon stresses this point when he highlights the screenplay's focus on 'externalisation' and the aim to make the psychological visible.

While Imagism and the screenplay diverged on exactly how to capture the image most precisely, they both formalised their approaches. As screenwriting format was standardised to an industry-wide convention, Imagism's principles became codified in manifestos: Pound states that he, H.D. and Aldington agreed to three imagist principles in 1912:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether objective or subjective.
  2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
  3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not the sequence of the metronome.
- (Pound 1954: 3)

These principles were further expanded on in 1915 as part of the Imagist Credo<sup>1</sup>, published as a preface to *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* (1915).

While modernists such as Pound and Lowell endorsed a new economy of words, the condensation of verbiage in screenplays has been treated differently in the assessment of the screenplay as a form of literature. In a contrast that highlights how similar literary innovations are interpreted through the context of their usage, Imagism's restrictions were regarded as a radical innovation with the potential to shake the foundations of poetry. John Gage explains:

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<sup>1</sup> 1. To use language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly – exact, nor the merely decorative word. 2. To create new rhythms – as the expression of new moods – and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo new moods. We do not insist upon "free verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea. 3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write badly about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911. 4. To present an image (hence the name, imagist). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art. 5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry. (Lowell 1915: vii-viii)

That they were put into the form of prescriptions is indicative of the reformist attitude which characterised imagist thought, and the imagists were viewed by a large part of the contemporary audience as a threat to poetry as they knew it.  
(Gage 1981: 8)

In comparison to Imagism's innovation being regarded as a threat to convention, the screenplay did not have the capacity to unsettle any previous forms, as it had no true predecessor. Furthermore, as its audiences were contained to participants of the film industry and no public *readership* existed, the screenplay was not included in any assessments of the literary landscape. This invisibility resulted in the screenplay's formal innovation remaining largely unexplored when similar innovations in modernist writing generated critical interest.

#### 2.1.1 Modernist self-fashioning aesthetics and Hollywood celebrity culture

Given Pound's attempts at fashioning H.D. as the archetypal imagist poet, it is pertinent to compare how Anita Loos, as a prominent member of the American silent film industry and H.D., as a modernist writer, utilised and engaged with new forms of publicity.

Anita Loos capitalised on her status as the highest paid screenwriter during the late 1910s styling herself as a star screenwriter through exposure in popular film publications such as *Photoplay* (1911-1980). Through her collaborations with silent screen stars such as Douglas Fairbanks and the Talmadge sisters, Loos was one of the few screenwriters known to the public and she and her husband John Emerson were keen self-publicists (Carey 1988: 50). She uniquely combined professional credibility with celebrity, eliciting press such as 'Next to Mary Pickford [...] Anita Loos ranks right along the leading causes of heart failure' (*Photoplay* 1920: Vol. 10, No.2) while working as a respected studio-contracted writer.

Using film magazines in a similar fashion to actors, Loos aimed (and succeeded) to advertise the persona of the professional screenwriter. In a *Photoplay* piece from February 1920, a storyboard format is used to describe the different stages of screenplay development, the staged shots deliberately blurring the differences between ‘star-actor’ and ‘star-writer’. (See Fig.1)

## How To Write Movies



### 1--WHERE THE IDEAS COME FROM

"The greatest mine for movie stories is your daily newspaper. After reading hundreds of back-pat ideas sent in from amateur scenarioists, we usually find the idea we're after in a headline. You don't think a coal strike makes a good story? We prophesy that more than twenty photoplays during the coming season will be based on that coal strike—just as every good news story forms inspiration for scenes of scenarios. Do not work and fret over some flimsy, antique situation. Read the papers and you'll never lack a plot."

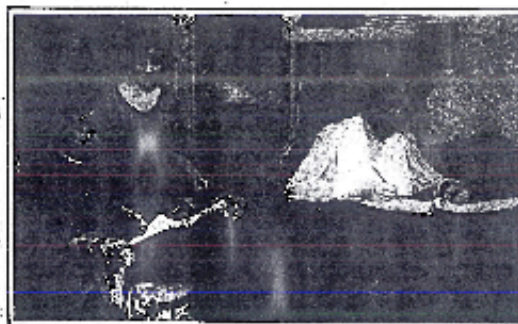
**R**EADERS of *Photoplay* are familiar with the work of Anita Loos and John Emerson, the best known collaborators in scenario writing in the realm of motion pictures. They wrote and directed the famous Douglas Fairbanks photoplays of last year—"Wild and Woolly," "Reaching for the Moon," "Down to Earth," etc. They have written many other photoplays for such stars as Elsie Ferguson and Mae Marsh, and they are now authors of all the Constance Talmadge screen dramas of this year. Miss Loos (Mrs. Emerson) has produced a steady stream of successful photoplays from the age of sixteen.

This series was posed by Mr. Emerson and his demitasse wife in order to show amateur scenario writers exactly what is expected of a movie writer under the present system. These pictures tell aspiring movie authors how to get the idea of how to assemble the completed film—a duty which producers expect from those from whom they buy their stories. Of course there are a few requisites for success in this work which cannot be given you in two pages—such as ability to write well, originality of ideas, knowledge of plot construction, and other trifles.



### 2--READING THE SCENARIOS

"Since the demand for movie stories this year is many times greater than the supply and since \$5,000 is now the minimum price for a good plot, nearly 50,000 people throughout the country have started to write movies. Send your story to the scenario editor, for no matter how many tons of scripts he gets a week, he'll gladly read it in the hope of finding a good story—just as we do. The pile on his table, representing the stories received in a few days, will give you some idea of the competition in scenario work."



### 3--WRITING THE SCENARIO

"After you've got the plot, sit down and write it out in scenario form, numbering the scenes 1, 2, 3, etc. You'll find it simpler if you collaborate with someone else, for it's mighty easy to get mixed up if you haven't somebody to check you up and keep you from changing your hero's name or your heroine's character. We find it easier to dictate our scenarios—saves time and facilitates concentration on the work. Composing a script with your own fingers often presents a conglomeration of figures and fancies that bewilder the most adamant of genius. It can be done—but slowly, and when you're under contract to turn out a new photoplay every two months you'll hire a stenographer, too."



### 4--PLANNING THE STORY WITH THE STAR

"Here you see us working out details of the scenario with our star, Constance Talmadge—something you will have to do when you sell your movie. Make your story fit the star and keep her—on the screen is at least 50 per cent of the game, or you'll never sell the script. And when they call you in to confer with the star, prepare for shocks, for these notables usually have pretty definite ideas of their own—as in our tableau above where Miss Loos looks her dismay at Mrs. Talmadge and Mr. Emerson chucklingly set about directing a new scene upon which the audience had spent many ambitious hours. It's hard—but necessary—to let them revange."

Figure 1: Extract from: "How to Write Movies", *Photoplay*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Feb. 1920, MHL

In contrast to Anita Loos's personal efforts to establish herself as a star-screenwriter akin to popular Hollywood stars, H.D. cultivated less of a public persona. Susan Stanford Friedman writes:

In spite of H.D.'s leadership role in the imagist anthologies of 1915, 1916, and 1917 and as assistant editor of *The Egoist* in 1916-17, she appeared to be removed from theorizing about the modern and to be, instead, immersed in the production of her own version of it.  
(Stanford Friedman 1990: 7)

Abigail Morris extends this argument further in suggesting that H.D. in fact 'occupied a constricted position in the movement: [...] [she] was from the first the *Imagiste extraordinaire*, the movement's foregrounded practitioner' (Morris 2003: 98). Rather than H.D., it remained Pound who won acknowledgment as Imagism's chief publicist by ensuring the publication and recognition of poets who met his personal definition of Imagism until he found a rival for ownership of the movement in the poet Amy Lowell, which resulted in him abandoning the movement for alternative involvement with Vorticism (Scott 1999: 12).

While Pound's conflict with Lowell highlights feelings of personal ownership in the modernist endeavour, Loos, 'although she did not always disparage the results, habitually downplayed the labour of writing' (Churchwell 2003: 139) even when she publically elevated her own profile, therefore maintaining writing as a form of salaried labour rather than intensely personal expression. In fact, Loos later described her foray into prose almost condescendingly: 'I began to write down my thoughts; not bitterly, as I might have done had I been a real novelist, but with an amusement which was, on the whole, rather childish' (Loos 1963: xxxviii). This self-deprecating approach to her literary output somewhat anticipates *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Lorelei Lee's prose efforts: Lorelei writes while being a 'professional lady', not dissimilar to Loos herself. Loos's lack of apparent engagement with the idea of

creating works of ‘literary value’ is shared by commercial magazine writers such as Dorothy Parker, who ‘has been marginalised by her own anxious relationship to the literary. Many of her poems and stories are ambivalent and self-conscious about literary value’ (Hammill 2007: 27). One can argue that commercial writers’ self-consciousness about literary value was due to both the changing notion of how writing was created – fast production of commercial pieces in an industrial setting – as well as the measure of their own success being based solely on economic viability, both of which were traditionally subservient to aesthetic considerations. This contrast of success based on economic viability versus traditional aesthetic considerations is even more notable given that a majority of prominent writers in both commercial magazines and screenwriting departments at the time were women (Weaver 2010: 27) and it might be considered that the lower status afforded to these forms of writing allowed women to achieve greater prominence in them.

As discussed, H.D. did not publish critical pieces on her engagement with Imagism and her only contribution to the movement are poems. Instead, she reserved her critical reflections for the cinema, publishing ten articles for the modernist film magazine *Close Up* she edited with Kenneth Macpherson and Bryher between 1927 and 1933. H.D.’s writing on film focused less on the commercial output of her native country but rather was characterised by ‘a pronounced internationalism [...] taking the form of a pan-Europeanism designed to offset the gigantic influence of Hollywood’ (North 2005: 88) and also drew inspiration from her interest in antiquity, exploring the notion of film as a universal language of symbols, akin to Egyptian hieroglyphs, an idea that was widespread in the 1910s and put forward by both filmmakers such as D.W Griffith and early critics such as Vachel Lindsay (Hansen 1991: 77-78). Here, H.D. equates cinematic beauty with classical beauty:



As long as beauty is classic, so long beauty on the screen, presented with candour and true acumen, must take its place with the greatest master-pieces of the renaissance and of antiquity.  
(Doolittle [1927] 1998: 108)

She highlights the aesthetic potential of the cinema and places it in a context of artistic innovation, which, by acknowledging that ‘as long as beauty is classic’, elevates it to the same level as the traditional arts. And despite not seeking celebrity status through her writing, H.D. relished the status of her lead roles in two POOL films *Wing Beat* (1927) and *Foothills* (1927-8) directed by Kenneth Macpherson where she:

Swept up in the experience of being a (private) “star” fixed by the camera gaze of the director who was her lover [...] identified deeply with widely known stars of the avant-garde silver screen like Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Elizabeth Bergner.  
(Stanford Friedman 1990: 12ff)

In an article for *Close Up*, H.D. had claimed of film that it was a ‘universal art open alike to the pleb and the initiate’ (Doolittle [1927] 1998: 44). So, it seems, was celebrity.

### 2.1.2 The Middlebrow

In contrast to H.D., whose works ‘were limited editions privately subsidised, and some of her books were published posthumously or never published at all’ (Korg 2003: viii), Loos produced work that, while aiming at a culturally literate audience, was intended for the widest possible dissemination in a capitalist market. The tension between critical and commercial considerations highlights how in the early twentieth century, the distinctions between low- and highbrow cultural output were diffused by the possibility – for the first time – of appropriating highbrow culture for larger audiences. Cultural producers who inhabited but did not identify with either were crucial at this intersection as the aim was to produce popular, rather than merely mass

market, cultural goods, meaning that products had to appeal to different types of audiences simultaneously. Loos's work is a useful example of this phenomenon with *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* "aimed at a fairly educated audience, since [its] primary satiric target is a semi-literate, philistine lowbrow, but [it] also satirize the pretensions of highbrow culture in its various forms' (Hammill 2007: 57).

The border Loos inhabits here is symptomatic of the increasingly prevalent American middlebrow culture during the early part of the last century. The 'middlebrow' emerged when literature and advertisement combined forces to sell the commoditised markers and discourses of 'high culture' to the aspiring middle classes and can be defined as the commercially produced and mass advertised. Commercial magazine writing can be considered as an overt example of this merger between culture and commercialisation and screenwriting served to transpose many of the themes of magazine culture to the cinema. In fact, Loos utilised the seductiveness of popular culture far more aggressively than magazine writers such as Parker, who remained more critical towards her own status within the cultural framework (Weaver 2010: 26). If one concludes that 'admitting the commercial into artistic consideration might well be the only mark of the middlebrow writer' (Churchwell 2003: 160), Loos can be regarded as a new kind of middlebrow writer who combined the artistic with the commercial while most of her writing was in fact excluded from the immediate public as it was restricted to a small group of industry professionals. In direct contrast to the industrially embedded nature of Loos's work, 'H.D. was protected from the full blast of rejection by the complex network of friendship and patronage that made up the world of avant-garde little magazines and presses' (Stanford Friedman 1990: 21) and was therefore not subjected to the commercial pressures experienced by writers in

the competitive market place. Yet, industrial practitioners such as Loos were not immune to the aesthetic potential put forward by writers such as H.D..

Recognising the potential of cinema as a form of ‘respectable’ (and immensely lucrative) middle-class entertainment, a move to ‘elevate’ cinema from its vaudeville roots to something more akin to the theatre was explored as early as 1915 when Harry Aitken formed the Triangle Film Corporation, (which would become Fine Arts Triangle and Anita Loos’s first full time employer), boasting the ambitious aim to produce films that were ‘made for the masses with an appeal to the classes’ (King 2005: 6). Aitken’s aim was to transform the movies into a cultural experience for the discerning, genteel classes, shedding the image of the vulgar Nickelodeons filled with illiterate immigrants. Similar to Samuel Goldwyn’s later ‘Eminent Authors’ experiment in 1919, Aitken imagined that well-known theatre actors would simultaneously draw audiences and ‘elevate’ film’s reputation. The stage-star experiment constituted Triangle’s most coherent attempt to forge association with the cultural practices of the emerging middle class, ‘but economic necessity forced Aitken to fall back on his screen stars’ broad appeal. Commercial considerations had outmatched the aspirational appeal of highbrow culture’ (King 2005: 14).

While aesthetic high modernism traditionally had an ambivalent relationship with the middlebrow, American modernism’s noticeably less anxious view of popular culture provides an alternative view of the reciprocal relationships between popular culture and modernism. To highlight the discrepancy, Gertrude Stein ‘read detective novels for pleasure and was fascinated by Hollywood, advertising, and other popular discourses’ (Leick 2009: 4), while in England, Virginia Woolf famously derided the middlebrow as a person:

Betwixt and between [...] the middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middle-bred intelligence [...] in pursuit of no single object, neither art

itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily,  
with money, fame, power, or prestige.  
(Woolf [1942] 1962: 155)

Despite herself participating in the middlebrow culture, with her writing appearing in *Vogue* in the mid-1920s (Garrity 1999: 37) Woolf attacks the ‘low’ aims of ‘money, fame, power or prestige’, which she portrays as a contaminant. In turn, frequent *Harper’s* contributor Russell Lynes poked fun at this ‘siege mentality’ of the avant-garde, whom he characterised as self-appointed guardians of aesthetic standards in the article “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow” in April 1949 for *Life* magazine (Lynes 1949: 20). Therefore, while some American modernists seemed to embrace a more pragmatic view in comparison to modernists in Europe, they were still

Negotiating two mutually exclusive ideologies: a European, aristocratic discourse of taste as ‘high class’, and an American, middle-class democratic egalitarianism. [...] [Finding] themselves trapped between the need to sell and the need to be what Lorelei would call ‘refined’ - that is, ‘artistic’.  
(Churchwell 2003: 138)

Here, Americans in Europe, such as H.D., provide an interesting point of intersection where the creative modes of the amateur and salaried classes coincide and – importantly – interact with newly professionalised creative discourses. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four, professionalization in the arts created a new class of cultural worker that unsettled previously established distinctions between financially self-sufficient amateurs and salaried craftspeople.

### 2.1.3 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*: Modernist satire or satire on modernism?

“A gentleman friend and I were dining at the Ritz last evening and he said that if I took a pencil and a paper and put down all of my thoughts it would make a book. This almost made me smile as what it would really make would be a whole row of encyclopediacs.” [sic]  
Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*  
(Loos 1925: 11)

Despite her prolific output as a screenwriter, Loos's most prominent work remains the 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. It was Loos's first novel and subsequent prose efforts, including the sequel *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* (1927), are commercial derivatives of this initial success. *Blondes* has, as Laura Frost notes 'been adapted to nearly every medium imaginable – magazine, stage play, silent film, musical, sound film, comic strip, dress fabric and wallpaper' (Frost 2010: 291). An instant bestseller after its serialization in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Blondes* solicited both critical praise and derision. Faye Hammill explains that

The primary difference between the admiring and the critical readers of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is that the former consider Loos an ironic and perceptive commentator on mass culture and the latter see her as an emanation from that culture and a producer of commodities. (Hammill 2007: 75)

But in the context of her work as a screenwriter and as the author of screenplay manuals, Loos was both perceptive commentator on, and producer of, mass culture. It is no coincidence that *Blondes* was initially published in *Harper's Bazaar*, a middlebrow magazine, including punch lines such as “‘It really seemed to be a bargain but Dorothy and I do not seem to be mathematical enough to tell how much franks is in real money’” (Loos 1925: 96), which appropriated vernacular humour to re-enforce readers' sense of cultural sophistication and superiority by recognising Lorelei's intellectual shortcomings. Yet the irony is that Lorelei, while unrefined, aspires to the same social advancement readers of middlebrow magazines do. Therefore 'the obsession with refinement as cultural capital [which] drives both the plot of *Blondes* and its publication in a middlebrow magazine' (Tracy 2010: 116) is simultaneously a participation in the commoditisation of social aspiration and a mockery of it. Lorelei can be held up as an ironic, if not cruel, mirror-image to the aspiring middle-classes of the 1920s. This irony is reinforced when considering that in

the novel, Loos employs stylistic means more commonly associated with literary modernism, which she subverts to make fun of both the semi-literate Lorelei Lee, as well as those who consider themselves superior to her.

In addition to this existing web of references, the initial serialization in *Harper's Bazaar* places *Blondes* ostensibly in the realm of the middlebrow magazine. Its adaptations to screenplay and stage play evidence further how *Blondes* transcends any easy characterisation and show how Loos responds to both American modernism and popular culture. One of the key stylistic features in the original novel *Blondes* is the use (and mis-use) of spelling. Loos highlights Lorelei's intellectual shortcomings through the frequent use of misspellings, misprisions and malapropisms as she narrates her story in a first-person diary format. Possibly alluding to her own career in the cinema, Loos introduces Lorelei as a former actress, who 'met Mr. Chaplin once when we were both working in the same lot in Hollywood' (Loos 1925: 16). Not unlike Loos, Lorelei is a woman of the cinema who is now trying her hand at being an 'authoress'. Lorelei's musings display, at times, characteristics of a cinematic stream-of-consciousness:

So then we rode around and we saw Paris and we saw how divine it really is. I mean the Eyefull Tower [sic] is divine and much more educational than the London Tower, because you can not even see the London Tower if you happen to be two blocks away. But when a girl looks at the Eyefull Tower she really knows that she is looking at something. [sic]  
(Loos 1925: 98ff)

The notion of the roving camera-eye in Lorelei's diary stands in contrast to the implications of the diary device itself. Particularly word-reliant and difficult to adapt for the screen, Loos makes use of the medium by almost covertly inserting recognisable literary devices and a general playfulness in creative manipulation of the written narrative. Her manipulation of letters as physical objects to signify new meanings has been noted as Loos's alignment with modernism:

Loos's comical use of illiteracies (misspellings, bad grammar, mis-usages), her repetition of words, her simple diction suddenly seem akin to [Gertrude] Stein's stylistic experiments, foregrounding the materiality of language.  
(Hegeman 1995: 527)

However, I would argue that Loos deliberately included devices that would be read as modernism as a form of irony. As previously noted, the target of her satire is not only the semi-literate, blonde gold-digger but also her audience, the educated masses desperate to identify as 'insiders' by recognising specific codes. Furthermore, as a novel, *Blondes* was not entirely word-based. In its original publication, it was published with accompanying illustrations by Ralph Barton, which had also appeared during the serialization in *Harper's Bazaar*. In approximately 200 A5 pages, there are 33 illustrations. Accompanied by a humorous quote, each illustration is a self-contained narrative based on the interaction of word and image, placed within the text. They also provide an additional layer of irony to the narrative as Lorelei's brunette side-kick Dorothy is emphasised as the knowing 'insider' who recognises many of Lorelei's *faux-pas* but continues to play along. Unbeknownst to Lorelei, Dorothy mocks her with cutting statements such as: "Lady, you could no more ruin my girlfriend's reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet" (Loos 1925: 103). Although Lorelei does not recognise the evident irony (and insult) of the statement, the accompanying illustrations emphasise Dorothy's position as the reader's – instead of Lorelei's – confidante. Just as the illustrations in the novel destabilise the authority of the text and de-emphasise illiteracies and word-play as meaningful modernist devices, some of Loos's textual strategies echo industrial convention, if viewed in the context of Loos's screenwriting practice. For example, with 'simple diction' being a common feature in screenplays to achieve clarity, although again, 'to use absolutely

no word that does not contribute to the presentation' (Pound 1954: 3) was also one of Pound's three imagist principles of 1912.

As a result of the immense success of the novel, Loos adapted *Blondes* for the screen and the film was released on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1928, starring Ruth Taylor and Ford Sterling, directed by Malcolm St. Clair. While the film print is now lost, parts of Loos's screenplay have survived. The following excerpt uses a popular filmic device – a flashback to the past – to introduce viewers to the story:

September 12, 1927 Script

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

Subtitle 1: Two generations ago, led  
by the spirit of the  
pioneer, there wandered  
into the hills of Arkansas  
a man of dreams – dreams  
of gold.

Scene 1

HILLS OF ARKANSAS. – SEMI LONG SHOT – FADE IN

on Lorelei's grandfather, a lousy pioneer,  
drooling tobacco juice and scratching cuties.  
He is working with a pick at a ledge, finally  
chips off a bit of rock, picks it up and looks  
at it, and seeing that what he mistook for  
gold is naught but mica, starts a line of curs-  
ing that would do justice to Wilson Mizner.  
FADE OUT.

CLOSE-UPS



Subtitle 2:As a mining venture his  
claim turned out to be  
a third grade dump heap.

Scene 2

EXT. LORELEI'S ARKANSAS HOME - Long Shot

A run-down, dilapidated farm house in the  
center of the hook-worm district of Arkansas.  
The gate is off its hinges, the portico is  
drooping and it shows every evidence of a  
high degree of shiftlessness. Lorelei is  
sitting on the front stoop, but is not dis-  
tinguishable in the long shot.

CLOSE-UPS

Subtitle 3:But gold finally did crop  
Out in those hills.

Scene 3

BIG CLOSE UP

of Lorelei's golden curls, in a natural,  
unbobbed state. Lorelei slowly turns and  
looks into the camera, wide-eyed, dumb  
and beautiful.

Subtitle 4:And the spirit of that  
old pioneer lived on  
in his grandchild.

(Loos 1927: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Script, Extract)

In the novel, the reader learns about Lorelei's past not through a consolidated scene  
but through snippets in her diary such as: 'It would be strange if I turned out to be an

authoress. I mean at my home near Little Rock, Arkansas, my family all wanted me to do something about my music' (Loos 1925: 13). As the novel's diary format is a text-based form which is not easily transferable to the screen, Loos introduces a layer of introspection to the screenplay by opening with information about Lorelei's poor rural background and thereby supplying the necessary motivation for the ensuing action without resorting to Lorelei as the first person narrator as in the novel. This flexibility in form proves Loos's nuanced understanding of how narrative is consumed differently across text- and image-based media. She extends this further by adapting *Blondes* for the stage. Below is an excerpt from an undated copy, possibly for the first 1926 Broadway run of *Blondes*. (The novel was adapted for a second time as a musical in 1949, for which Loos shared the writing credit with Joseph Fields.) In the stage adaptation, Loos chooses yet another medium-specific mode to introduce the characters:

### ACT 1

SCENE:           The scene is in the sitting room of the  
Imperial suite on an ocean liner.

At the back are the windows. Looking out on the promenade, and between the windows is an artificial electric fireplace. Down L. is the door leading to the corridor, and in the C of the R wall is a door leading to the bedroom. There are the usual furnishings in the room; also one or two wardrobe trunks, and arranged about the room, on chairs and couch, are many stuffed dogs and similar junk ordinarily sold on ships. Also several bowls of flowers.

AT ROSE:       Stage is empty, and after a moment the  
ship's bells ring out the hour of nine or  
ten, one, one – one (11-1)

Then DOROTHY enters L. breezily from the corridor. She switches lights on after closing door. She is in evening dress and wears a wrap. She is a pretty girl, rather dark, vivacious, with a devastating sense of humor, which pierces thru all sham and buncombe. She is loyal to those she loves and she loves freely. Her success as a gold-digger is consequently meagre.

Dorothy

(Glancing about the room quickly and not seeing anyone, goes directly to bedroom door and calls)  
 Lorelei!  
 (Then, a little louder)  
 Lorelei!  
 (There is a knock on the corridor door)  
 Come in!  
 (HARRY, the cockney steward, enters and closes the door. He carries a radio message)  
 Hello, Harry.

Harry

Good evenin', Miss Shaw.  
 (Loos: n.d., *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Play, Extract)

Viewers are introduced to Lorelei and Dorothy on the ship to Europe, in the midst of the story, providing a suitable environment for the story to unfold through verbal interaction in a confined physical setting. Loos does however retain some devices across screen-and stage play. She uses the same supplementary instructions in the play as she does in the screenplay, such as 'Sir Francis (glowing more)', 'Lorelei (front of sofa)', 'Sir Francis (getting excited)', 'Lorelei (coyly)' or 'Sir Francis (overcome by feeling of generosity)' (Loos: n.d., *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Play, Extracts).

Despite the accompanying drawings, *Blondes* the novel is not necessarily an example of a particularly visual literature but one that is aware of the multiplying effects an intermedial work can achieve. As such, Loos created an additional narrative beyond the written narrative that relies on the affinity between text and image which preceded Virginia Woolf's inclusion of images in her novel *Orlando* (1928), which, according to Liedeke Plate

[...] illuminates her own intermedial practice, showing the use of pictures in her texts to serve one of two ends; to construct a work of art wherein the tension between the media dissolves as to fuse into a single but complex meaning, or, on the contrary, to foreground the tension between

text and image, jarring the reader into an awareness of the constructiveness of her intermedial practice.  
(Plate 2004: 301)

Did Woolf read Loos?

While the fact that writers as diverse as Loos and Woolf employed similar strategies of juxtaposing written narratives with images when ‘intermediality emerged as a result of a wider variety of media gaining significance as culturally transformative modes of production’ (O’Sullivan 2017: 288), it is noteworthy that this approach stands in contrast to both imagist tactics that relied entirely on word choice to signify visual intention as well as the screenplay, which similarly does not resort to visual illustrations to convey its narrative. But using *Blondes* as an example, one can argue that Loos recognised the potential of cross-fertilisation between images and literature early and utilised it to produce *Blondes* as an intermedial novel.

However, while Loos did employ textual strategies that have been read as an approximation of modernism, it is unlikely that she uses these devices to align herself with modernism. Instead, she includes ‘soft’ references to modernism for her middlebrow readers for whom the ability to recognise these markers would have provided the same sense of cultural superiority her character Lorelei displays.

Despite her references to the aesthetics of highbrow modernism, Loos (significantly) does not refrain from endorsing the primarily economic aspirations in *Blondes*. Lorelei ultimately succeeds in her quests to attain a wealthy husband and this is primarily the result of her economic and sexual intelligence. As Daniel Tracy argues:

Loos’s endorsement of conspicuous consumption contributes to her novel’s overall sense of what counts as sophisticated. It demonstrates not simply a distance from modernism, but from literary value itself as the sole basis of “smart,” sophisticated culture. The middlebrow definition of what it takes to become sophisticated expands to include gendered, *economic* smarts as well as legitimate literary culture.

(Tracy 2010: 136ff)

Loos positions herself outside an elitist literary discourse, indeed mocks it, by smuggling its attributes into a novel that ultimately endorses economic aspiration and pleasure. Put bluntly, she satirises the perceived dead seriousness of modernists by vulgarising ‘serious art’. With *Blondes*, Loos seizes modernism for the capitalist consumer and creates the illusion of the ‘reader as insider’ – most evidently through the use of Dorothy – and provides the reader with a form of popular modernism that provides a fantasy of alignment with the cultural elite. With this appropriation, *Blondes* renders Loos an ‘accidental’ modernist and provides a trajectory to a new *American middlebrow modernism* that positions innovation in popular cultural art forms through the specific synthesis of modernist and popular art at its core.

## 2.2 Anita Loos & the Modern Industrial Screenplay

Motion picture writing is as practical a profession as plumbing, only the plums are bigger. It is at the present time probably the most lucrative of all the various forms of literary effort. It does not take unusual genius. But you must learn how to do it – just as you have to learn bookkeeping or bricklaying or the making of champagne from a glass of cider and a raisin. (Emerson & Loos 1920: 1)

Loos sold her first screenplay *The Road to Plaindale* in 1911, the same year Ezra Pound introduced his former fiancé, the poet H.D., to his early collaborators on the imagist movement, T.E. Hulme and F.S. Flint. From this very beginning of her commercial career as a freelance writer, Loos maintained a record of all screenplays she speculatively submitted to production companies before she became a contracted screenwriter at Fine Arts-Triangle in 1916. In her carefully maintained documents, she recorded production companies, titles, submission dates, release dates, reel sizes

and the payments she received.<sup>2</sup> This prudent curation of her own work (and its commercial viability) provides a contextual framework to trace the trajectory not only of Loos' work but of the development of the modern industrial American screenplay.

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<sup>2</sup> In the late 1910s, Loos began to share most of her writing credits with her future husband, John Emerson (a notable exception is the novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*) although it appears to have been widely acknowledged that Emerson contributed far less than would have been required for co-authorship (Carey 1988: 44). Therefore, the screen credits attributed to Emerson and Loos will be treated as works by Loos only for the purposes of this study.

*May first 13*

Accepted Films

Lubin	"The Earl and the Tomboy" March 3, 1912 Released	1 reel	\$25.
Biograph	"The Road to Plaindale" April 11, 1912 Released May 23, 1914	1 reel	25.
Biograph	"The New York Hat" October 1, 1912 Released December 1, 1913	1 reel	25.
Biograph	"He Was A College Boy" December 27, 1912 Released	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	15.
Biograph	"The Power of the Camera" December 27, 1912 Released March 17, 1913	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	15.
Biograph	"A Horse on Bill" January 27, 1913 Released - April 14, 1913	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	15.
Biograph	"A Hickville Epicure" Feb. 17, 1913 - Jan. 1913 Released - January 1913	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	15.
Biograph	"Highbrow Love" February 17, 1913 Released 1913 June	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	15.
	"Unlucky Jim" April 9, 1913 Released May 25, 1913	1 reel	35.
	"All On Account of A Cold" April 12, 1913 Released -	1 reel	25.
Biograph	"The QUEEN OF THE Carnival" April 16, 1913 released -	$\frac{1}{2}$ reel	25.
Cinemacolor	"The Saving Grace" April 26, 1913 Released -	1 reel	35.
Kinemacolor	"A Narrow Escape" May 1, 1913 Released -	1 reel	25.

Figure 2: Extract of list of submitted films, n.d.: Anita Loos Papers, MHL

In contrast to Pound, who curated H.D.'s poems and declared them ideal expressions of Imagism, the screenplay was shaped not by the aesthetic taste of one individual but by industrial and market forces, which relied on consumers' tastes over that of producers. Loos's work, commercially successful while being formally innovative, proves a rich archive for exploring the screenplay, especially the ways in which its development diverged from more other forms of writing through both formal characteristics and application. It is this development of the screenplay, tracing it from Loos's amateur efforts to production in tightly controlled industrial environments, that the second part of this chapter aims to explore by drawing attention to the way some of its distinctive characteristics were shaped. As an introduction, I will outline how screenplay format evolved into a standardised format by discussing Loos's early work in the contexts of the burgeoning American film industry. Re-focusing on the increasing standardisation and codification of screenplays, I will then assess Loos's contribution to the popularisation of screenplay manuals and correspondence courses. Evaluating what this effort can reveal about the formalisation of screenwriting practice, the chapter will draw conclusions on the screenplay's relationship to American modernism/s.

### 2.2.1 Loos and the early American screenplay

Loos's progression from freelance amateur to contracted professional writer charts the general trajectory of screenwriting during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Her work exemplifies the evolution of screenwriting from an auxiliary device to satisfy the demand for new story material to pioneering filmmakers, to an integral element in controlling both narrative and technical production in industrialised studio productions. Her consistent production rate and the 'accounting book' approach of



recording submissions, acceptances and earnings provide clues to Loos's writing practice as a venture guided by economic imperatives. Unambiguous about her commercial objectives, stating in her later publications that 'amateur photoplay writers, if they hope to attain success, should first direct all their creative efforts towards coaxing a check from its lair [...]' (Emerson and Loos 1920: 72), Loos unequivocally equates success with commercial viability and quickly aligned herself with a studio she felt was most conducive to her efforts. Initially submitting screenplays to a number of production companies, she soon wrote primarily for Biograph because 'the best of what she saw came from the Biograph Company, whose little films were better acted, and more succinctly and dynamically developed' (Carey 1988: 21). The timing of her alignment with a production company supports Janet Staiger's assertion that 'by at least 1911, firms had a story reading/writing departments [...] [and] reliance on freelance submissions decreased' (Staiger 1985: 146).

As such, Loos' first widely acknowledged success and the one she (falsely) publicised herself as her initial effort (Carey 1988: 23) is *The New York Hat* (1912). A pre-*Birth of the Nation* (1915) film by D.W. Griffith, it also stars a still relatively unknown Mary Pickford. The premise of the one-reel, 12-minute film is simple: A dying mother hands her savings to the local pastor with a letter asking him to buy her daughter a small luxury that has been denied by the cruel father. The pastor is sworn to secrecy and when he sees the daughter admiring a hat from New York in a shop window, he buys it for her without any explanation. This causes scandal in the small town and just before the minister is about to be defrocked, he presents the mother's letter and saves the daughter's honour.

There are two surviving documents in relation to the screenplay: the ‘Synopsis’ and the ‘Description of Scenes’. The Synopsis is a treatment of the story with an introductory paragraph setting the scene of the story (a dying mother’s bequest). It combines descriptions in the form of short story writing, such as ‘Her father is the old New England character, possessed of all the faults and none of the virtues of this type’ (Loos 1912: *The New York Hat*, Synopsis) (Synopsis, *NYH* hereafter), with descriptions of more specific physical actions that are easily replicated in silent film, such as ‘[...] the minister enters with a bandbox. He presses it to Mary with little comment and goes. When Mary opens the bandbox the sight staggers her and, falling back into a chair, it is sometime before she can believe her dream is true [...]’ (Synopsis, *NYH*). It is noteworthy that Loos’s description includes some specific directions for the actors such as ‘Mary passes along the window and looks in. As she is gazing fondly on the beautiful creation, the minister happens along’ (Synopsis, *NYH*).

THE NEW YORK HAT

Synopsis

When Mary's mother is dying, the young minister is summoned to the bedside. There, surrounded by the leading members of the church, she gives the minister a small pasteboard box requesting that he open it in secret. The young minister, after attempting to cheer the austere father and the shy but sincere little daughter, returns to the parsonage and opens the packet. It contains a few bills and numerous coins of various denominations. The minister also finds a letter which reads: "My Beloved Pastor: My husband worked me to death, but I have managed to save a little sum. Take it and from time to time buy my daughter the bits of finery she has always been denied. Let no one know. Mary Harding."

After her mother's death, perhaps Mary, the daughter, does not find things quite as simple, but she has been schooled all her life in repression. Her father is the sturdy old New England character, possessed of all the faults and none of the virtues of this type. Mary's shy manners and queer clothes cause silly comments among the young people and the older people are too busy to bother with her. Some time after her mother's death, at the opening of the picture, Mary is looking in the glass in the old dining-room, and becomes dissatisfied with her small old black velvet hat that sits on her head like a small half-baked pancake. She summons up courage to ask her father for a new hat but is met with a sympathetic refusal. After further inspection of herself in the glass, Mary decides to do without any hat. She wears one and only black glove, left from her mother's past finery, and walks over in the broad side of the appearance of two gloves, and walks down the street in her virgin's little steps holding her one glove in front of her, as if to declare to the world that she was not without her finery. She passes two girls of the village who receive her smiling face kindly enough, but refuse to accept her society and smile at her odd appearance on her departure. Now, at the local millinery store there has just been received a hat from New York with the magnificent price of ten dollars attached. It is the sensation of the village, and many village maids pass by with longing eyes or are dragged away by disapproving mothers. Three gossip high in the affairs of the church are also attracted by the hat, but after a careful inspection inside the store, they pass to more practical conceptions in the hat line. In the meantime, Mary passes the window and looks in. As she is gazing fondly on the beautiful creation, the minister happens along. He and Mary admire the hat together, and after her departure, remembering the request left by the mother, he goes into the store to inspect the

Figure 3: Extract from the Synopsis for *The New York Hat* (Loos 1912 in Martin and Clark 1987)

THE NEW YORK HAT

Description of Scenes

Eagle Title: The New York Hat

Sub-title: A dying mother's strange trust

Room: Woman in bed; man and woman standing behind bed  
man and girl standing along side of bed

Sub-title: The bequest

Room - minister's study

Letter: My Beloved Pastor: My husband worked me to death  
but I have managed to save a little sum. Take  
and from time to time buy my daughter the bits  
of finery she has always been denied. Let no one  
know. Mary Harding

Sub-title: Afterwards -- "Daddy, can't I have a new ha

Figure 4: Extract from the Description of Scenes for *The New York Hat* (Loos 1912 in Martin and Clark 1987)

In comparison to the two and half page Synopsis, the Description of Scenes for *The New York Hat* (see Fig. 4) is nine pages long and includes approximately eight different shots on each page. The document is laid out as a direction document, describing each shot and intertitle. The information provided is limited to location, specified as exterior if applicable, titles, intertitles and any physical action to be performed. The narrative is derived through the juxtaposition of images and titles / sub-titles. However, while the Description of Scenes document is very bare in its language, the narrative is closer to a short story. There are no directions for actors and some of the intertitles are ambiguous, such as ‘The Village Sensation’ (Loos 1912: *The New York Hat*, Description of Scenes) (Description of Scenes, *NYH* hereafter).

What becomes evident in the comparison between Synopsis and the Description of Scenes is that the two documents serve distinctly different functions: the Synopsis serves as treatment and is a written narrative suitable for consumption in its own right while the Description of Scenes is a technical document, a set of instructions aimed at the production process. This separation highlights what Staiger described as one of the key stages in the development of the screenwriting as

[...] the new major separation in the writing process: the technical expert who specialised in translating a story into a continuity script. As the script became more important for planning and coordinating the work and as continuity conventions became more complex, this technician took over the preparation of the script.  
(Staiger 1985: 146)

The Description of Scenes is a minimalistic version of the Synopsis and its language is instructional and plain, with a particularly noticeable lack of adjectives. While the Synopsis uses phrases such as ‘many village maids pass by with longing eyes’ (Synopsis, *NYH*), the Description of Scenes is restricted to ‘Store: Interior: Women in store – woman in foreground, looking at hat’ (Description of Scenes, *NYH*), highlighting the more technical application of the latter. The omission of adjectives in

favour of condensed, visually coded sentences amplifies the intended usage of each text. If one accepts that ‘word-choice (or lexis, or what used to be called ‘diction’) is central to whatever is distinctive about a particular literary text’ (Toolan 1998: 17) the Description of Scenes-as screenplay defines its existence as a technical document through the way the word is employed in its texts. Further, the text as screenplay is established as a text in constant flux, renewed and altered according to considerations that are not literary but technical and economic. Such a complete transformation such as the one that takes place between the Synopsis and the Description of Scenes above is a characteristic that exceeds the authorial instability of other wholly commercial texts, such as popular journalism. With definitions of what a ‘screenplay’ was not beginning to be standardised until the mid-1910s, Steven Price proposes that:

To the extent that distinct and regularised formats can be identified in American film prior to the emergence of the feature film in 1913-14, it seems sensible to propose that there were not two kinds of script in use during this period, but three: the theatrical play script, the outline script and the scenario. [...] The form of scripts was not consistent between studios and film units, which had their own ways of working; instead, different prototypical approaches to the two most common methods of segmenting a narrative – via the scene or via the shot – were explored. (Price 2013: 75)

This sentiment is echoed by Janet Staiger, who suggests that prior to standardisation ‘outlines’ ranged from the casual scenario to the more formal play’ (Staiger 1985: 119). Within firms, a certain degree of standardisation did however take place. The Description of Scenes for *The New York Hat* follows the same format as other Biograph productions of the time, suggesting that once a Synopsis was accepted, it was transcribed into a Description of Scenes format, according to a set Biograph convention. Notable properties are that scenes are not distinguished: the document is a shot-by-shot list in consecutive order without numbering and minimal information is provided in each of the shot descriptions.

When examining scenarios produced by other production companies during the period, it becomes apparent that formal conventions were consistent within production companies but differed between them, supporting Price's claim (Price 2013: 75). For example, Fig. 5 is an extract from the screenplay for *Dick Whittington and His Cat*, written by Alice Guy-Blaché and produced by Solax in 1913.

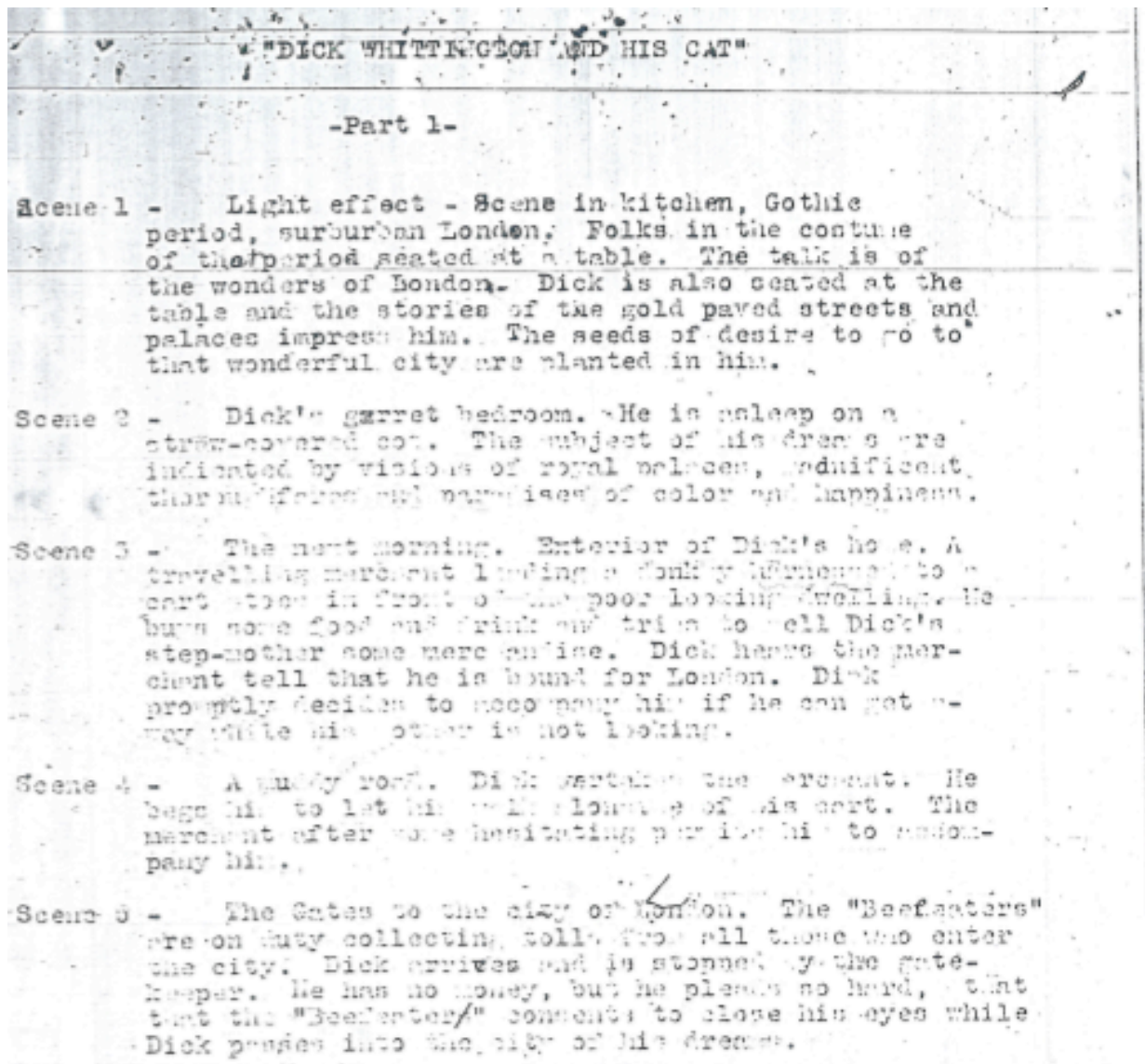


Figure 5: Extract from the screenplay *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (Guy-Blaché 1913 in Martin and Clark 1987)

Guy-Blaché was an established screenwriter during the silent era writing predominantly for Solax, similarly to Loos who wrote primarily for Biograph, except that Guy-Blaché 'owned and ran the studio from 1910-1914' (Foster 2018: 52). The

extract below differs from a Biograph scenario primarily by describing each shot as a ‘scene’, which is described in some detail. Each numbered ‘scene’ includes information such as location and camera effects. Notably, they also include introspective information about the characters:

Scene 1 - Light effect - Scene in kitchen, Gothic period suburban London. Folks in the costume of that period seated at a table. The talk is of the wonders of London. Dick is also seated at the table and the stories of the gold paved streets and palaces impress him. The seeds of desire to go to that wonderful city are planted in him.  
(Guy-Blaché 1913 in Martin and Clark 1987)

Guy-Blaché’s scene description is far more inclusive than the Description of Scenes for *The New York Hat*. At the same time, it includes some information on period and costume, which could have alternatively been found in a treatment. Statements such as ‘the seeds of desire to go to that wonderful city are planted in him’ are distinctly non-visual, unless they are used as an instruction to the actor to express a (frankly, fairly vague) emotion. In comparison to the Description of Scenes for *The New York Hat*, the scenario for *Dick Whittington and his Cat* is essentially a hybrid between a synopsis and a scene description. Loos’s synopsis for *The New York Hat* utilises the stylistic means of the short story, which are reduced to succinct language for the Description of Scenes, while Guy-Blaché’s Solax scenario employs lengthier descriptions more akin to the novel without appropriating them for their alternative use.

Yet another formal convention can be observed in *The Parson Slips a Cog*, written by Lynda Earle and produced by the Atlas Motion Picture Company in 1915:



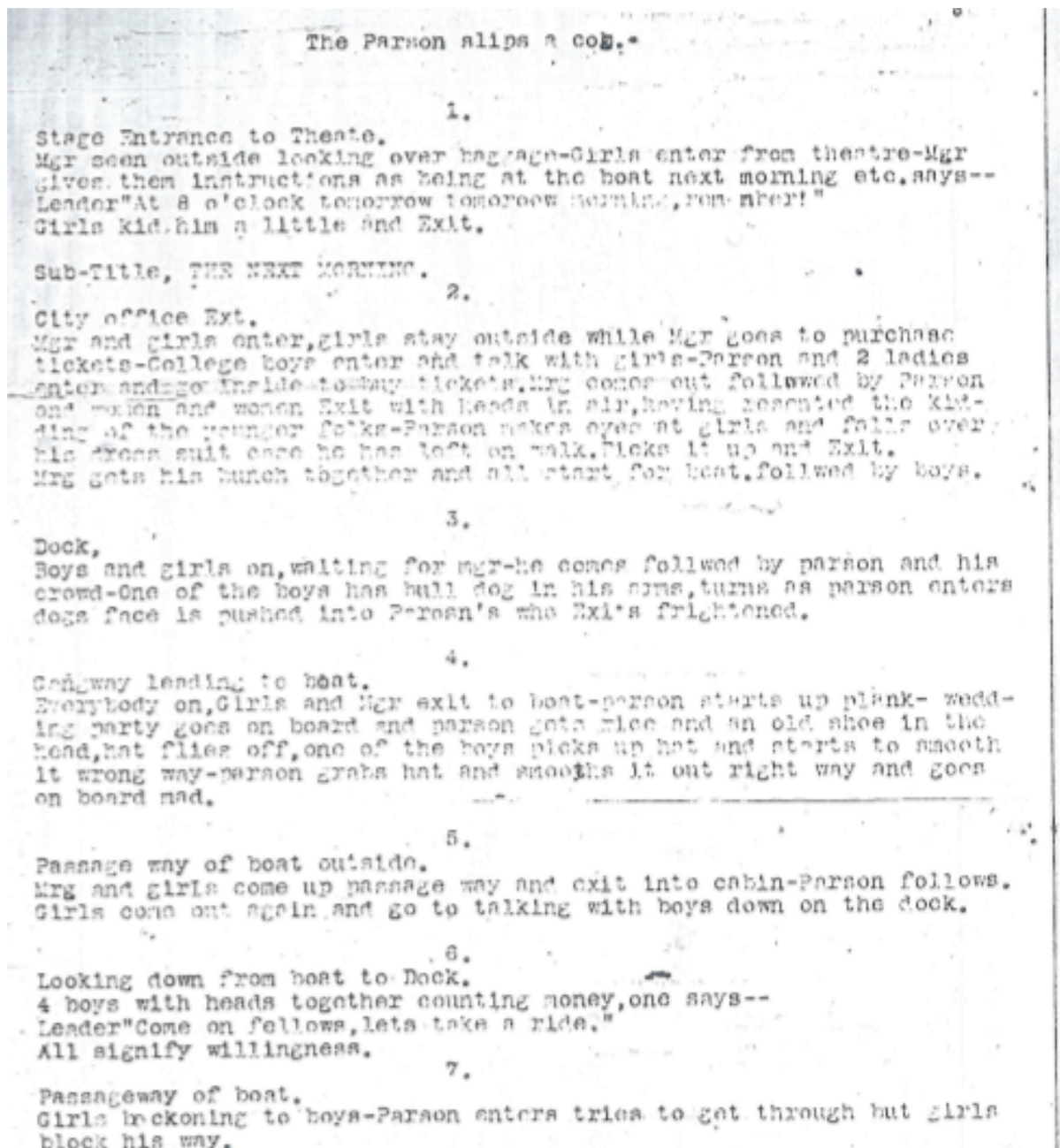


Figure 6: Extract from the screenplay *The Parson Slips a Cog* (Earle 1915 in Martin and Clark 1987)

The layout of the document differs most visibly from a Biograph Description of Scenes in the amount of text provided on the page. Again, each shot is described but intertitles are not listed separately. The text includes directions for the actors to convey specific meanings such as:

6.

Looking down from boat to Dock.  
 4 boys with heads together counting money, one says -  
 Leader "Come on fellows, let's take a ride."

All signify willingness.  
(Earle 1915 in Martin and Clark 1987)

The shot description includes a camera direction ‘Looking down from boat to Dock’, dialogue and physical description. It does not include information such as exterior / interior or specify when the intertitle will be inserted. In comparison, the Biograph format is closer to the standard screenplay format we are familiar with today. While a synopsis by a writer might have been merely transcribed into a description of scenes in 1912, by the end of the decade Loos’s title *Under the Top* (1919) was re-written in a number of formats (as well as by a number of writers) before being shot using a continuity script. In subsequent years, the function of the continuity script expanded and while it still ‘functions as a document of design in the creation of a narrative film’ (Azlant 1980: 5) it now exceeds this broad requirement by having

[...] a dual function. First, it represented a more specific visualisation of the action as it would appear on the screen, precisely anticipating the number and type of shot and the anticipated footage, for example, so that all of those working on the film would understand exactly what was required during production. Second, it assisted powerful studio managers in overseeing and anticipating the budgets of larger numbers of longer, more complex feature films.  
(Price 2013: 76)

The evolution of the screenplay from an outline written in a short story format to the continuity script neatly summarises how the screenplay developed formally in a direct response *not* to the requirements of photographic narration alone but instead in response to commercial considerations in an industrial process. While this conclusion might suggest the screenplay’s distance from literary modernism, it can also be seen to suggest that literary modernism was influenced by industrial processes.

A good example of the impact of an industrial setting on the formal evolution of the screenplay can be found in the Paramount Picture Scripts file for *Under the Top* (1919). Firstly, it includes the original story by Anita Loos (Fig. 7):

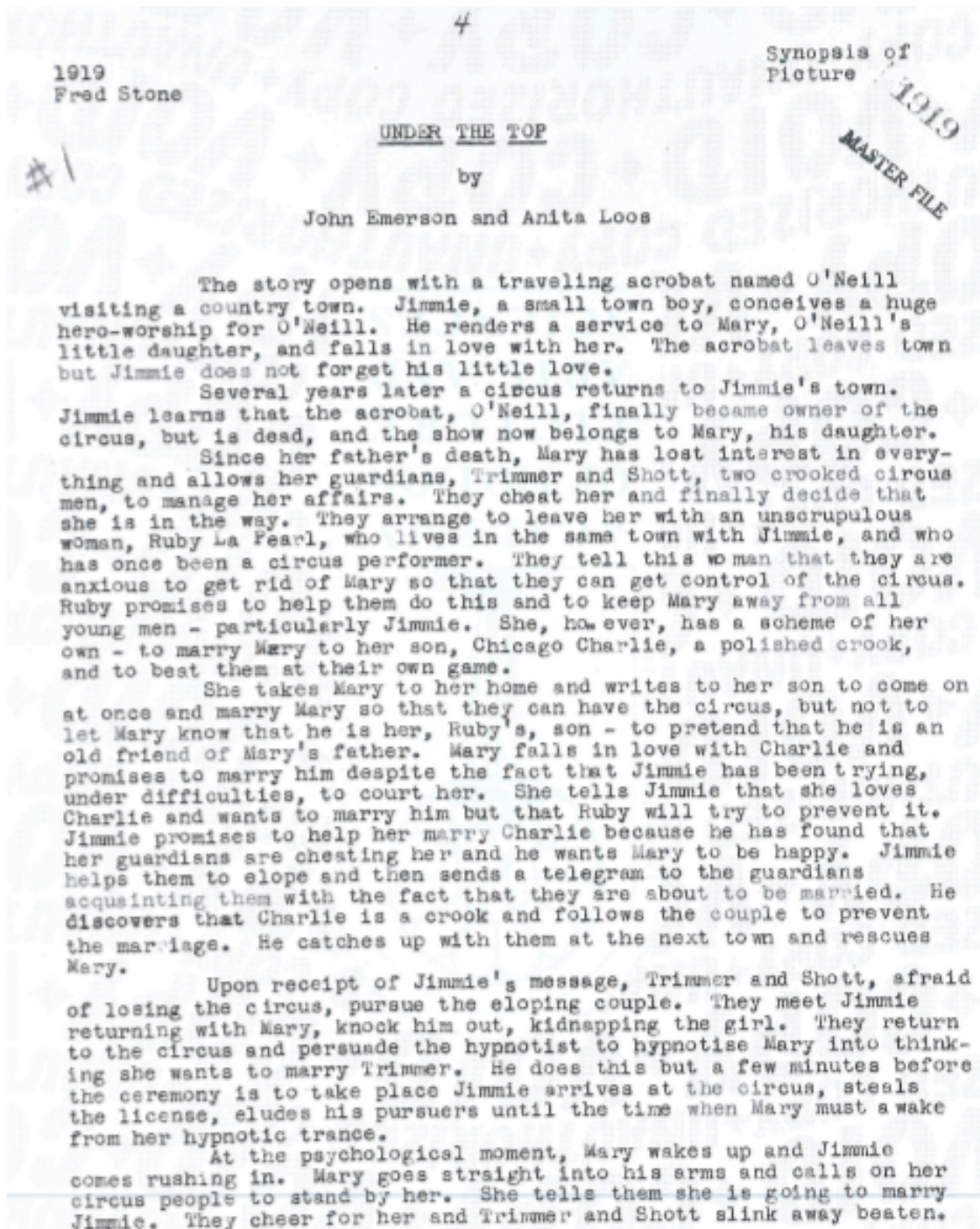


Figure 7: Loos and Emerson 1919: *Under the Top*, Synopsis, Paramount Picture Scripts, MHL

Further to the original story, the file provides the ‘Scenario’ by Gardner Hunting, a ‘Treatment’ by Anita Loos (and John Emerson) as well as the continuity script written by an unnamed author. A number of characteristics immediately distinguish these documents from Loos’s scenarios, synopses and scene descriptions of the early 1910s.

Loos's original story lists the star of the film on top of the page. Further, the original story is, at one page, significantly shorter than previous synopses, yet has a much more complex narrative. The story features predominantly descriptions of physical actions, which is an indicator that it was written as a vehicle for the actor Fred Stone, who was known for his athleticism. In a direct reversal of the previous Synopsis / Description of Scenes relationship, Loos's subsequent Treatment goes into considerable detail at 36 pages. The production of a treatment was an intermediary step studios had added in the mid-1910s to 'view [the script] with an eye to the special requirements and conditions of his own studio and to the present market' (Howard 1929: 222 in Staiger 1985: 146). The extract below incorporates both background information to the story, titles, camera directions and directions for actors:

UNDER THE TOP  
A Photoplay by  
John Emerson & Anita Loos

The story opens with the general title to the effect of that all small boys go through the period of hero-worship, without much regard to the real intrinsic worth of the object of their idolatry.

This is followed by a second title, as follows:

MAETERLINK HAS SAID THAT THE DOG IS PECULIARLY  
BLESSED BECAUSE HE CAN CONSTANTLY LOOK UPON THE  
PACE OF HIS GOD.

Then Iris into a little mut-dog, with long ears,  
sitting in the road and looking up adoringly at an  
object, of which we see only the feet. We then open

up to the full length of of a small town boy who, in his turn, is gazing upward towards some object which we do not see. Then comes the title:

BUT THRICE BLESSED IS THE SMALL BOY WHO CAN SEE  
HIS CAPERING ABOUT IN PINK TIGHTS AND SPANGLES.

Then show again the boy and the dog, and pan up above the heads of the crowd in the village street to the top of the building to which a tight rope is attached, and which stretches across the street. In the middle of the tight rope is a trapeze on which the tight-rope walker is cavorting and doing stunts.

(Emerson and Loos 1919: *Under the Top*, Treatment, Extract)

Although Loos provides more detail here about the back story than in the original story, she is selectively specific, for example providing the text for the second title but only vague suggestions for the first. The camera directions she includes are concise and it is apparent that the Treatment is much more an informal direction document than an expanded Synopsis. This comparison becomes more significant when assessed against the Scenario by Gardner Hunting: at 81 pages, it is substantially longer than the Treatment and distinguishes itself most visibly in format. Employing a numbering convention, headers with information on location, expressed through Exterior/Interior and specified location, Hunting's Scenario displays some, but not all, characteristics of a Continuity Script:

1. Main Title: "UNDER THE TOP"
2. Producer's Title:

3. Foreword: Mr. Lasky desires to state that the marvellous skill and agility exhibited by Mr. Stone in the course of this story are in no ways misrepresented or "tricked" by the camera, but that all the extraordinary feats here pictured are the genuine performances which have made Fred Stone the most athletic comedian in the world.

4. Subtitle: "Whoe'er excels in what we prize  
Appears a hero in our eyes!  
His deeds may not be worth our while;  
It matter not - we like his style!"

5. Subtitle: Merterlinck has said that the dog is peculiarly blessed because he can constantly look upon the face of his god.

Scene 1.

Ext, Village Street - IRIS IN

on little mutt-dog, sitting in road - looking up adoringly at his boy-master (of whom we can see only the feet in background). OPEN to show full length of small town boy (back to camera) gazing aloft at something he, in turn, is adoring (which we do not see).

6. Subtitle: But thrice blessed is the  
small boy who can see his  
god capering about in pink  
tights and spangles.

Small(still with his back to camera) gazes in awed admiration, upward, while dog gazes at him. PAN SLOWLY UPWARD, showing crowd in background, all gazing upward also in tight-rope stretched across street between tops of buildings, on which an acrobat is walking (or performing acrobat is walking (or performing on suspended trapeze.)

(Hunting n.d.: *Under the Top*, Scenario, Extract)

It is noteworthy that the Foreword included in Hunting's Scenario makes specific reference to Fred Stone and his performance. Technical camera directions are in capital letters, while general directions such as 'back to camera' and 'which we do not see' are isolated in parentheses. Hunting's Scenario employs the camera frame as a narrative conduit, visually guiding the gaze of the reader through the story.

The final iteration of *Under the Top* is in the form of a Continuity Script. The document does not specify an author, nor is it dated. A summary of the titles is inserted before the main text:

1. Main Title: UNDER THE TOP  
DISSOLVE INTO:  
Producer's Title:  
DISOLVE INTO:  
Credit Title:  
FADE OUT.
2. Subtitle: Maeterlink has said that the dog is peculiarly blessed because he can constantly look upon the face of his god.
3. Subtitle: But thrice blessed is the small boy who can see his god capering about in pink tights and spangles.
4. Subtitle: Jimmie Jones, the small boy.
5. Subtitle: The acrobat's little daughter, Mary.
6. Spoken Title: "Walk wight up! Det apphotodraph of the world-famoth tight-rope artitht - O'Neill the Dwate! Wight dith way!" [sic]
7. Insert: VIGNETTE FLASH O'NEILL'S photo in Mary's hands.

The page with titles is then followed by the rest of the Continuity Script:

UNDER THE TOP.

SUBTITLE 1 ON SUBTITLE 2:

SUBTITLE 2 ON SCENE 1.

Scene 1.

Insert 3 in Scene 1:

Ext. Village Street - SHUTTERED DOWN FROM TOP

Revealing legs of various people and three dogs -  
SHUTTER LIFTS showing Jimmy Jones with his back to  
camera among a crowd of people all staring at the  
tight-rope walker (off).

Subtitle 3:

CAMERA PANS UP showing O'Neill on tight-rope.

(Anon., n.d.: *Under the Top*, Continuity Script, Extract)

Without the titles, the Continuity Script is much more condensed than both Loos's Treatment and Hunting's Scenario. The language is factual and adjectives have been removed. Technical instructions from Hunting's Scenario have been replaced, such as 'Ext. Village Street – IRIS IN' with 'Ext. Village Street – SHUTTERED DOWN FROM TOP'. It is unclear if actors were provided with this Continuity Script only or if they would have received either Loos's Treatment or Hunting's Scenario also. One can speculate that the different drafts served different purposes in parallel rather than being a linear evolution of the same text but what becomes clear through the transition of the screenplay through its varying formats is that screenwriting was no longer a practice that simply required writers to produce a narrative in prose format. Instead, screenwriting had become a codified practice following specified conventions.

### 2.3. How to and the movies: Screenplay manuals

As the extracts above show, the formal conventions of screenwriting became increasingly formalised as the modes of production within the American film industry



changed. This codification facilitated an increasing specialization, which inevitably led to a decline of successful new entries into the profession from outside the established film industry. However, the fact that screenwriting became a codified practice did not deter successful screenwriters such as Loos from capitalising on the public's perception that they too could participate in the making of the movies. Consequently, Loos styled herself as the prototype American screenwriter and actively participated in the popularisation of screenwriting manuals through her contributions to dedicated fan magazines and self-authored titles on screenwriting technique. Partly due to its coverage in film magazines such as *Photoplay*, screenwriting gained a reputation as a glamorous and desirable occupation.

Correspondence courses such as *The Palmer Course and Service* sold aspiring film professionals the opportunity to aim for a Hollywood career during their spare time. Manuals and courses professed to offer students the chance to bridge the gap between the amateur outside the closed environment of studio filmmaking and the production studios. Numerous American celebrity screenwriters lend their names to manuals in later years, amongst them Frances Marion's *How to Write and Sell Film Scripts* (1937) and Clara Beranger's *Writing for the Screen* (1950). Importantly, manuals enforced the notion of a 'right' screenplay and Ian Macdonald explains that manuals were not a place of critical engagement with the screenplay but a instead reiteration of 'insider' knowledge:

Manuals direct writers towards the 'right' way to do things. Their attraction lies in the authority they can claim for their 'insider' information, and the clarity with which they express it. Writers are expected to absorb the wisdom on offer, rather than question its basis. (Macdonald 2013: 37)

As such, screenplay manuals deal in prescriptions, in definitive do and don'ts, a form of 'writing by numbers'. Yet, despite their general lack of nuance, Loos's first

screenwriting manual *How to Write Photoplays* (1920) shows that many of the general principles of screenwriting they advocate are still considered valid today.

In screenplays of the early 1910s, such as the examples presented earlier in this chapter, terminology was often used interchangeably, with ‘scenario’ meaning anything from a two-page synopsis to a highly specific 80-page document. Loos introduces readers to standardising industry jargon, key principles of screenwriting and provides technical tips on how to submit a screenplay to a studio for consideration. She also provides background on how terminology evolved and that meanings have changed over time such as: ‘CONTINUITY: The technical form of the photoplay which gives a description of all scenes in the sequence in which they will appear on the screen’ (Emerson and Loos 1920: 15). ‘SCENARIO: This term is now held to mean a detailed synopsis of the plot in ordinary short story form. Originally it referred to the continuity, but this meaning has recently gone out of date’ (Emerson and Loos 1920: 19), and ‘SCRIPT: The typewritten copy of the photoplay’ (Emerson and Loos 1920: 19). But as explained earlier using the example of *Under the Top*, there was, due to the industrial intricacies of the studio system no single screenplay formula or format that amateurs could apply to be instantly successful. Instead, screenplay writing had become an intricate web of professionalised knowledge that aligned it closer with specialised professions and while Loos’ manual did educate moviegoers on the general principles of screenwriting, this ‘sideline’ of hers needs to be contextualised in relation to the particular interest in screenwriting at the time.

Loos published her first full-length manual in 1920, two years after the *Palmer Course and Service*, a screenwriting correspondence course by Frederick Palmer, launched. The Palmer Photoplay Corporation was founded in 1918 and became the largest and most successful mail order screenplay school of the period (Morey 1997:

300). Its unique selling point was that it not only provided its students with a manual, a *Photoplay Plot Encyclopaedia* and regular pamphlets and lectures, it also provided a service to read and provide feedback on students' screenplays. In 1922, Palmer expanded as far as actually producing so-called 'Palmerplays'. In essence, 'Palmer offered itself as a liaison between Hollywood and the American public, addressing its students primarily as would-be members of the industry' (Morey 1997: 301). It framed screenwriting as a craft that could be studied and honed through practice:

The mastery that the Palmer course offered rests upon the absorption of 'technique', which is represented as a discrete body of knowledge, the possession of which separates the tyro from the adept [...] In some instances, technical mastery is described as a new form of linguistic competence, which may range from learning the vocabulary of filmmaking to beginning to think in a new, more visual language. (Morey 1997: 304)

Palmer's correspondence course can be situated in the context of self-improvement schemes that were widespread in the America during the early twentieth century. The idea of educational correspondence courses was not linked exclusively to the film industry and another well-known example is the mail order Book-of-the-Month Club which was founded in 1926 but was in fact started as early as 1916 on a smaller scale by advertising copywriter Harry Sherman (Tracy 2010: 123). The ubiquity of such self-improvement programmes alongside the popularization of concepts of aesthetic discrimination were part of the middlebrow cultural establishment that extended across media.

Mail order manuals were available for a wide array of subjects. The film industry, with Loos at the forefront, utilised the desire for self-improvement within the domestic context to advertise Hollywood as an elite, yet accessible, ambition. This becomes particularly evident through the features that distinguish Palmer's screenwriting course. Just as a public speaking correspondence course was accessible

to anyone willing to pay the subscription fee, the screenwriting course was theoretically accessible to anyone willing to part with the subscription fee also. Palmer added an additional level of exclusivity by setting an ‘entrance exam’, employing a pseudo-scientific approach to assessing ability for screenplay composition. Before enrolling on the course, and receiving a personalised copy of the Palmer manual, prospective students had to pass the so-called ‘Creative Test Questionnaire’:

What qualifications are demanded? In the Creative Test Questionnaire, devised for us by H.H. Van Loan and Professor Mac Lean, *Creative Imagination* and *Dramatic Insight* are the two qualifications set down as the necessary fundamentals for successful screen writing. These qualities of mind, we believe, are inherent. They may, however, be undeveloped, and there are many who possess them unconsciously, because they have never been put to use. It is for that reason that the Palmer faculty arranged for this test, so that all applicants for enrolment may satisfy themselves, and us, before they take up the study of screen technique.  
(*The Essentials of Photoplay Writing* 1921: 9)

This ‘Creative Test Questionnaire’ can be seen to have two distinct purposes: firstly, it gave aspiring screenwriters the opportunity to reflect on the abilities required to write screenplays. Secondly – and more importantly – this type of ‘entrance exam’ provided a reaffirming experience once passed as it meant that Palmer students had mastered a first hurdle in order to gain access to the coveted circle of people considered to have the necessary aptitude to write screenplays. It thereby achieved the almost contradictory effect of being simultaneously exclusive and accessible while also maintaining a meritocratic message.

Loos and Palmer both discuss the particular characteristics of screenwriting in their publications, which often stand in contrast to more commonly accepted literary aesthetics, and make specific key recommendations. One of the most significant recommendations from both Palmer and Loos is that ‘literary style is of secondary importance’ (*The Essentials of Photoplay Writing* 1921: 20). There are two aspects to

be considered when assessing this statement. Firstly, convention: what are the specific characteristics of a screenplay that render literary style of secondary importance? The second consideration, to consciously disconnect screenplays from the literary tradition and to emphasise an anti-literary bias in favour of the image as the medium through which meaning is derived, is less explicitly stated, but its outcomes have implications for where the screenplay is situated in relation to both film and literary discourses. Being a form ‘between forms’, an intermedial practice, the screenplay is the written form most closely connected to film and its existence and rejection from being either wholly literary or visual amplifies existing tensions between visual arts and literature.

In his essay “The Word on Film”, John Simon points out that:

The hostile use of ‘literary’ antedates questions of film and has been hotly debated in the realm of the fine arts, which, according to most modernist painters, sculptors and art critics, had to be freed of ‘literary’ content. It is probably from this source that film inherited its anti-literary-and, by extension, anti-verbal-bias.  
(Simon 1977: 502)

Simon here echoes Eisenstein’s demarcation of film from the written word (Eisenstein [1929]1988: 135) but in the context of early filmmaking, the hostile use of ‘literary’ extends even further than an aesthetic consideration – it was also commercial: As a mass medium rooted in vaudeville spectacle and created primarily as low-brow entertainment, film was conceived as a medium open to those parts of society who had been alienated by much of the previous cultural output; film industrialists knew their audiences and had no intention of losing them. Early film was an alternative to traditional modes of storytelling and while screenwriting emerged as a necessary part of developing longer narratives for the screen, it is important to emphasise that the silent cinema was, despite its use of intertitles, not a verbalised form of narration – it was a visual alternative to verbalisation.

As such, the term ‘literary’ proves ambiguous for the screenplay as it is simultaneously desired and rejected. On the one hand, the screenplay aims for the ‘literary’ label as it is the qualitative term applied to discriminate texts on the basis of established convention. Yet, in order to serve the means of the medium it is destined to be transposed to, it has to distance itself from being ‘literary’. It has to place the needs of the screen over its own form; aesthetics. Indeed Loos recommends that

Amateur photoplay writers must arrange their stories so that the opportunity for acting is apparent [...], they must also visualise their English, for no matter how well a phrase sounds, if it does not look well, it is unfit for the screen.  
(Loos 1920: 16)

She discourages aspiring screenwriters from being too concerned with finessing phrases but instead to visualise action and describe it in functional language. This recommendation is both a reflection of the particular requirements for silent film screenwriting but also a recognition of the need to respond to the requirements of photographic representation by adapting an intermedial mindset when producing written narratives. This requirement for intermediality does not need to be explicit but can be expressed referentially, as it is in our example of Imagist poetry:

The light passes  
from ridge to ridge  
from flower to flower –  
the hypanthias, wide-spread  
under the light  
grow faint –  
the petals reach inward,  
the blue tips bend  
toward the bluer heart  
and the flowers are lost.  
(Doolittle [1916]1940: 24)

The above extract from H.D.’s poem *Evening* could, if presented in a different format on the page, be mistaken for an establishing scene in a screenplay while its concrete and tight visual presentation enhances rather than diminishes its literariness. What

does distinguish the extract from *Evening* from the average screenplay is its introverted perspective, which, through its subjective qualification of objects through adjectives, privileges subjective perception over description. The avoidance of introspection in screenplays directs us to the second key recommendation both Loos and Palmer propose: the imperative requirement of *action*. Loos states that ‘crisis and conflict are the great essentials of the dramatic story. Something must happen and it must happen speedily’ (Emerson and Loos 1920: 11). Similarly, Palmer makes his point by contrasting screenplays with novels: ‘Vocabulary and literary ‘style’ determine the success of the novelist; *dramatic action* determines the success of the photoplay [...] the scenarist’s medium is *action*’ (*The Essentials of Photoplay Writing* 1921: 18ff).

Palmer advocates the screenplay as a form whose ‘style’ is immaterial to its success. Yet the question of *style* is how the constraints of screenwriting’s increasingly prescriptive conventions, with a standardising approach, illuminate a significant difference between screenplays and other forms of writing. Roland Barthes argues that style ‘is the private portion of the ritual, it rises up from the writer’s myth-laden depths and unfolds beyond his area of control’ (Barthes 1967: 11). Therefore, Palmer’s recommendation proves apt as Hollywood screenplays are not private documents but industrial ones. There are not meant to be an expression of the writer’s ‘myth-laden depths’. However, Barthes continues that ‘style is never anything but metaphor that is equivalence of the author’s literary intention’ (Barthes 1967: 12), which, recalling Nannicelli’s argument that ‘realised intentions determine artefact kind membership’ (Nannicelli’s 2013: 34), implies that a screenplay can be stylised as long as it fulfils its intended purpose.

Nonetheless, Loos and Palmer discourage the cultivation of a personal style that is expressed through the tools provided by the written word. Instead, they urge the aspiring screenwriter to focus on creating captivating dramatic action. If this can be achieved with a particular style that is acquired through the means of particular content, this can be desirable. Loos, for example, showed an early aptitude for comedies, and satirical, tongue-in-cheek intertitles became a defining feature in her writing even before *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hull 2018: 35). With Loos' witty turn of phrase being one of her main strengths, she rather revealingly awards a special status to intertitles:

The only place where the photodramatist may “spread” himself in clever verbiage and literary style is in the sub-titles, the inserts of printed matter flashed on the screen between photographed scenes. It is this matter of sub-titling which is winning the continuity specialist his place as an artist. (Emerson and Loos 1920: 39)

This special consideration of intertitles is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Firstly, Loos appears to engage in another act of self-publicity. Yet it also implies that when the words of a screenwriter, in the form of printed matter, reach the spectator directly, they take on an increased importance, unsurprisingly perhaps when considering that ‘before the arrival of sound, watching a movie also required a good deal of reading, as intertitles alternated with filmed action’ (North 2002: 206).

Despite exceptions such as intertitles, Loos and Palmer emphasise that the specific codes for screenplay form and function position the screenplay as part of the filmmaking process instead of a form of literary production. The focus is on the image, or as Loos states: ‘Remember the story is being told in pictures’ (Emerson and Loos 1920: 35). And Palmer's explanation: ‘It is a picture plot – not a narrative story’ (*The Essentials of Photoplay Writing* 1921: 18) removes screenplays from the literary realm entirely. While this single-minded focus on the image might be too narrow, it is



important to consider that the screenplay positions itself to capture narratively what will be retold visually. Orientating itself on visual tropes using unambiguous language, the screenplay expresses itself not through exceptional diction, but through its aim to set up a narrative for transposition into a new visual entity most effectively. Manuals such as Loos's therefore – inadvertently – provide a theoretical framework for the critical positioning of screenplays, which, while not a critically reflective analysis, is nevertheless a critical positioning.

Loos and Palmer both encourage the use of 'visual language', with the Palmer Course even setting specific 'visualisation exercises' for its students. Yet, how can language become visual? The imagist principle to 'use language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word' (Lowell 1915: vii) anchors the word to its reflection in physical reality, which is then transcribed onto the page. However, in contrast to the imagist poem, the screenplay needs to anticipate a second transposition, from page to screen. Remember that Loos and Palmer produced their manuals during the silent era: the relationship between word and image became complicated further after the introduction of sound, yet it is equally important to remember that dialogue was often written (and performed) for silent films also, in order to increase the naturalness of the actors' performances. The word, although not spoken in silent films, was therefore never truly absent from film but remained in screenplays, sub-titles, and mimed dialogue. And the introduction of actual sound was not greeted positively by all: For example, the 'initial reaction of *Close Up* critics to synchronised sound was profoundly hostile' (Townsend 2019b: 7) not only because 'photography was strongly associated from its very beginning with hieroglyphs, another form of writing that, in the popular view, bypassed sound and spoken language to reach the mind directly through the eye'

(North 1999: 4ff) but because, I would argue, it increased film's intermediality to an include a third medium, therefore removing it further from the 'purity' of its visual capacity.

Sound, and by extension spoken dialogue, added a new dimension not just to film but to screenwriting practice, which was to be distinctly different from the spoken word of the theatre. And while the screenplay, similar to Imagism, advocates a focus on common, unstylised speech, one can argue that a written narrative is always a special use of language that achieves its distinctness by rendering ordinary language into a stylised form. For example, by focusing precisely on the invocation of the physical image, imagist poets were tasked with the objective to present the ordinary in a new and compelling manner, therefore transcending mere description and endowing ordinary language with new meaning. In contrast, screenwriters were tasked to present the extraordinary, i.e. dramatic action based in physical reality, with as little stylisation as possible. Manuals did not impart specific techniques or practical tools for writing other than reinforcing a focus on action and specifically, the externalisation of dramatic action and manual writers asserted that it was not a concern if the content was presented in an aesthetically affecting way, however it needed to exhibit an expressive capacity that was clear, concise and communicated by means of externalisation. With this approach, manuals instilled a focus in aspiring screenwriters on the *function* of the screenplay text over its *form* and one could argue that this specific focus was actually a form of rational innovation.

The key recommendations of both Loos's and Palmer's manuals assert that the successful industrial screenplay places function over form of expression. This elevation of function stands in opposition to modernism's preoccupation with 'the thing itself'. By emphasising the needs of the 'target medium' film, through which the

narrative will reach the end reader/spectator, the screenplay must aim towards a visual aesthetic, disregarding its own verbal form in favour of advancing that of its intended target medium. In this respect, the ideal screenplay is free from any ‘ornamental variation’, free from meaning derived through the composition of words only. It aims to be the direct opposite of medium specific.

It is also noteworthy that Loos does not describe the screenplay as an aesthetic object but instead stresses the need to focus on conveying the strongest narrative possible. She does however place emphasis on the narrative capacity of the screenplay story that must not be neglected in favour of visualisation:

Amateurs should bear constantly in mind at this point that the very first pitfall they must avoid in scenario-writing is ‘The camera-eye’, that is, thinking so much of pictorial values that their stories become merely a string of pictures rather than a coherent plot.  
(Emerson and Loos 1920: 15)

While the Palmer approach was one of descriptive rules, such as ‘DeMille’s Rules<sup>3</sup>’, Loos advocates general principles to guide the aspiring screenwriter.

A not inconsiderable side-effect of the popularisation of screenwriting manuals was that the principle features and characteristics of screenplays were set out to the public in a formalised manner. It was less a theory – even a popular one – of screenwriting than a DIY handbook, educating filmgoers and providing aspiring screenwriters with industry-specific vocabulary as well as practical tips, such as ‘when you have polished off the synopsis sufficiently, send it to the scenario editor in just that form.

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<sup>3</sup> Demille’s Rules Story Requirements

First: Fundamental idea of interest to the average spectator or patron. Second: Logical premise, logical sequence, logical conclusions. Third: Characterization, action. Fourth: Dramatic value in thought, commonly designated as mental punch. Fifth: Dramatic value in situations, or the physical punch. Sixth: Constant growth progression of the story. Seventh: Beauty, harmony, simplicity, color. By simplicity is meant for the story to run in one straight channel and not have a number of branches. Eighth: Picturesque value. Ninth: Novelty in treatment. And after all those requirements it must have the breath of life. It must love. It must be human, feeling. A story which does not contain practically sixty per cent of these requirements is returned simply with the comment ‘Not available’” (Palmer 1921: 28).

Enclose your address and return postage' (Emerson and Loos 1920: 32). Practical recommendations such as 'enclose return postage' are an important part of screenwriting manuals during the period. While it appears as if Loos's manual and the Palmer Course in particular provide the general public with tools to enter the screenwriting profession, it is notable that 'the freelance market for photoplays appears to be diminished by 1916' (Staiger 1983: 34) (incidentally, the year Loos became a contracted screenwriter at Fine Arts-Triangle). By the time Loos published *How to Write Photoplays*, it had become increasingly unlikely for amateur screenwriters to place an unsolicited screenplay with a studio. Nevertheless, 'the possibilities represented by such a [freelance] market were kept alive by fan magazines into the 1920, through a variety of types of articles' (Morey 1997: 303). Loos appears to have capitalised on this continued interest although in reality the market for freelance screenplays had narrowed considerably.

To underline the commercial interest in manual publications, Loos published a second manual called *Breaking into the Movies* in 1921, this time aimed at a wider audience, which also included a chapter on scenarios. The content of the chapter is in essence an abridged version of *How to Write Photoplays* and the inclusion of the chapter towards the end of the book after chapters addressing topics such as 'How to dress for a picture', 'Movie Manners' and 'Inside the brain of a movie star', suggests direct marketing towards female readers of fan magazines aspiring to become actresses rather than professional screenwriters.

Through her manuals, Loos consolidated her status as a screenwriting 'celebrity' in the public eye (notably similar to the way modernists used the emergent cult of personality to enhance their public profiles) as well as providing an additional source of income. Further, her manuals had the potential to popularise her films

further as readers might hope to learn from her professional practice. As the standardisation of screenplay format took place in the industrial studio context rather than in a theoretical capacity outside of the industrial application, one can argue that screenwriting manuals served less as a tool to advance convention within the professional sphere than as a tool to educate moviegoers and thereby increase audience numbers:

It was an audience given an excuse to consume more films, simply because it hoped to have a hand in producing them. The most consistently repeated piece of advice to the would be scenarist [...] was to see as many movies as possible.  
(Morey 1997: 316)

Screenwriting manuals and courses created higher-skilled consumers and provided awareness of, and appreciation for, the skills required to write successful screenplays while maintaining film and screenwriting's democratic, non-elitist reputation as a meritocratic art form because the notion that everyone had the possibility to succeed was consistently perpetuated. This meritocratic ideal was vastly exaggerated as filmmaking, and by extension screenwriting, was 'an industry that had become by the early 1920s hierarchical and closed to the unconnected, untrained and naïve' (Morey 1997: 311).

With the formal development of the screenplay contained in an industrial context, knowledge of codified screenplay conventions became increasingly removed from the realm of the aspiring amateur to a restricted community of experts. This development can be compared to how the New Critics established their study of literature as based on expert knowledge rather than a matter of taste. Barton Bledstein explains that 'the key to institutionalisation of professional power is the ability to employ expert knowledge [...], legitimating it by virtue of its association with institutions of higher education' (Bledstein 1976: 23). Here, early American

screenwriting underwent a dual process by which its practices were authoritatively consolidated according to commercial considerations, with the professional group in possession of this knowledge holding an effective monopoly over the knowledge – and therefore the practice – of screenwriting.

Despite the increasing institutionalisation of screenwriting knowledge within the confines of industrial practice, critical theories of film began to appear and one of the first American film theorists, Vachel Lindsay, published *The Art of the Moving Picture* in 1915. He argues for the screenplay as a form with significant reach:

The photoplay cuts deeper into some stratifications of society than the newspaper or the book have ever gone [...] the destiny of America from many aspects may be bound up in what the prophet-wizards among her photoplaywrights and producers mark out for her, for to things which a whole nation dares to hope for, it may in the end attain.  
(Lindsay [1915] 2000: 7)

Although Lindsay's study is passionate in its assessment of the influence of the screenplay, it does capture the impact of the cinema on society as a whole and therefore proposes film, and by extension the screenplay, as a subject worthy of critical – rather than merely industrial – exploration. To impress this point, *The Art of the Moving Picture* opens with the ambitious statement: 'This outline is proposed as a basis for photoplay criticism in America' (Lindsay [1915] 2000: 1). Despite this ambitious opening, Lindsay continues to include much populist advice to readers:

If you are one of the ten thousand people writing scenarios that have not been taken as yet, if you desire advice that will enable you to place your work, read along with this volume *The Technique of the Photoplay* by Epes Winthrop Sargent, to be had from *The Moving Picture World*.  
(Lindsay [1915] 2000: 17)

What can be discerned through the early engagements with the screenplay across both manuals and critical studies is the idea that an understanding of the impact and the desirable aesthetic and social trajectory of cinema might be discovered in the

screenplay. By formalising knowledge in codified form, owners of this knowledge held true cultural – and in the screenplay’s case – economic power.

Loos and Palmer’s manuals amplify the way Hollywood commercialised knowledge by tapping into the ordinary moviegoer’s desire to be an active participant rather than a mere spectator. Screenwriting was advertised as an open route to become part of the film industry and manuals and correspondence courses legitimised this desire as a viable career option. In this sense, screenwriting manuals can be regarded as an extension of the Hollywood product itself. Screenwriting manuals specified the screenplay’s characteristics; they defined ‘rules’ which identified the screenplay genre as an independent form of writing, not dissimilar to the lists of imagist principles, produced by both Pound and Lowell. And yet, while literary modernists were vocal about their innovations, Hollywood was notably silent in publicising screenwriting as an aesthetic innovation, notwithstanding the fact the screenplay’s intermedial positioning recommended it to be included in any assessment of literary responses to the mechanical image. Instead, by tying screenwriting irremovably to the industrial production process, manuals such as Loos’s reinforce the notion of the screenplay as a ‘de-aestheticised’ means of production. And while one can argue that screenwriting manuals were just another instalment to be consumed as part of the Hollywood package, they – maybe inadvertently – also provided a useful framework to define the screenplay’s aesthetic capacity and position in relation to other written forms in the age of photography.

## 2.4 Conclusions

Anita Loos was one of Hollywood’s first professional screenwriters. Her work traces the history of American screenwriting from its roots of the freelance amateur to the

staff writer in the industrialised studio setting and her screenplays remain examples of emerging industrial convention during the professionalization and institutionalization of the practice in the 1910s and 20s.

Although Loos did not advocate the screenplay as an aesthetic object outside the context of commercial production, and while she was certainly not formally connected to any form of modernist movement, she did heed Pound's modernist imperative 'to make it new'. More specifically, her screenplays and manuals can be read as a response to the imagist's 'privileging of the concrete over the abstract, the excising of all unnecessary words, the employment of compression and the creation of 'new rhythms'' (Lowell 1915: vii). As such, Loos's work, together with early American screenplays on the whole, exemplifies, through its direct connection with film, a new and distinctly modern intermedial mode that responds to the impact of the photographic image on written narration. In this sense, the screenplay's objective is the same as that of H.D. as imagist poet *and* of H.D. as member of *Close Up* and POOL.

In the context of the screenplay as an intermedial art form, it is noteworthy that the screenplay's reconfiguration of the relationship between word and image distorted the word from a device suggesting an imagined reality to a device capable of designating physical reality, therefore distancing it from the figurative arts. Stanley Cavell argues that

[...] photographs are of the world, of reality as a whole. [...] You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense when asked of a painting. You can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality. [...] A painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* the world.  
(Cavell 1979: 23ff)



Cavell's argument suggests that the capacity of the photographic image to capture physical reality places new demands on the written word to reflect this capacity. As 'imagists insist we know what we see' (Morris 1984: 414), which is essentially an articulation of subjective perception, the screenplay was able to incorporate the technological capabilities of the cinema, such as the close up, to deliberately distort subjectivity and *how* things were seen. If Imagism strived to be capable of effects that other written forms were not able to produce, the screenplay can lay claim to having achieved this aim by transcending the restriction of its form through its connection to the camera apparatus.

Despite awareness of and strengths in formal innovation, Loos did not associate herself with any modernist movement and did not reflect critically on her approach or the cinema's relationship to written narrative beyond its industrial application. Her novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* can be regarded as probably her most direct engagement with the text as an aesthetic object, although the result is a primarily commercially focused text. Loos challenged critical hierarchies and the separation of literature and cinema as highbrow and lowbrow by developing a mode of writing through which literature and cinema together disturbed the conventional relationship of image and word, while remaining aligned to a firmly economic objective. Echoing Eisenstein's realisation of film's debt to literature:

Let Dickens and the whole ancestral array, going back as far as the Greeks and Shakespeare, be superfluous reminders that both Griffith and our cinema prove our origins to be not solely as of Edison and his fellow inventors, but as based on an enormous cultured past [...].  
(Eisenstein 1949: 232)

Loos created a fluid style that moved between and borrowed from literature for film and from film for literature. Loos's observers who have sought to align her with a modernist context on the basis of *Blondes* the novel alone have disregarded a far more

significant innovation: *Blondes* exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between literature and the image, extending from illustrations, to film, musicals and theatre plays. It *commercialised* the affinity between forms, and Loos's writing is characterised by narrative capacity transcending genre specificity. Yet, despite being an essentially modern writer who experimented with new forms of writing for a new medium and manipulated language in an established medium to establish new meanings, Loos is no aesthetic modernist. Her interactive relationship with mass culture and literature rejects any fear that popular culture might dilute aesthetics and actively embraces entertainment and commercialised art as a source, rather than an opposition, to a variety of cultural outputs. In this sense, Loos anticipates postmodernism's departure from what Andreas Huyssen terms 'the great divide', which 'is the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture' (Huyssen 1986: viii). Her writing was not autonomous but was based in commercial practice entirely. By crossing the boundaries between literary, cinematic and dramatic genres with *Blondes*, preceded by her insistence to make titles an integral part of cinematic narration, Loos exposed the capacity of cross-fertilisation between media and their inherent reliance upon each other not through the insistence of challenging artistic convention but through an economic objective. This conflict between commercial necessity and formal evolution is key to why, while modern, Loos is not, nor could be, a self-identified modernist. Instead of embracing *l'art pour l'art*, Loos employed the screenplay as a cultural product for sale in the market place.

This approach of relentless commodification distinguished the already highly industrialised American film industry from its European counterparts. Extensions of the Hollywood product, such as Loos's commercial screenwriting manuals and the

public's participation in screenwriting courses are phenomena exclusive to the United States during the late silent period. The notion of the professionally trained screenwriter and the formalised approach to screenwriting and filmmaking promoted by Loos and the developing Hollywood industry as a whole was marketed as the most superior model of filmmaking around the world. Loos comments on European films in the article "On European Film" in the March 1923 issue of the fan magazine *Motion Picture Magazine* that the stories being filmed in Germany 'run altogether to morbidity, perversity and decadence. Their comedy sense is appalling' (Loos in Hall 1923: 54). This, according to Loos, is partly due to the fact that:

They don't have stories especially written for the screen as we have them written here. They have developed no school of screenwriters. They do not work from continuity. [...] ...with things in such shape it is impossible for them to develop any star material [...] it is all too haphazard, too much of a gamble.  
(Loos in Hall 1923: 54)

European filmmaking in the early 1920s did not yet follow the American model and it is noteworthy that Loos takes exception to what she perceives to be a lack of trained screenwriters who write specifically for the screen. Similar to her traditional modernist counterparts, she places great emphasis on the notion of the 'expert'. In addition, Loos prized the importance of the institutional context for the 'expert' to be able to develop star material and fan bases. The specificity of Loos's approach delineates the difference between national models of screenwriting during the modernist period, which will be explored further in the following chapters. In conclusion: Kevin Boon previously suggested that:

The screenplay was in some ways an ideal modernist work. It had no direct antecedent (other than the early influence of theatre), and adhered to no model other than language itself.  
(Boon 2008b: 259)

This chapter has proposed that Anita Loos's screenplays and manuals, when assessed comparatively to American modernism, imply a closer relationship between the screenplay form and modernism than mere formal analysis suggests. With the shared objective of how to present an image as part of modernism's larger imperative to respond to the mechanical image, Anita Loos's work as a screenwriter and innovative commercial novelist has shown parallels to H.D.'s evolution from imagist poet to both a critical observer of and participant in film production. Furthermore, the adoption of intermedial tactics across both commercial and modernist art highlights that artistic practitioners across the cultural spectrum interacted with the new media of their contemporary environment. It is therefore not just evident in physical encounters, such as Bryher's interview with Loos for *Close Up*, but through H.D.'s imagist poems and Loos's screenplays themselves, that there was no hard line between 'high' modernism and 'low' popular culture; they were just different ways of responding to the challenge of writing in the age of visual narration.

### Chapter 3: Carl Mayer: The Screenplay between Weimar Modernisms

Most writers who work in films are already writers of books and plays, or, at the least, they are journalists. Carl Mayer never wrote a play, a book or an article. He wrote only in film terms.  
(Rotha 1947: 6)

Without Mayer the German film would have never come into its own.  
(Kracauer [1947] 1972: 136)

In the summer of 1932, the Austrian screenwriter Carl Mayer left Berlin via stops in Paris and Prague to settle in London, leaving the collapsing Weimar Republic shortly before the National Socialists assumed power the following January. Mayer – a Jew and a pacifist – was one of the approximately 20 percent of Weimar-era German film workers who emigrated to escape racial and political persecution (Asper 1998: 957). Mayer had turned down F.W. Murnau's offer to join him in Hollywood (Kasten 1994: 201), instead choosing to remain in Europe, where he worked little and died young. His obituary in the *News Review* published on the 13th July 1944 notes, under the heading "Poverty and Hard Work Claim Carl Mayer":

Driven from Germany in 1932 by Hitler's racial persecution [sic], Mayer came to London. But London in 1930 had succumbed to Hollywood, and had no time for a man who put art and technique before the box-office. Hollywood offered Mayer both hands, but Mayer turned them down.  
(Anon., *News Review* 13.07.1944: Obituaries)

Having begun his career working various odd jobs in Berlin's theatres during World War I, due to being declared unfit for military service, Carl Mayer later produced a small, but highly regarded, body of screenplays during an approximately ten-year period in Berlin. Known primarily as the co-author (alongside Hans Janowitz) of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), Mayer made a name for himself as the highest paid German screenwriter of the late 1910s and early 1920s with titles such as *Genuine* (1920), *Hintertreppe (Backstairs)* (1921-22), *Vanina* (1922), *New Year's Eve (Sylvester)* (1923), *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Tartüff* (1925) and, in the US,

*Sunrise* (1927), as well as being credited with the idea for Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: A Symphony of a Great City* (1926).

Mayer's productive decade followed a period of expansion in the German film industry. A large market that prior to 1914 had been catered to by up to 70% imported films (Jason 1936: 134) was increasingly demanding German productions after the outbreak of war (Scholz 2016: 76). As a result, the number of domestic film studios grew fourfold between 1914 and 1918 and the number of cinemas increased by 25% (Jason 1936: 134). Growth accelerated further after the end of the war throughout the years of the Weimar Republic with domestic demand resulting in 'about 3,000 feature films [being] made in Germany during the approximately 4,800 days of the Republic' (Kardish 2010: 18).

Upon immigrating to the UK in 1932, Mayer's writing career came to a halt as his output was confined to that of a script and editing consultant. But the decline in his output preceded his departure from Germany as he did not acquire a single sole author credit after 1928. Mayer's work as a screenwriter is therefore contained within the short years of the Weimar Republic between 1919 and 1933, coinciding with the proliferation of two, now well-known modernist movements, namely German Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (most commonly translated as New Objectivity). By being anchored in this discrete timeframe contained within the distinct cultural framework of the Weimar Republic, Mayer's body of work therefore lends itself for comparison with its contemporaneous literary modernisms as part of the broader examination of the screenplay as a form of literary modernism.

Framed by World War I and the Nazi *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power), German Expressionism came to be known as a distinctively national form of modernism that was distinguished by what was considered its manifestly 'German'

character. This supposed national quality was informed by its emergence from the contradictory influences of German classicism imparted by the prevalence of the German literary canon, as well as the more contemporary philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche whose re-evaluation of all social values, and especially those of the educated German middle-classes, influenced the thinking of expressionists (Huyssen 1980: 13, Vietta and Kemper 1975: 134-43). For the evaluation of literary Expressionism, Ernst Schürer highlights the particular importance of drama and poetry:

When we think of the literature of Expressionism (1910-1923), its lyrical poetry and dramatic works immediately come to mind. The two genres are indicative of the two poles of the literary movement: its subjectivity and private nature on the one hand, and its desire for human interaction and public appeal on the other. [...] The overall impression of a new movement with new structures and modes of expression, however, belies its historical embeddedness and dialectical indebtedness. [...] The fact that Expressionism explicitly rejected the classical heritage does not disprove their indebtedness in terms of language and topics. (Schürer 2005: 231)

Schürer, as well as Huyssen, highlight the importance of Expressionism's connection to preceding German literary movements, in particular the well-known *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) movement, which provided a template for the embrace and simultaneous rejection of traditional practices (Schürer 2005: 231-234, Huyssen 1980: 13-84). This pattern is noteworthy when exploring Expressionism's engagement with the photographic image and how its responses differed to those of other literary modernisms as it provides clues to the roots of Mayer's idiosyncratic take on the form.

The second Weimar modernism I will address in the latter part of this chapter is New Objectivity. *Neue Sachlichkeit* or New Objectivity (and to add my own translation: New Rationality) emerged towards the latter part of the 1920s and was

used to describe movements spanning architecture, literature, and film with a sense of general cynicism, sobriety and lack of sentimentality.

The so-called “New Objectivity” in the arts and culture of the Weimar Republic was characterised by an erosion of the boundary between the “high culture” associated with the bourgeois public sphere and new forms of mass culture directed at other classes in the emerging modern consumer society.

(McCormick 1994: 1)

Gustav Hartlaub used the term ‘*Neue Sachlichkeit*’ for the first time in 1923/1924 to ‘describe the ‘post-expressionist’ paintings that he arranged to exhibit in 1925 in the Kunsthalle, Mannheim’ (Colquhoun 1994: 28). Looking to the United States and the perceived ordered prosperity and stability inherent in novel business and industrial practices such as Taylorism, New Objectivity can be regarded as a form of impassive practicality that focused on outward appearance, or the ‘world as fact’, in direct contrast to the more traditional inward-looking focus of German Expressionism.

When considering Mayer’s screenplays in context to literary German Expressionism, this chapter will focus primarily on the connections between the screenplay and poetry, instead of plays. As links between expressionist drama and cinema have been widely explored previously (Hake 2005, Eisner 1952, Kurtz 1926), I aim to build my discussion on the formal connections between expressionist poetry and Mayer’s screenplays, as previously identified by Frankfurter 1997, Kasten 1994 and Luft 1954 /1968, using them as a starting point for a more comprehensive contextualisation of Mayer’s work in Weimar modernisms beyond Expressionism alone. It is through this wider contextualisation that an evaluation of Mayer’s screenplays can prove helpful to exploring the nature of the screenplay as a form of literary modernism.

As this chapter will show, Mayer’s body of work, placed at the very beginnings of industrial-scale German filmmaking, reveals the screenwriter in a unique location



within the filmmaking process that was reflective both of its national context and of the status of writing therein. An examination of the distinctive formal characteristics of Mayer's screenplays will identify the differences between his creative and professional practice and that of screenwriters in other national studio contexts, most notably contracted American staff writers; while at the same time highlighting the ways in which national cinemas across Europe, including Germany, were moving towards formalised and standardised practices reflecting those developed in the US, which led to the decline of the more individual forms of screenwriting practice as exemplified by Mayer.

Mayer's screenplays, rather than confirming a teleological account of the screenplay's formal development that assumes a smooth and inexorable progress from expressionist-inspired screenwriting to a standardising Hollywood model, reveal a more interactive engagement with contemporary literary movements that moves from expressionist-influenced writing to the influence of New Objectivity. This shift is noteworthy as it not only *incorporates* steps towards the American model but more importantly, marks a *departure* from the attempt to externalise internal conditions towards an increased naturalism. As only a limited number of Mayer's screenplays have survived, with the notable loss of a complete copy of *Der Letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924), it is difficult to trace a full formal evolution of his writing from expressionist styles to any explicit affiliation to the literature of the New Objectivity (itself a debatable and inchoate 'movement'). However, as my discussion of *Der Letzte Mann* towards the end of this chapter will show, Mayer's screenplays, even in extracts, reflect the changing concerns within Weimar modernisms both through their choice of subject matter and the form through which these concerns are expressed.

The continual evolution of Mayer's work (up to the moment when his writing abruptly ceased altogether) runs both in parallel (and sometimes in contrast) to the evolution of the screenplay towards a more universally standardised industrial document as well as the move from Expressionism to New Objectivity as the dominant modes of Weimar modernism. As Marion Faber summarises:

Mayer's identity as an Expressionist and his gradual transition to a more realistic mode are central to any study of his work. [...] It would be simplistic and inaccurate to expect the works of Mayer to fall neatly and quietly into one of the standard sets of expectations which the terms Naturalism and Expressionism elicit. Like other great artists of these years, Carl Mayer takes what he wants from movements and adds the elements to his own particular purpose as a writer.  
(Faber 1978: 160)

In addition to falling across rather than neatly into the categories of modernist movements in Weimar Germany, it is important to keep in mind that Mayer's screenwriting was by no means representative of the German industry as a whole. In fact, German screenwriting in the 1910s was not entirely dissimilar to the (contemporaneously crystallising) US model. Alexander Schwarz, in his study of German and Russian silent film *Der geschriebene Film: Drehbücher des Deutschen und Russischen Stummfilmes* (1994), reproduces parts of several German texts which show that the development of screenwriting in Germany had largely followed forms in the US in the 1910s, with Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Das fremde Mädchen* (1910-13) written in narrative prose and the more recognisably standardised *Schatten des Lebens* (1912) already being divided into scenes with detailed scene text – thus paralleling developments in the nascent Hollywood film industry discussed in Chapter Two. Mayer was therefore an exception to the rule by developing a personal screenplay style adapted to his particular artistic priorities, which consciously utilised contemporary literary strategies to achieve a visual effect via a written medium. Mayer's screenplays thus embody an alternative screenwriting practice that may mark

a significant moment of divergence in the development of the screenplay form – one in which its identity between ‘literary’ form and instrumentalised visual description was relatively fluid. But Mayer’s format never became popularised and he himself anticipated the end of his own approach to screenwriting after seeing Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* in 1926. His close collaborator, the cameraman Karl Freund later wrote:

After Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* exploded on the Berlin film-world in 1926, Carl Mayer’s screen-writing career was abruptly altered. From this time on, he ceased writing screen-plays, and continued to function in films primarily as a production and script adviser [...] Apparently his concept of an increasingly fluid cinema had been shaken for ever by the new Russian principles of conflict and shock. The coming of sound seemed to send him further away from active participation as a screen-writer. It seems almost ironical that this should have happened to the first consciously experimental writer of films.  
(Freund 1947: 11)

The clearly profound impact of Russian montage cinema (and later the introduction of sound) on Mayer’s screenwriting practice offers clues to the distinctive quality of that work. While thoroughly visually-oriented in their ambitions, Mayer’s screenplays nevertheless derived narrative rhythm through the fashioning of language to poetic effect. The ‘shock’ cuts of Eisensteinian montage stood in direct contrast to Mayer’s more lyrical storytelling; montage’s startling visual efficiency may have convinced Mayer of the redundancy of his own mode of narration and may have contributed to his move towards work as an editor, which allowed a focus on the aspect of creating meaning through ‘rhythm’, an aspect of his practice that has been highlighted by a number of scholars (Ksenofontova 2018: 35-36, Kasten 1994: 279-281).

The introduction of synchronised recorded sound was another challenge as spoken dialogue spelled the end of film as an (almost) purely visual medium and invoked dialogue-driven stage narration, threatening to reduce cinema to merely a filmed version of theatrical drama. Critics have highlighted the importance of silence

in Mayer's screenplays with Thomas Elsaesser noting that silence is part of Mayer's 'ambition [...] to tell the story without intertitles or explicit comments' (Elsaesser 1999: 166), underlining the primacy of the image in cinematic narration. Furthermore, through sound, Weimar cinema (and by extension its screenplays) became a more localised art form, its address and hence appeal principally confined to the German-language national community. In the context of an irrevocably changed cinema, both Mayer's move from screenwriting to editing, and his reaction to the introduction of sound may be interpreted as reaffirming his overriding interest in the film as 'visual language'. Yet if we accept that Mayer's principal concerns were visual rather than literary, how then are we to understand his screenplays, which distinguish themselves above all through a singular literary style? I propose that Mayer re-appropriates the devices of literature for a new purpose: to utilise the written word in a stylised form to impart emotional effects via another medium.

### 3.1 Carl Mayer: Then and now

Contained in a relatively narrow timeframe and idiosyncratic in style, Mayer's work highlights a very specific moment in the history of screenwriting, offering an alternative model for how screenwriting could have evolved as an intermedial form had the American standard not been adopted globally. Mayer's work has been discussed by numerous scholars, including in the pioneering post-war studies by Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* (1952) in which, while acknowledging Mayer's contribution to the development of German film, he is classified as an 'Expressionist' without any formal assessments of his screenplay texts (Eisner [1952] 1965: 192). In Rolf Hempel's full-length biography *Carl Mayer: Ein Autor schreibt mit der Kamera* (1968), an

increased focus on the literary aspects of Mayer's work becomes evident which is continued in articles such as Marion Faber's (1978), where she nevertheless works on the seemingly accepted premise of 'Mayer's identity as an Expressionist' (Faber 1978: 160). Similarly, Bernhard Frankfurter's edited collection (1997) focuses exclusively on *Caligari*, which, as I will discuss later in the chapter, is arguably Mayer's least innovative screenplay. It is in more recent scholarship, such as Kappelhoff (2003) that Mayer's stylistic idiosyncrasies in context to written visualisation are foregrounded; and Steven Price (2013) highlights Mayer as an example of distinctive European screenplay culture prior to US-inspired standardisation (Price 2013: 105-111) in which Mayer was 'at the forefront of [...] attempts to present 'Weimar auteur cinema' as an art rather than merely popular entertainment' (Price 2013: 105).

In the most comprehensive study on Carl Mayer's work, *Carl Mayer: Filmpoet – Ein Drehbuchautor schreibt Filmgeschichte*, published in 1994, Jürgen Kasten combines a detailed overview of Mayer's life with formal discussions of the majority of his screenplays. Kasten provides detailed insight into Mayer's working relationships with key figures within UFA (notably F.W. Murnau) as well as the studio itself, highlighting how Mayer's idiosyncratic approach, while enabling directors, became problematic within the industrial structure of the emerging studio system. Kasten's key argument, that Mayer is a 'screen poet', is supported by the identification of numerous formal conventions Mayer uses in his screenplays, which are seen to evoke effects similar to poetry. However, while Kasten highlights Mayer's characteristic formal features and discusses the significance of many, he does not attempt to place Mayer's 'film poetry' in the broader context of Weimar literary modernism nor does he locate Mayer in relation to the increasingly dominant US

screenwriting model. Instead, he confines his discussion to the German (and in the case of *Sunrise*) US film industry, which precludes an assessment of how Mayer's work relates to its contemporary cultural framework. Although Kasten correctly identifies many of Mayer's formal devices as literary and, furthermore, as literarily innovative, by his narrow and exclusive focus on film-industrial practice, and by failing to assess Mayer in the broader contexts of Weimar modernism, he limits the possibility of considering Mayer's screenplays as (partly) literary or intermedial texts.

In an article published while this study was nearing completion, "The screenplay/film relationship bifurcated: Reading Carl Mayer's *Sylvester* (1924)" (2018), Alexandra Ksenofontova uses the example of Mayer's screenplay for *Sylvester* to illustrate that 'screenplays are not only written with a view to a potential function in film production, but also as a continuous verbal simulation of film as medium' (Ksenofontova 2018: 28). Ksenofontova argues for a positioning of the screenplay that exceeds any definition as a mere blueprint and 'can meaningfully challenge the reader's views on the nature of film, language and communication in and between the two media' (Ksenofontova 2018: 36). Her argument that 'Mayer seems to belong among the writers, filmmakers and other artists who saw silent film as an alternative to literature and theatre' (Ksenofontova 2018: 32) can arguably be supported by the – unacknowledged by her – fact that Mayer stopped producing screenplays after the introduction of sound.

Mayer is in many ways an exception to the norm when compared to other well-known screenwriters of the Weimar era such as Ernst Lubitsch (who was a writer/director) or Thea von Harbou (who was also a prolific novelist). He did not write fiction other than for film and he was neither a journalist nor a critic. Mayer wrote for film and for film only. In addition, his friend Paul Rotha suggests that

Mayer was not motivated by commercial success or fame (in extreme contrast to, for example, Anita Loos's deliberate self-positioning as a Hollywood celebrity) noting that:

Such men in this mad, money-crazed industry of hours are rare. Had he craved a fortune, his name in tall letters, Carl could have had it at a price he was not prepared to pay – liberty to write as and how he believed.  
(Rotha 1947:7)

As such, taken at face value, Mayer exemplified in many ways the German ideal of the classical *Dichter*, the poet as artist whose ambition is elevated beyond the imperatives of commerce with his protection from the market provided by individual patronage (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002: 127-128). Juliane Scholz, in her book-length comparative analysis of German and American screenwriting practices, highlights that while the development of the screenwriting profession in the 1910s and 20s developed roughly in parallel between the two countries, German screenwriters were generally much more integrated with the traditional literary establishment (Scholz 2016: 70). But how could Mayer be a *Dichter* if his chosen medium was part of an industrial machine run for mass entertainment and profit?

As influentially (and controversially) argued in Horkheimer and Adorno's chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (first circulated in 1944), "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", there was a view in early twentieth century Germany that 'the culture industry is infecting everything with sameness' (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002: 94). And while Mayer's work precedes their analysis, Horkheimer's and Adorno's focus on standardisation of cultural goods in order to manipulate the subjects of capitalism into passivity is an important consideration when assessing Mayer's *deviation from standardisation* during his production of industrial cultural goods. In addition, there is no direct evidence that Mayer consciously rejected the commercial aspects of the film industry. If anything,

he positioned himself apart from the preceding cultural elites, with accounts suggesting<sup>4</sup> that Mayer took little to no interest in literature and was instead drawn to stories of everyday life as portrayed in newspapers and magazines (Gysin 1980: 1) (not unlike some Weimar progressive/left modernists such as Bertolt Brecht who, by contrast with contemporary expressionist writers, resisted drawing on canonical literary texts, the vocabulary of which they had internalised through years in the *Gymnasium*, the university-track high school (Schürer 2005: 234)).

But despite providing the most comprehensive analysis of Mayer's screenplays to date, Kasten was not the first to recognise their literary dimension. In his 1954 article "Notes on the World and Work of Carl Mayer" and in "Carl Mayer, Screen Author" (1968), Herbert Luft, like Kasten, links Mayer's approach to screenwriting to his unconventional biography and lack of formal education. Luft emphasises the point that Mayer 'believed that one who is writing for motion pictures should never write anything else' (Luft 1954: 380). Published in 1997, Bernhard Frankfurter's edited collection on Mayer's *Caligari* screenplay includes a contribution from Jörg Becker on 'sentence construction as image construction' ("Wortsetzung als Bilderführung", 1997), in which Becker argues that Mayer did not treat the screenplay as a mere scaffolding for the construction of a film but that he wanted its structure, the screenplay, to be a visible thread throughout the film (Becker 1997: 51).

In this chapter, I will argue that a rounded assessment of Mayer as a screenwriter – that is, as a writer whose screenplays communicate explicitly, particularly and distinctively through a play of literary form – it is necessary to consider his work in the context of a more comprehensive view of Weimar

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<sup>4</sup> His friend Francis Gysin wrote: 'Clearly well-read during his formative years, in maturity he devoted little or no time to works of fiction. His interests were always visual rather than literary, his reading ranging over the ephemera. Newspapers he devoured. From the quirks of real life he drew his subject matter (Gysin 1980: 1).



modernisms as well as the history of screenwriting in Weimar Germany. The first part of the chapter will outline Mayer's place in the development of German screenwriting practice in the context of an industrialising German film industry after World War I and will explore the position of the screenwriter in the critical hierarchy of its nascent studio system. I will then discuss screenwriting in Weimar Germany through the lens of the modernist movement most frequently associated with Weimar film, namely Expressionism. This will necessitate a brief overview of the most important critical studies on Weimar cinema, highlighting how they have positioned (and often paid little attention to) the screenplay text as creative artefact. My discussion here will not highlight the familiar and widely discussed political and sociological frameworks of inter-war Germany, other than to provide historical context. The cultural and ideological contexts of Weimar film have also been extensively rehearsed in the critical literature, from Kracauer (1947) and Eisner (1952) to contemporary scholarship by Anton Kaes (2009), Thomas Elsaesser (2000), Marc Silbermann (1993), Paul Coates (1991), and many others: it is the far less frequently undertaken formal analysis of a specific *mode* of writing during the period on which this chapter concentrates. Accordingly, the second part of the chapter will focus on close readings of a number of Mayer's screenplays, namely *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), *Tartüff* (1925) and *Sunrise* (1927). By isolating formal characteristics of screenplays from the beginning, middle and end of Mayer's writing career, I aim to show that his style evolved both to include and to abjure formal characteristics of American industrial screenplays and expressionist poetry alike, and that he created a distinctive literary mode, which, I will argue, can be read as a precursor to New Objectivity, Weimar Germany's 'second modernism', which emerged in the later 1920s and was,

in (conscious) contrast to Expressionism, seeking to align itself much more closely with ‘Americanism and an infatuation with mass culture’ (McCormick 1994: 5).

### 3.2 Expressionism and Weimar Film

The German film industry made ‘stylised film’ to make money. [...] Germany was defeated: how could she make films that would compete with the others? It would have been impossible to try and so we tried something new; the Expressionist or stylised films. (Pommer in Huaco 1965: 35)

The German cinema of the Weimar Republic is often, but wrongly identified with Expressionism. If one locates Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch and F.W. Murnau on the mental map of Berlin in the twenties, home of some of Modernism’s most vital avant-garde directors, the Expressionist cinema connotes a rebellious artistic intervention. If one sees their films grow from the studio floors of the Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA), the only film company ever to think it could compete with Hollywood, this golden age of silent cinema takes its cue more from commerce and industry than art. (Elsaesser 2000: 3)

Films of the Weimar period have been widely, if not always accurately, been associated with German Expressionism, a pre-war movement rooted in the visual arts with strong literary connections. As is generally recognised, Expressionism came late to the cinema after World War I and ‘movie-makers only consciously began to participate in the movement after [the war], at a time when it had peaked as an avant-garde movement and had become a bit of an intellectual fad’ (Barlow 1982: 7).

The beginnings of Expressionism in Germany can be roughly dated as far back as 1881, with Frank Wedekind’s play *Frühlings Erwachen* (*Spring Awakening*). Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* in 1893 laid the foundations for *Die Brücke* artist collective (1905-11), and the novelist brothers Thomas and Heinrich Mann (*Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man* (1911) / *Man of Straw* (1914)) provided literary portraits of the German psychological condition at the turn of the century. It was in the traumatic aftermath of the Great War that German film began belatedly to

draw on the visual inheritance of the pre-war visual arts and through its combination of the more recent modes of visual representation and the mystic heritage of German Romanticism, Weimar film has often been presented as a result of the fusion between the influences of developments in the visual arts and the Romantic literary traditions of the 19th century. Yet, as Kaes and Levin explain, if this was a fusion of antecedents it was a complexly overdetermined one:

Film, situated as the medium between fairy tale and machine, was predestined for the representation and problematisation of modernisation which was experienced in Germany as the imbrication of the magical and the uncanny. The Expressionist film in particular narrativised this ambivalence vis-à-vis modernity as a threatening encounter with the unfamiliar and translated it into pictorial images whose power of suggestion remains intact to this day.  
(Kaes and Levin 1992: 141)

Immediately after World War I, Germany was faced with the aftermath of a lost war, the loss of its monarchy and the establishment of a new republic, simultaneously with the upheavals of modernity other industrialised countries were also undergoing. An influential (though subsequently disputed) historiography originating in the 1960s maintained that Germany's transition to modernity both before and after the War proved especially unsettling and socially disruptive as it industrialised with unusual (compared to other advanced economies such as Britain and France) rapidity starting in the 1860s and accelerating following German unification in 1871, while its rigid social structures failed to adjust to altered realities at the same pace (Sauer 1972: 260). Expressionism's often agonised juxtaposition of archaic and primal imagery and sentiments against a disenchanted and destructive contemporary environment has been interpreted as a cultural expression of this so-called *Sonderweg* or 'special path'.

Film offered an extension of the pre-war expressionist project in the sense that it brought movement to the expressionist visions captured in visual art, therefore giving them (new) life. To express pre-industrial fantastical subject matter through the –

literal – lens of technology allowed artists to create a creative exploration of the past (fantasy) through present (technological) means. Film as a form also lent itself to question notions of certainty and reality in a period when Germany underwent changes so profound that they put the very foundations of German society in doubt. German expressionists in multiple media drew heavily on Nietzsche's philosophy (Richard Gray asserts that 'if one were to mentally subtract Nietzschean ideas and stylistic influences from the intellectual and aesthetic storehouse of Expressionism, what would remain would hardly be recognisable' (Gray 2005: 39)). Nietzsche's fundamental questioning (or 'transvaluation') of existing values and the traditions of western post-Enlightenment philosophy can be mapped onto German modernist cinema, confirming David Bordwell's argument that cinema was uniquely equipped to capture, and engage with, the fundamental shifts that were taking place in society and that

[i]t was thus not simply the technical side of cinema that appealed to modernist artists. Cinema was an ideal vehicle for the modernist urge to question the solidity of reality, to probe the way the world seems to the beholder.  
(Bordwell 1986: 70)

Mayer's arrival in Berlin's film industry towards the end of the War places him at a decisive intersection between the increasingly sophisticated industrialisation of film production and the modernist engagement with film as an art form. As previously mentioned, domestic film production had expanded throughout the war years and in addition to entertainment productions, now also 'modernist writers and artists, the Dadaists, the Futurists, the Constructivists, and the realists of the New Objectivity saw in film a new visual programme which should be realised on all artistic levels' (Kappelhoff 2003: 160). This alignment between industrial production and artistic culture was by no means confined to film production, but was evident across a variety

of media, perhaps nowhere more famously than in *Bauhaus* founder Walter Gropius' statements on art as an ally of industrial production: 'Using the machine as another kind of tool, could 'bring art back to the people' through the mass production of beautiful things' (Gropius in Lane 1968: 67).

Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Mayer published no manifestoes or programmatic statements of his artistic practice during his life, nor does his archive yield any such documents. In the absence of any record of his thoughts on the application of industrial production to art or the expanding studio system, it is impossible to judge with any certainty if and how he aimed to align more innovative artistic practice with the industrial complex of the film industry. We do know that Mayer ran into problems with the German studio system toward the end of his time in Germany. Having received numerous commissions for screenplays from UFA, which he failed to deliver, Jürgen Kasten quotes a UFA protocol, in which the board claims that Mayer owes UFA up to RM.50,000 in advances, which should be returned (Kasten 1994: 39-41). Declining Mayer's offer to settle for a payment of RM.15,000, Mayer was pursued for his debts throughout the rest of his life. Paul Rotha later wrote that 'he took little from the film industry. He would accept no work unless it conformed wholly to his principles. From the latter he never departed; had he done so he might have achieved status as a highly paid technician' (Rotha 1944, *The Times*: Obituary). But Rotha's efforts to posthumously configure Mayer as a species of Romantic purist, victimised by the industrial machinery of commercial filmmaking, oversimplify the narrative we can trace through Mayer's only extant testimony – his archived screenplays. On a formal level, as readings of the screenplays will show, expressionist influence can be identified in Mayer's texts; but they also reflect a transition to a more naturalistic mode closer to the functional sobriety of New

Objectivity. As such, the trajectory of Mayer's work and career connects him to broader changes in German film culture during the period, and in turn to the cultural ferment of wider Weimar culture.

Prior to its modernist (i.e., expressionist) turn in the later 1910s, cinema had already been a popular form of entertainment in Germany. In fact, the former was closely related to the latter as a form of market differentiation:

“Weimar auteur cinema”, as it is understood by film historians, was characterised by efforts to transform a popular form of entertainment, moving pictures, into a modern art genre. Their strategy included emphasis on the literary foundation upon which films are based as well as regarding the director as the films “author”.  
(Kappelhoff 2003: 169)

But similarly to developments in America, German film in the 1910s and 1920s found itself caught between its roots as spectacular form of vaudeville entertainment and growing aspirations to transform itself into a respectable middle-class art form. Much more so than in the US, this task was an uphill struggle in Germany, as theatre proprietors actively aimed to discredit the cinema (in fear of lost revenue) (Scholz 2016: 77) and as

[...] cinema's frequent association with the lower orders was [...] a reflection more of bourgeois fears and snobbery than of real consumption patterns. Middle-class aversion towards film was arguably particularly strong in Germany, where a culture of reading and an almost religious veneration of ‘art’ were the defining status symbols of the embattled *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle class), which regarded itself as the guardian of true German *Kultur*.  
(Ross 2006: 163)

Yet, and paradoxically, the *Bildungsbürgertum* was what Expressionists (and by extension, expressionist-influenced film) rebelled against. Thus any attempt to ‘elevate’ film artistically – via the adoption of expressionistic techniques – in order to attract the middle-class market was caught between the need to appeal to the

representatives of Wilhemine society and an aesthetic discourse that programmatically rejected those very societal norms.

Two factors are of particular interest here: the emphasis on the written word as a signifier of cultural integrity on the one hand, and on the other the public and communal mode of film consumption, which designated cinema a ‘working class popular art’. Both of these were addressed by the German film industry via a unique fusion of artistic appropriation and industrial investment. Firstly, UFA, created in 1917 as a government-backed studio through the consolidation of most of Germany’s film companies (including well-known companies such as Decla), had by the early 1920s become *the* dominant force in German filmmaking and invested heavily in creating *Filmpaläste* (movie palaces) in large German cities (Ross 2006: 161), copying the glamour of Hollywood and simultaneously rivalling theatres as the most fashionable cultural destinations. By introducing tiered pricing on the theatrical model, the cinema reflected existing class boundaries, with the aim of ensuring that the experience of going to the movies was familiar enough not be alienating yet also modern and glamorous enough to be enticing. The subject matter of films was also adapted to cater to wider (and crucially, more educated) audiences. Films became longer and featured more complex narratives, and studios started to build advertising around the names of directors and screenwriters, both of whom could be labelled the ‘author’ of a film, depending on who was considered to be better known and/or rated by audiences (Kreimeier 1996: 24). The concept of ‘authorship’ however was more complex in Germany compared to other European countries and the US, as the idea of the *Dichter* continued to enjoy a unique currency in German culture (Scholz 2016: 70). This created an additional cultural hurdle for German writers who could not, like their American novelist counterparts moving to Hollywood, offset artistic anxieties

with financial rewards. But with the growing film industry relying on experienced and (crucially) better-known writers to provide story material of sufficient quality, participation increased and the previously hard line between popular culture and art became increasingly blurred (Laqueur 2011: 153). In this context, the screenplay grew in importance as it needed to fulfil multiple functions on different levels: to convey a narrative of sufficient visual substance, build the narrative around the technical possibilities available, *and* ensure that the narrative appealed to both the cinema's core working-class audience as well as the emerging middle-class target group.

Yet, despite being the bridging form between the literary and the visual (and between the vulgarly spectacular and artistically respectable), the practice and influence of screenwriting on the evolution of German film during the Weimar years received relatively little attention in Kracauer (1947) and Eisner's (1952) key early studies of inter-war cinema. In contemporary scholarship, meanwhile, Thomas Elsaesser's *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (2000) is equally focused on the socio-cultural implications of interwar German national cinema and does not provide close formal readings of screenplays from the period. Elsaesser provides a template for recent studies such as Laurence Kardish's edited collection *Weimar Cinema, 1919-1933 Daydreams and Nightmares* (2010) and Christian Rogowski's *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy* (2010), both of which exclude the screenplay from their exploration of the German inter-war cinema. For example, Kardish cites as examples of widely discussed Weimar cinema in the US during the 1920s the films *Passion* (*Madame Dubarry*) (1919), *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919), *The Last Laugh* (1924), and *Sunrise* (1927) (Kardish 2010: 16), without even noting that three of the four films were written by one author: Mayer. His subsequent discussion focuses solely on



direction and cinematography and, in the case of *Caligari*, art direction, with no mention of the screenplay.

The perpetual absence of focus on the screenplay in studies of Weimar cinema arguably reflects the continued impact of Kracauer and Eisner's celebrated critical interventions on Weimar cinema scholarship more than 70 years after their publication. But it is worth noting that this may be perhaps due less to their interpretations and underlying historical assumptions, which have been widely challenged for several decades (for example Salt 1979: 119-123), than their construction of an analytical methodology, one that – crucially for the purposes of this thesis – specifically *excludes*, or elides, the screenplay.

But even before Eisner and Kracauer's post-World War II, post-Holocaust assessments, contemporary commentators had engaged with the emergence of film with recognisably expressionist characteristics and motifs and how these could be critically interpreted. In 1926, Rudolf Kurtz's pioneering study *Expressionism and Film* traced the roots of Expressionism and its utilisation in the new medium. Kurtz firmly situates the birth of Expressionism in the visual arts as a reaction against Impressionism's aim for natural representation of reality. He credits 'the painter' with introducing Expressionism to film (Kurtz [1926] 2007: 54) and argues that:

The person who views an image from an Expressionist film will recognise how much the modelling of form is achieved through lighting. Harsh lines are smoothed into the imagery, they are either reduced or emphasised. [...] Lighting has breathed life into Expressionist film.<sup>5</sup>  
(Kurtz [1926] 2007: 60)

Kurtz's important focus on the connection between Expressionism in the visual arts and film discounts the impact on the films of the period of expressionist use of

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<sup>5</sup> NB: A number of the sources cited in this chapter are originally in German. Unless otherwise quoted, all translations of citations are mine.

metaphor, allegory and symbolism – that is to say, attributes shared between visual and literary media. However these aspects contribute strongly to the distinctiveness of expressionist cinema, which is not limited to its visual characteristics.

Defeat in World War I drew a line between Germany's now-irretrievable Wilhelmine past, eternalised by a German Romanticism increasingly allied to radical nationalism, and the altogether more brutal experience of twentieth century modernity, which (largely as a result of the war) had brought economic crisis, poverty and starvation. Expressionist art sought to avoid an impressionistic replication of reality as the German economy, nationhood and livelihoods disintegrated on an unprecedented scale. Instead, by narrowing its focus on the experience of the individual amidst the destabilising forces pulling apart the foundations of society, German Expressionism sought to represent the psychological condition, which could not be represented through naturalistic means. As such, Expressionism sought a deliberate distortion of reality and communicated this subjective – and distorted – reality by subverting means of naturalistic representation such as photography and film. And while German films during the silent period of the Weimar Republic are commonly grouped as expressionist in style, there are in fact only a handful of films which subsequent observers commonly agree on as expressionist films proper, all produced between 1919 and 1923: *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, *Genuine*, *Das Haus zum Mond* (all 1920), *Torgus* (1920/21), *Raskolnikow* and *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (both 1922/23). These films were considered to 'present a unified worldview' by moving 'beyond conventional notions of reality, as established by realist and naturalist traditions, and seek to create more powerful reality effects based on perceptions, emotion, and sensations' (Hake 2005: 325). Notably, the way these effects were seen to be achieved was through the choice

of particular themes presented in a particular visual style. What sets expressionist film apart from Expressionism in other media, notably literature and drama, is the direct juxtaposition of the representation of physical reality via photography with a distortion, simultaneously pictorial and thematic, of that very reality, creating a third dimension between the real and the fantastic. It is at this junction that the screenplay of expressionist film can appropriate literary means for a visual purpose, creating powerful effects based on emotion.

Despite the influence of the above films, it can be problematic to classify the majority of studio-produced films after World War I as expressionist: Expressionism as a contemporary art form had effectively ceased to exist and, as Elsaesser points out, ‘No single stylistic label could hope to cover the many ideas [...] yet, in retrospect, a unity imposed itself on the films, their subjects and stories’ (Elsaesser 2000: 3). This ‘unity’ can partially be explained by the fact that in the late 1910s many of Berlin’s film workers had previously gained experience in theatres around Germany and Austria, often heavily influenced by expressionist dramaturgy, scenography and visual art. And similarly to how classical literature continued to influence modern writing, drama held an influential position in public discourse (Schürer 2005: 232) as the role of the industrial cultural producer continued to stand in uneasy contrast to that of the classical artist removed from the culture industry.

Another reason to group German films after World War I under an expressionist label was economic; in the precarious post-war environment, the employment of a formally distinctive, previously successful aesthetic that distinguished German film product in the international market place was a commercially sound decision. Jürgen Kasten writes that:

These films were mainly part of the production lines of larger film studios to use as an ambitious form of product differentiation in a – by inflation –

artificially bloated German market. In addition, it was intended that specific German style characteristics used in other art forms and adapted for the medium, would be used to create interest in German films abroad. (Kasten 1994: 41)

As the first, and most influential, entry on the list of expressionist films, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* set the subsequent standard for combining elements of German Romanticism with traditions of German fairy tales to produce a stylised version of silent cinema that was unique in the marketplace. *Caligari*'s distinctive use of architectural space and the appropriation of the expressionist visual arts created a 'look' that centred around distinctive features such as tilted angles (utilising a sense of physical distortion to convey a sense of psychological distortion), primitive urges (through themes such as sexual violence) and dominance of the ecstatic over the rational (highlighting the limits of reason within society). As such, expressionist cinema became a 'brand' synonymous with German cinema abroad and reconnected an (after the war) often hostile foreign public with Germany via the modern medium of film. By combining elements of expressionist theatre with the visual arts, expressionist films emphasise film's capacity as an intermedial form of storytelling, and could be seen as 'the tail-end of [a] first truce between highbrow culture and a lowbrow medium, rather than a new departure' (Quaresima 1992: 65) – as well as an indication that the screenplay, as the literary antecedent of film, would have to create a new – intermedial – mode to meet its many new requirements.

How then, in this consolidation of pre-war Expressionism in the commercialised art of film, did the screenwriter position himself? For Carl Mayer, his primary cultural orientation – openly visual rather than literary – set him apart as a writer in Germany. His (not necessarily deliberate) rejection of the cultural norms expected of cultural producers in German society were symptomatic of larger changes in Germany's *Kulturverständnis* (understanding of culture) in which modes of

production and consumption of art changed in radical ways to pave the way for the emergence of previously unknown forms of popular culture and entertainment that were aligned with, rather than opposed to, both those of the bourgeois mainstream and the avant-garde. In a development that thrust the bourgeois institutions of high art into the background to make room for new temples of indulgence celebrating mass entertainment for increasingly urbanised populations, ‘the prospect of becoming mere suppliers for a culture industry seemed [...] terrifying for German writers, since they worked in a society that had always celebrated literature as the centre of cultural identity’ (Hake 1993: 66). Already commercialised, screenwriters further problematised the link between the writer and highbrow culture. As cinema began to take an increasing market share, the number of ‘serious’ writers seeking employment in the newly established studios was lower than that of their American counterparts; instead many reacted to what they perceived as a loss of social and economic status with open hostility and

[...] rather than confronting the situation, many contended themselves with slandering the new profession of scenario writing. They complained about the fact that filmmaking, at least in their view, required neither skill nor talent.  
(Hake 1993: 66)

The writer who *only* wrote for screen however, a novelty without a pre-defined place in the otherwise stringent hierarchy of Germany’s cultural landscape, enjoyed – precisely through his lack of status – a freedom from constraints on his output. Mayer co-authored *Caligari* without there being any record of him producing or publishing any writing for the screen or theatre before. In fact, Mayer had not even completed his *Abitur* exams in Austria and was lacking any formal qualifications or training.

Instead, Mayer took the camera as his key stylistic reference:

Mayer’s arrangement of words and sentences are not evocative of an imaginary presence of the images beyond language; they form a linguistic

structure which points to the cinematographic image as a desire for a nascent language.  
(Kappelhoff 2003: 182)

One can argue that Mayer's ongoing experimentation with the screenplay text was primarily guided by his aim to develop a mode of writing that was most suitable to represent the moving image and impart emotional effects. However, both the subject matter of his films and the idiosyncratic mode of their narration indicate that his screenplays should be explored under the premise of both German Expressionism and New Objectivity, within a framework of inclusive Weimar modernisms, as well as the extension of the cultural universe which is examined for modernist practice and which is considered part of an ecosystem of mutually influential cultural practice.

### 3.3 Carl Mayer: The Screenplay as Film Poetry

Let's talk about *Caligari*. What makes the film compelling is its rhythm. At first slow, deliberately laborious it attempts to irritate. Then when the zig motifs on the fairground start turning, the pace leaps forward, agitato, accelerando, and only leaves off at the word "End", as abruptly as a slap in the face.  
(Delluc 1922 in Eisner [1952] 1965: 17)

Having reviewed the historical, cultural and industry contexts in which Mayer's screenwriting practice developed, the second part of this chapter will explore if and how Carl Mayer's screenplays can be considered a form of literary modernism: more specifically, in the first instance, a form of German Expressionism. The chapter will provide close readings of extracts of a number of Mayer's screenplays and assess to what extent they show formal characteristics of literary Expressionism. Drawing on these close readings, the chapter will then propose an exploration of Mayer's screenplays in context of the emergence of the New Objectivity movement as part of an inclusive Weimar modernism. The chapter will argue that a scholarly discussion

focused primarily on Mayer as a contributor to German Expressionism, such as put forward by Price (2013: 105-111), Kasten (1994: 47-59) and Eisner (1952: 192 ) is based on a critical reception overly focused on his first screenplay, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, as *the* example of cinematic Expressionism, and underestimating the further evolution of his use of language, which I propose develops as part of the evolving landscape of Weimar modernisms. His personalised literary style, which crystallised as a direct response to the particular and unique requirements of writing for the screen, allows for a connection between the use of literary means for visual effect as well as incorporating stylistic means used in other genres. It is this intermediate nature of Mayer's writing that makes it such fertile ground for the evaluation of the screenplay as modernism, and the general distinction between written and visual narratives highlights its continued uniqueness.

While Carl Mayer wrote just under twenty screenplays, he never put down his thoughts on the cinema or screenwriting and there is only one published interview with him, which quotes him in indirect speech (Frankfurter 1997: 30). In fact, this dedicated practitioner of the new mass art form of cinema conducted himself, in terms of his interaction with his mass public, with an extreme detachment, in almost absurd contrast to contemporaneous American writers such as Anita Loos. Hence we must reconstruct Mayer's 'theory' of screenwriting with exclusive reference to the archive of the work itself.

Despite his idiosyncratic use of language Mayer worked within a fairly standardised screenplay format that is reminiscent of the one we still see today. After his initial collaboration with Janowitz on *Caligari*, Mayer's screenplays evolved to frame narratives in a visual rhythm that instructed film technicians and actors alike. He did not produce a text to be transmuted into another medium but rather, a text that

employed what might be categorised as ‘simulation’ to draw an image. Alexandra Ksenofontava identifies this form of ‘simulation’ as a distinctive characteristic of the screenplay text in that:

[...] screenplays continuously attempt to ‘generate an illusion’ of film’s specific practices by bridging the ‘intermedial gap’ between film and text in the ‘as if’ mode and thus *simulating* the specifics of filmic communication.  
(Ksenofontava 2018: 28-29)

By highlighting the aim to ‘generate an illusion’ between film and text, Ksenofontava points to the ways in which Mayer (and the screenplay more generally) can bridge the gap between visual and written narrative. While this aim can be pursued through the application of literary strategies it is worth highlighting that bridging the ‘intermedial gap’ relies on the evocation of emotions similar to those achieved by film. Steven Price highlights how Mayer anticipates emotional responses with his screenplays:

Mayer places comparatively little emphasis on what is imagined to be seen on the screen (unlike most forms of screenwriting) or on the requirements of the technical crew (unlike the silent Hollywood continuity or the various kinds of ‘shooting script’). Instead, he anticipates the emotional response of the spectator; and ‘anticipates’ is the right word, since his writing is an attempt to capture the nervous excitement of the viewer, with all his or her doubts and speculations about the events unfolding on the screen.  
(Price 2013: 105)

‘Anticipating’ the emotional response of the spectator is manifestly different from descriptions of characters’ emotional responses that are a ubiquitous element of conventional screenwriting practice (Igelström 2013: 145-50): what Price highlights here, rather, is Mayer’s direct engagement with the spectator before the film has even been made.

The focus on simulating the visual with literary devices provides additional motivation to the emphasis Mayer seemed to place on the specificity of his written narrative. When, in 1926, Kurt Mühsam asked for ‘Mayer’s script *Sylvester* (1924) [to



be] one of the very first screenplays published as a book' (Becker 1997: 53), Mayer wrote to him:

In case it is still of interest for your book, I would like to note that when composing scenes, I was primarily guided by impressing upon directors, operators, and actors the relevant action, its tempo, its mood with suggestive urgency. I would like to ask you to ensure that the structure of the sentences in the scenes is identical to the original. I would ask for the same to be applied during any corrections and to check that the punctuation is transcribed accurately [...].  
(Carl Mayer 1926: Letter, 26.11.1926)

The above paragraph supports Ksenofontava's and Price's claims that Mayer uses stylistic means to capture the emotional effects of the eventual film in his screenplay. And while Mayer's screenplays were of course part of a production process, his request for accurate transcription does imply that Mayer treated his written texts in a similar way to pieces of literature – and that he considered the *form* of the text a vital intersection between word and image. At the same time, Mayer's attempts at 'simulation' are not confined to the intended spectator, as his screenplays are in the first instance at least aimed at 'directors, operators and actors' for the purpose of imparting 'tempo' and 'mood' with 'suggestive urgency'. Therefore, it can be argued that Mayer re-appropriates the devices of literature for a new purpose: to utilise the written word in a stylised form to impart emotional effects via another medium.

Over the course of his screenwriting career, Mayer employed verbal strategies to explore how to unearth the internal by optical means. His evolving efforts can be observed throughout his texts, manifesting in distinctive linguistic techniques that developed in the pursuit of writing accurately and impressionistically for the eventual transcription to film. Mayer's screenwriting style became personalised in a similar fashion to how writers in other genres positioned their work through recognisable formal innovation. The formal features Mayer developed are also more broadly valuable when assessing the evolution of the screenplay across national contexts

insofar as they were either adopted, or entirely discarded, in the contemporary, international development of the standardised, screenplay.

When examining the formal characteristics of Mayer's work, it will become clear that not all adjustments of writing for the screen are his innovations alone, but that screenwriting practices across national industries moved along similar parameters from an early stage. One of the most obvious similarities that can be observed across national contexts is the increasing reduction of verbiage in screenplays and a progression towards a constant lexical decrease, or rather compression, that emphasises a simple narrative in a simple structure with simple language. Yet, in contrast to his American counterparts, Mayer did not restrict himself to describe 'what can be seen' in the most unambiguous terms but instead, he crafted the screenplay as the first step in the process of emotive, visual storytelling. Most importantly, Mayer ventured beyond the external and used literary means to project the internal outside of the imagination of the viewer. This externalisation of interiority and focus on the hidden psychology of narratives is one characteristic that allows Mayer to be contextualised more closely to his expressionist contemporaries than any affinity his screenwriting colleagues in the US may have had with their own national strains of literary modernism. Walter Reimann saw the source of a film's Expressionism in the screenplay as 'the rhythmic advancement of the dramatic thought in the manuscript and not only the naturalistic basis, but built on sole artistic feeling' (Reimann in Anon. 1920: 4). This effort to move within but also beyond the pure representation of the natural world, and the specific ways Mayer sought to achieve this ambitious aim, help us understand the capacity of the screenplay form within the context of the literary Expressionism.

### 3.3.1 Beginnings: *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) and the Modernist Cinema

Bild: Das Innere des Bußwagens

18. Dr. Olsen kniet an der Kiste  
Caesars und untersucht ihn  
gründlich, wobei er ihn mehr-  
mals vergehens zum Erwachen  
zu bringen sucht. Francis steht  
gespannt beobachtend dabei  
während Caligari's mit veräble-  
nem Lorn in einer Ecke steht  
scheinbar ohne sich um die Tür-  
gänge zu kümmern.

Titel: Bitte merken Sie den Lorn-  
nambulen, es ist für die Unter-  
suchung nötig. - Ich bedaure  
Caesare wird jetzt nicht  
erwarten.

Figure 8: Extract from handwritten screenplay *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), SDK

*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) was Carl Mayer's first screenplay. It was written in collaboration with Hans Janowitz and sold to the Decla-Filmgesellschaft studio.

Mayer had some experience working in theatres (Kasten 1994: 16), but had no credits as a writer. *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is an unusual screenplay in the body of

Mayer's work, not least because he wrote it collaboratively; but, despite being largely

devoid of his most distinctive stylistic features, it has become the benchmark for German expressionist cinema (Elsaesser 2000: 61). Upon closer inspection, the expressionistic nature of *Caligari* is multi-layered. Firstly, its subject matter:

Most critics, Siegfried Kracauer significant among them, view the original story, a script by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer, as truly “expressionistic”, as an exposure of the “madness inherent in authority.” (Cardullo 1982: 28)

The theme of ‘madness inherent in authority’ reflects not only on the slaughter of World War I, perpetrated and prolonged by those in authority, but also the influence of Nietzsche’s philosophy that fostered:

[...] the critique of institutions and conventions in society and in language, which lead to a posture and practice of analytical nihilism with a plurality of perspectives, allowing no firm epistemological grounding in a system, no truth. (Donahue 2005: 7)

This anchoring of the *Caligari* story is further amplified through the – now famous – set designs that drew heavily on expressionist visual art, which quickly popularised and were appropriated across genres and media to the degree that ‘within a year or two of *Dr Caligari*’s release [...] Expressionism as an art movement had itself adapted to the ‘market’ and become just that, a commercial art idiom in interior design and a fashion accessory’ (Elsaesser 200: 70), setting a precedent for later cross-medial commodifications such as Loos’s novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) to ‘dress fabric and wallpaper’ (Frost 2010: 291).

Despite *Caligari* becoming the most frequently cited example of German expressionist film (Hake 2005: 321), one of the most obvious attributes of the screenplay text itself is that many of its formal features are not unusual. While its format on the page is not constructed in the now common two-column format but written as blocks of texts, alternating between scene descriptions and titles, this practice was widespread: as described in Chapter Two, in the late 1910s American

screenplays were still commonly composed as prose-based short stories, adhering only to the loosest of formal conventions as they were later transcribed into shooting scripts whose format was more conducive to technical production. Mayer and Janowitz's screenplay for *Caligari* is mostly written in prose style, describing the visually available:

2. The terrace: Closer shot, taken from the house views of a beautiful, old, park bathed in evening light. Sloping behind is the country lane. Happy atmosphere. Suddenly Francis looks across to the country lane on which gypsy travellers with their wagons are moving across. Francis lowers his glass, for a toast raised, and stares into the distance while his wife moves closer to him and gently caresses his hair. The guests, surprised and concerned, turn to question the couple.

Title: "Yes my friends, but you don't know the terrible story of Holstenwall, that Jane and I wistfully recalled when those gypsies passed."  
(Mayer and Janowitz 1919: *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Script, Extract)

The innovation in *Caligari* is therefore not immediately a formal one that can be assessed through the way the words are graphically arranged on the page. Instead, it is *Caligari's* narrative structure that subverted audience expectations and provided a different, unsettling perspective on the authorial reliability of the camera as narrator. Notwithstanding, the screenplay document itself was intended to be stable enough that it could not be subverted. Hans Janowitz describes the *Caligari* script:

A film script had to be a straitjacket for the director, a very tight, precise and even cut with tight belts and locks so no one could in any way stray beyond our instructions. That's how we wanted to write our first screenplay.  
(Janowitz in Hempel 1968: 106)

Through this, Mayer and Janowitz aimed to utilise a firm narrative structure to show the film's full potential as an intermediary between an individual's innermost

thoughts (and nightmares) and the physical world, therefore exposing the screenplay's ability to be the connecting force between human myth and film's modernity.

In addition to its change in perspective, *Caligari* presents its viewers/readers with an unusual narrative device: the frame narrative. Since a copy of the screenplay has become available at Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin, Kracauer's claim that the frame story glorified authority and therefore turned a 'revolutionary film turned into a conformist one' (Kracauer [1947] 1972: 11) has been questioned. It is undermined by the original typescript that also outlines a frame story (Brockmann 2010: 61); but as the film version's frame story significantly differs from Mayer's and Janowitz's original – which is, in Steven Price's view, even more conservative (Price 2013: 107) – and the closing part of the original frame story remains missing, the issue cannot be definitely resolved. *Caligari* is Mayer's most complex narrative structure (although he employed framing devices again in later screenplays also, such as *Tartüff*) but his focus would shift from narrative experimentation to formal experimentation, i.e., on how to utilise language to achieve a particular effect on the page, which would be able to be animated through the means of the camera.

Therefore, despite its deserved status as a milestone in filmic narrative construction, as a literary document *Caligari* is arguably Mayer's most conventional screenplay, as it models itself more closely on previous models than anticipating his later screenplays. It is implied through features such as the subtitle 'A fantastical film *novel* in 6 acts' that the screenplay aims towards the fluid style of a novella. The prose style of the text is not tailored to the needs of the screen in any particular way and is seems to provide greater scope for a director to shape the film in both tone and perspective. Hence, in the literary context of the period, *Caligari* again distinguishes itself less through formal innovation than through its choice of subject matter and the

externalisation of internal events: however, Mayer has yet to develop the literary means to represent these on the page. Its themes of paranoia and madness can be related to the fantastic-romantic nineteenth century tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe rather than the formally expressionist plays of contemporaries Walter Hasenclever and Fritz von Unruh.

But in the specific context of expressionist poetry, the release of *Caligari* significantly coincided with the publication of Kurt Pinthus's acclaimed anthology *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung* (*Dawn of Humanity: Symphony of New Poetry*, 1919) which has become known as the 'most celebrated and often cited document not only of expressionist poetry, but of German literary Expressionism in general' (Sharp 2005: 137). In the collection of 273 poems, Pinthus sought:

[...] to bridge the emotional depths and peaks that characterise these poems and their times as a whole. The emotions range from a sense of impending doom reflecting the collapsing metaphysical, social, and political orders to a secularised religiosity that trumpeted a radical transformation that would bring about a new age of community and solidarity.  
(Sharp 2005: 138)

The opening poem *Sturz und Schrei* (*Crash and Cry*) by Jakob van Hoddis, originally published in 1911, exemplifies characteristics now commonly associated with expressionist poetry:

The burgher's hat flies off his pointed head,  
Everywhere the air reverberates with what sounds like screams.  
Roofers are falling off and breaking in two,  
And, along the coasts – the paper says – the tide is rising.

The storm is here, the wild sears are hopping  
Ashore to squash thick dikes.  
Most people have a cold.  
The trains are dropping off the bridges.  
(Van Hoddis in Pinthus, trans. Ratych, Ley and Conard 1994: 61)

The most relevant stylistic feature in context to the screenplay is the so-called *Reihungsstil*, or paratactical style, exemplified by connecting seemingly unrelated impressions such as ‘Most people have a cold. The trains are dropping off bridges’. Reflecting juxtaposed subjective thoughts, this was however by no means a feature unique to German Expressionism, as Alexandra Ksenofontova explains:

Paratactic style as such is characteristic not only of German expressionist poetry, but also, for example, of poems by Ezra Pound and Walt Whitman, Old English poetry, as well as Ancient Epic poetry, from which the parataxis stems as technique.  
(Ksenofontova 2018: 32)

Nevertheless, as Ksenofontova goes on to point out (ibid.), it is a device that can be identified in Mayer’s screenplays and provides a direct link between Mayer’s screenwriting practice and contemporary literary modernism. It is also a device that Mayer would continue to use and develop, as later examples of his screenplay will show, in order to effect an emotional response in the reader. *Caligari*’s use of language such as ‘[...] views of a beautiful, old, park bathed in evening light. Sloping behind is the country lane. Happy atmosphere. [...]’ (Mayer and Janowitz 1919: *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Script) are early examples of this strategy and are indicative of how he adapted literary tactics for visual narration.

In contrast to the adoption of explicitly expressionist tactics, such as the paratactical style, the frame narrative as a device to ease the transition between the ‘real’ and the ‘mad’ for the reader/viewer can be traced back to nineteenth century writers such as Hoffmann and Poe, who both regularly used them in their short stories. The frame narrative is employed to shift the reader’s/viewer’s perspective, resulting in a loss of narrative certainty and a subversion of photographic naturalism. The reader/viewer is left unsure of what is real and who is actually mad: Francis, who has to this point acted seemingly rationally (if highly emotionally) throughout the



course of the film, or the psychotic (but now suddenly benevolent) Dr Caligari. In the original screenplay, the main story would have seen a happy ending, despite the traumatic course to reach it. In the amended version, the frame narrative leaves the reader/viewer with a sense of deliberate unease.

To visualise this inherently internal condition required the screenplay to produce the potentially fantastical in cinematic terms; an aim that lent itself to the experimental forms of expressionist visual art like few other themes. But given that *Caligari* the screenplay – and to a larger extent the film – have been highlighted as turning points in the production of German expressionist cinema, it is important to point out that there is a discrepancy between what can be deducted from a formal assessment of the features of the screenplay and the film itself: The screenplay form is conventional, even if its structure is experimental. In contrast, the film itself is visually innovative while the means employed to generate the innovative effect had been used by visual artists for some time. What *Caligari* the screenplay accomplished is to provide the narrative bridge between the gap of the writing of an interior and the externalisation of nightmare, resulting in a narrative of disturbance and hallucination, which found its completion in the distorted vision of space and perspective. Furthermore, and key to the formal innovations of Mayer's later screenplays, *Caligari* provided a template for formal experimentation, highlighting the screenplay's capacity to influence both the visual narrative and its audiences.

### 3.3.2 Compression as rhythm: *Tartüff* (1926)

The screenplay for *Tartüff* (1926) differs significantly from *Caligari* and highlights the progression of Mayer's screenwriting practice. It provides insight into some of his most distinctive stylistic features and the compression of meaning into a minimum number of words, as well as his use of adverbs, thereby highlighting his evolution

between the structural innovation of *Caligari* and his subsequent move towards the utilisation of literary means to convey visual meaning. Mayer began working on the screenplay for his Molière adaptation *Tartüff* in April 1923, originally titling it *Herr Tartuffe*. But it took a further two years for F.W. Murnau to decide to film the screenplay, resulting in the film reaching cinemas only in 1926. The film was received unenthusiastically given that preferences in genre moved rapidly and the film's narrative had dated in the three years between its conception and arrival at the country's screens (Kasten 1994: 189).

The plot revolves around wealthy Herr Orgon (and his mother) who has fallen under the spell of Tartüff, a fraudulent priest. To expose Tartüff as a charlatan, a plan is concocted to trap him into trying to seduce Orgon's wife, Elmire. Tartüff does try to seduce Elmire but initially escapes Orgon's wrath until he is eventually caught and banished from Orgon's household. In revenge, Tartüff attempts to destroy Orgon's reputation with a cache of incriminating letters but he is exonerated. Eventually however, Tartüff is exposed and receives his punishment. Mayer had reduced the scope of Molière's original play drastically, focusing solely on the key conflict between the false priest Tartüff, Herr Orgon and his wife. All other characters and sideline narratives were cut. Instead, Mayer included a framing device that places the story in the present and creates a film within a film. Despite *Tartüff* being a comedy, Mayer was attracted to the story due to what he perceived to be a timeless theme of hypocrisy and greed (Kasten 1994: 190).

To position his adaptation, Mayer added a 'technical preface' to the screenplay in which he provided notes on his reading of the text and instructions on how the story should be set:

The framing narrative is set in the present, but with a tendency to the provincial, old-fashioned, backward. The set design of the Tartüff play

[...] with bright, large, detail-less walls. The use of furniture is sparse.  
[...] The costumes are timeless but cut more in the style of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a timeless style, which is revealing the allegorical nature of the *Tartüff* play.

(Mayer 1923 in Kasten 1994: 189)<sup>6</sup>

Mayer's emphasis on the 'allegorical nature' of *Tartüff* gives another clue to Mayer's connection to expressionist writers who, 'with their proclivity for graphic imagery gravitated towards allegory, borrowed from [...] the baroque' (Schürer 2005: 258). Therefore, in almost linear fashion, one can trace Mayer's adoption of allegorical devices in a screenplay which uses (other) expressionist literary devices in its adaptation of a Baroque play.

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<sup>6</sup> The SDK's copy of *Tartüff* is incomplete and does not include the opening frame story or his 'technical preface'. Kasten is referencing a complete copy held at the Cinémathèque Française, Paris

29.

Ein kultiviertes Schlafzimmer.  
Aus Elmires Blick gesehen:

Durch die Kerze erleuchtet;

Wo zwei Betten sichtlich einst standen;

Steht jetzt nur eins.

Mit gähnender Leere neben an.

Und da!

Grösser: Elmiro. Immer noch in der Türe;

So fragt sie jetzt:

Titel:

"Wo ist denn meines Mannes  
Bett hin - ?!"

Gross: Doch! ~~Dorine~~. Wieder sich drastisch  
verbeugend:

Titel:

"Herrn Tartuffes Geheiss!"

Grösser: Da starrt Fou Elmire Dorine an.

So sich fast fallen lassend auf  
~~seinen Stuhl.~~

So sitzt sie nun. In Reisemantel und  
Hut.

Immer nur ansehend Dorine.

Sekunden.

Endlich: Sie erhebt sich. Einfach.

Doch erhoben.

So sagt sie jetzt entschlossen:

Titel:

"Ich will sofort mit meinem  
Mann sprechen!"

Grösser: Dorine macht abwehrende Gesten.  
Wie beweisend einen Erfolg:

Figure 9: Extract from the screenplay *Tartuff* (1926), SDK

An old-fashioned bedroom  
 Complete(? : Dark. Yellowed.  
                   But lightening now  
                   Then:  
 Large:           On windows: The vicious.  
                   Curtains pulled  
                   And there!

(Mayer 1926: *Tartüff*, Script, Extract)

Mayer's exposition serves primarily to establish the physical space and the atmosphere of the frame. He exposes the image to the reader/viewer by moving from darkness to light through the physical action of the pulled curtains. 'Curtains pulled' is in fact an imprecise translation of the passive tense '*Ziehend Vorhänge hoch.*', which retains ambiguity about who is pulling the curtains by using this seemingly ungrammatical construction. This use of the passive tense is one of the most common features of Mayer's writing after *Caligari*. Grammatically awkward, it creates a rupture in the fluid reading of the text and forces the reader/viewer into a perspective other than the one she inhibits.

Larger:           Throughout recognisable  
                   Through curtains half covered: A bed.  
                   Here sits an old man.  
                   With a pointy white beard.  
                   And bare legs in his bed shirt  
                   Coughing into the room.  
                   And! Now: There the vicious here:  
                   He rushes her  
                   Gesticulating: His slippers!  
                   And there!  
 Large:           Sweetly she leans over him  
 Very large:       Having put them on him

(Mayer 1926: *Tartüff*, Script, Extract)

A familiar pattern structure in Mayer's description of scenes can be observed in the above extract. Mayer composes each frame as a self-contained narrative with an exposition outlining the physical space, *how* the reader/viewer accesses this physical space, and how we are instructed to perceive it. The characters are presented from two

opposing perspectives, meaning the external view signified through descriptive, sometimes singular, adjectives. He then provides the reader/viewer with the internal view of the character, often through the use of the passive tense, revealing small but significant details about a character's condition or motivation. These devices create both familiarity as well as alienation in the reader/viewer because we know more about the characters than implicitly meets the eye; yet equally, if the two channels do not align, which one do we believe?

This structure also results in an underlying rhythm in the film, which is akin to rhythms established in narrative poems such as ballads. Embedding such invisible structures in the screenplay (and the resultant film), provides the reader/viewer with an unconscious familiarity and architectural framework that results in a sense of ease when consuming the narrative. The reader/viewer is most likely unaware of the way information is presented to her in a particular pattern, but as classical dramatic structures have proven, readers/viewers learn and respond to structural narrative conditioning.

Mayer's use of temporal adverbs such as '*Doch!*' (which translates inaccurately to 'but yet') and '*Und da!*' (and there/then!) serves to create a bridge between images as it prompts an anticipation to proceed to the next shot before the previous one has been completed. Previously this device has been identified as reminiscent of expressionist poetry (Price 2013:105-111, Kasten 1994: 278, Faber 1978:169) but as Ksenofontova highlights, although Mayer's writing does indeed resemble the 'paratactic' style of German expressionist poetry 'in the placing of clauses one after another without coordinating connectives',

However, single lines or larger pieces of text in Mayer's script are always connected with 'And!', 'But!', 'Because' and other conjunctions [...] [and] such combination of stylistic devices seems to have no immediate prototype in expressionist poetry.

(Ksenofontova 2018 32-33)

When comparing the screenplay for *Tartüff* to Van Hoddiss's poem, we can again see that Mayer's aim is to anticipate an emotional response that exceeds that of the narrative alone. Mayer's use of adverbs evolves the paratactical style evident in Van Hoddiss's poem, both for the reader/spectator and importantly, in an industrial context, to serve as connections between images, as a narrative glue facilitating the editor's task.

Larger:           Unanticipated: She rushes back.  
                          Hidden in a small door.  
                          While the old one runs around  
                          Continually beating his back.

(Mayer 1926: *Tartüff*, Script, Extract)

Similarly, Mayer condenses sentences so substantially that they are no longer grammatically correct; however, he uses conjunctions (*während/while*) to link two separate images in order to compose one frame in which two actions happen simultaneously. Echoing dramatists' use of indications such as 'continuous' and 'simultaneously', Mayer composes the image (in lieu of the stage) in totality instead of providing only individual actions to be framed.

The creation of such simultaneity is frequent in Mayer's screenplays and reveals much about the way he composes images. Rather than describing a scene in which a number of actions are taking place as part of a whole, Mayer describes different actions as separate occurrences and *then* links them to create a frame. This distinction is meaningful as it implies that Mayer does not restrict the screenplay to describe a scene *to be* composed from it subsequently but instead, claims a stake in formulating the image through its components, effectively embracing cinematography, direction and acting instructions within the screenplay's narrative scope. Nonetheless, the screenplay is not an omniscient narrator:

28.

A door from the inside.

Larger: In the lamp's light:  
Boxes are stood.  
Next to them Elmire and Dorine  
And there! Dorine with plunging  
Arms repeating:

Title:

"Let everyone enter

Per Herr Tartuff's wish

Larger: Dorine standing. Arms akimbo.  
As if awaiting her effect  
But Mrs Elmire: More puzzled always.  
Herr Tartuffe? Herr Tartuffe?  
This she asks now:

(Mayer 1926: *Tartuff*, Script, Extract)

Mayer goes as far as speculating on his characters' intentions. 'As if' here implies both intention and action, separate but simultaneous. Through this, he implies to the director a subtle message: The character needs to *seem* as if she is doing something, and while it cannot be explicit, the viewer should be uncertain as the information on the screen is ambiguous. Mayer here transcends the role of the screenwriter as the producer of the basic narrative framework and explicitly moves into the role of the creator of the image. While this practice is not unlike modern screenwriting, the writer of screenplays in Weimar Germany (such as his contemporaries in studios across Europe and the US) was a creator of storylines, *not* of the image. Mayer uses the tools he has at his disposal (words) to affect the film beyond his designated remit, i.e., the narrative structure. Later developments in screenwriting have refined the conventions through which screenwriters are allowed to do just this; however Mayer's approach was innovative as he did not establish screenplay-specific conventions but evolved available literary styles for his purpose.

Although Murnau's film follows the screenplay's narrative structure precisely, he ignores most of Mayer's suggested camera angles and shot compositions. Oddly



(given Murnau's auteurist reputation), Murnau's cinematography is more restrained than Mayer's, whose roaming camera eye seems extravagant in comparison. The fact that Murnau reduced Mayer's screenplay back to its most basic elements – the narrative structure – when producing the film, highlights the limitations of Mayer's subtle literary strategies in an industrial context. It also emphasises that the screenplay has the capacity to provide a number of functions depending on which it is assigned to. Mayer's version of *Tartüff* contains a subtle, yet implicit, visualisation, which can be consumed independently from the film Murnau chose to make. However, the screenplay is neither a definitive nor a prescriptive text, it sets a horizon of interpretation for the filmmaker which the latter is however largely at liberty to ignore; a fact that the discrepancy between Mayer's text and Murnau's film highlights aptly.

### 3.3.3 Into the Hollywood mainstream: *Sunrise* (1927)

*Sunrise* (1927) was Mayer's third collaboration with F.W. Murnau after *Der Letzte Mann* (1924) and *Tartüff* (1925). It is arguably Mayer's most accomplished screenplay and allows us to assess all of his distinctive formal innovations such as unusual grammatical constructions to signify intention, single nouns and adverbs to anticipate emotional responses, as well an increased reflection of his interest in the role of editing in the creation of narrative rhythm. While *Sunrise* was produced after *The Last Laugh* (1924), the latter presents a departure from Mayer's other screenplays; thus *Sunrise*, in its formal characteristics, bears a closer affinity to both *Caligari* and *Tartüff*, which is why I will cover it before closing with a discussion of *The Last Laugh*.

*Sunrise*'s story is an adaptation of Hermann Sudermann's novella *Die Reise nach Telsit* (*The Journey to Telsit*), published in 1917. *Sunrise* is the last screenplay for which Mayer received a sole writing credit and it was completed by him in Berlin when Murnau had already departed to the United States. In her discussion of *Sunrise*, Lucy Fischer claims that:

One the one hand, the film seems consonant with American traditions of melodrama (the story's focus on domestic life, its prurient concern with adultery, its quasi-Manichaeian structure of good versus evil, its valorisation of female innocence). However, on the other hand, *Sunrise* transcends its standard melodramatic roots and veers towards a more eccentric style.  
(Fischer 1998: 15)

Fischer does not continue to explore the source of this 'eccentric' style in the screenplay, which – contrary to her claims that Mayer only produced a treatment (Fischer 1998: 15) – had been produced in full in Germany before being translated into English in the US.

As previously in *Tartüff*, Mayer reduces the number of characters from the original story and – discarding the names from Sudermann's novella – specifically identifies only three characters, 'The Husband', 'The Wife' and 'A Woman from the City', employing symbolic archetypes (a device very common in expressionist drama). All other characters are simply grouped as supporting characters. The story is simple: in a lakeside town, near the city, a husband lives with his wife and child, running a poorly performing farm. A woman from the city, a summer guest, begins an affair with the husband and tries to convince him to sell the farm and move with her to the city. In order to achieve this aim, she convinces the man to kill his wife by drowning her in the lake. After convincing his wife to join him on a boat ride, the husband cannot bring himself to kill his wife. After she flees from him into the city after realising his intentions, he pursues her and they reconcile, spending the day

together. As they return home across the lake, a storm capsizes the boat. The man reaches the shore, believing his wife is lost. Yet, the wife is saved and reunited with her husband as the woman from the city escapes the town.

The contemporary reception of *Sunrise* was extremely positive in both Germany and the US. The *Lichtbild-Bühne* critic Hans Wollenberg remarked on the importance of the screenplay's quality for the success of a film:

The condition – a text – also called a manuscript – that doesn't resist visual realisation. This is the only thing that matters. Not everything can be visualised. Just as not all is accessible to the general visual arts. [...] One of the few who understand the 'filmic', or who can at least guess it, is Carl Mayer, the author of *Sunrise*.  
(Wollenberg 1927: Review)

The final version of *Sunrise* is not entirely Mayer's though: The conventional last scene of the kissing couple is not part of Mayer's original screenplay but can be found in the English translation of the screenplay. Nevertheless, most of the German screenplay remained:

14. Atelier  
Across nightly meadows, but:  
The apparatus behind  
The man. Who walks  
    Furtively. Yet fast.  
    Now:

The apparatus overtakes him. Towards bushes  
                                    which become denser  
that branches now snap before the apparatus.

Just now:

The apparatus stops /Then: Visible through  
bushes:

A swamp in water  
Here back and forth:  
Bag in hand:  
Such person  
Watching out?  
Now

(Mayer 1927: *Sunrise*, Script, Extract)

The above extract conveys some of the technical dimension evident in Mayer's writing by this point, notably his use of 'dramatic condensation for the purpose of psychological intensification of the characters and condensation of the visible objects, thereby transforming them into symbols' (Kappelhoff 2003: 175). The employment of 'symbols' again connects Mayer to the expressionist narrative with allegorical pictoriality which, as Wilhemina Stuyver describes, is 'one of the most important stylistic means of Expressionism to make the essence of things stylistically accessible by means of verbal artistry' (Stuyver 1939: 42).

Structuring the text along specific points where the film needs to be cut, Mayer anticipates not only the cinematography but the eventual editing process, providing implicit 'cut' points, such as 'and now', 'now', 'but then' that instruct the reader, camera, editor and viewer to redirect, focus, or change their gaze and attention. As Mayer's involvement with the technical aspects of filmmaking (especially editing) progressed in the 1920s, his screenplays increasingly reflected the need for a clear structure. Interestingly, he again chooses to manipulate literary language in order to achieve this aim: similarly to *Tartuff*, one can observe that Mayer deploys literary means to indicate the flow of images. His use of 'and now' and 'now' to indicate cuts is a similar device to his use of temporal adverbs to indicate simultaneousness. Despite this new focus on the technical dimension of the screenplay, Mayer continues to explore the representation of internal conditions on the page. He directly signifies hesitation and explicitly prompts the reader to question the information she is provided with:

29. Atelier  
Nocturnal bedroom  
Shot: (above two farmers' bed to the door)  
Moonlight.  
The woman sleeps in front.  
Quiet.

Seconds so.  
But now:  
Is the door opening?  
Then now The man?  
Staring within.  
With a shy back.  
Seconds.  
Now: He enters on tiptoes.  
Now: Does he stop?  
Burdened with a bad conscience?  
Finally: He turns.  
Slowly. Heavy.  
So he walks.  
Quietly.  
But heavy always.  
To his bed.  
Heavy seated.

[...]

Large:        So he lies.  
              Still suited.  
              With unmoving open eyes.  
              Staring into the apparatus.  
              Long.  
              And still.  
              Finally:

Beginning cross-fade? Then: On the bottom of the  
frame?

Waves?  
Ever clearer?  
But then: Really!

Very slow cross-fade to:  
Waves hitting the shore at night.  
(Mayer 1927: *Sunrise*, Script, Extract)

‘To his bed/Heavy seated’ (*An sein Bett / Schwer sich dort setzend*) is another awkward grammatical construction in German. It combines the active and passive tense by describing the action of the subject in the passive tense. Unnatural and not strictly necessary to convey a simple instruction, Mayer must be pursuing a different objective for using this form. As previously noted, Mayer uses different tenses to signify different intentions. He interjects his, often elaborate, grammatical constructions with single nouns. Modern screenplays utilise single nouns in every

single scene to provide unambiguous indication of, for example, NIGHT INT. or DAY EXT. Mayer's screenplays extend the principle of the visual self-sufficiency of nouns further by applying the principle to not only the indication of location but, by using the single noun as a focal point for the camera, to indicate the content of each frame by providing the subject of each shot.

In the second part of the scene, Mayer visually describes what is in fact an internal, psychological condition (the man wrangling with himself if he should kill his wife). This conflict, by virtue of being a psychological conflict and therefore something that can only be externalised through performance, is not something that can be visually represented *per se* and is therefore effectively implied through sentences such as '*In bösem Gewissen benommen?*'/ Burdened with a bad conscience?', which serve no literal, visually descriptive purpose, other than a possible acting direction. The screenplay here creates its own narrative that is translated to the screen without Mayer's authorial questioning to the reader.

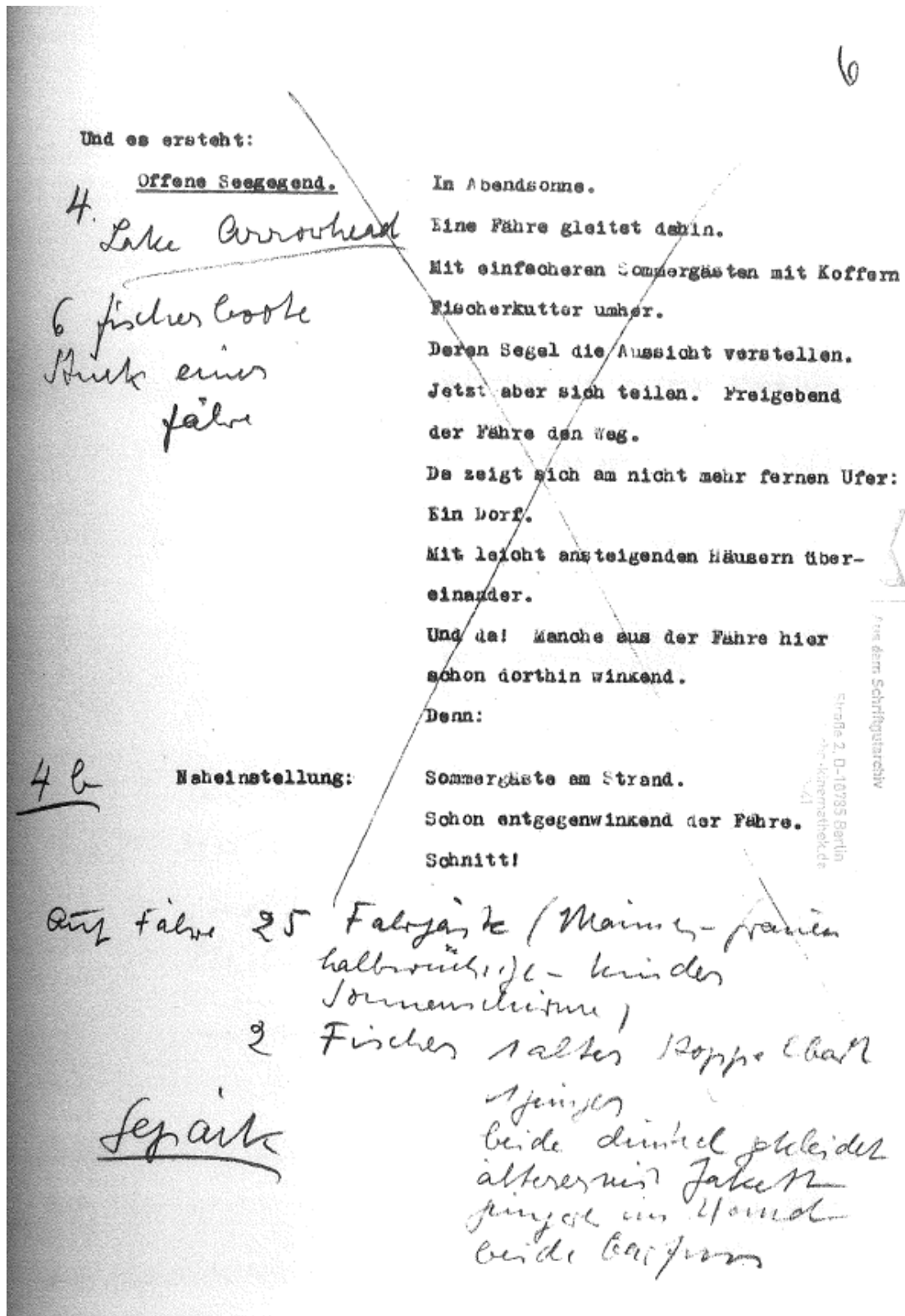


Figure 10: Extract from screenplay *Sunrise* (1927) with annotations by F.W. Murnau, SDK

Figure 10, an extract from Mayer's original German screenplay for *Sunrise*, contains a number of annotations by Murnau. His notes, including 'Six fishing boats, on a ferry, 25 passengers, men, women, teenagers, children, parasols' are all additions to Mayer's original:

Open sea: In evening sun.  
A ferry is gliding along.  
With common summer guest with suitcases.  
[Unknown] along.  
Sails obstructing the view.  
But now parting. Opening  
The ferry its path.  
Now revealing itself on the far shore:  
A village.  
With slightly steepening houses  
Overlapping  
And there! Some on the ferry here  
Waving there already  
Then:  
Closer frame: Summer guests on the beach.  
Already waving to the ferry  
Cut!

(Translation of Figure 10: Mayer 1927: *Sunrise*, Script, Extract)

Arguably, Mayer's version of the scene is atmospherically constructive rather than visually prescriptive. It lacks detail in terms of the visual realisation but provides information on the composition of the image, which is then filled with Murnau's specific instructions. The extract contains a number of Mayer's most common stylistic features for composition: singular conjunction, isolated adverbs, and single nouns. What does this imply? Mayer here provides Murnau with a scenic template he can use to populate physical reality. It renders the screenplay a literary precedent that is transformed into an industrial blueprint by the director himself. This use of the screenplay makes it more than, and certainly different from, a straightforward production tool. Equally, it is important to note that Mayer producing a 'literary precedent' does not imply that he was not specific about how *he* saw camera



movements and the composition of the frames. Rather, Murnau (as before in *Tartüff*) simply disregards some of Mayer's indicated suggestions. The uncertainty such changes impose on the screenplay's form encapsulate the key existential threat to the screenplay as a self-contained form of literary visual endeavour. With Mayer's writing so sparse and intentional that individual words carry fundamental meaning, what is the impact of Murnau's red pen?

The section 'Now revealing itself on the far shore / A village' reverses the notion of the camera/reader as the seeing/acting subject, as Mayer employs the passive tense to let the seen village reveal itself, rather than being discovered by the camera/viewer. This, for a screenplay needlessly unusual, grammatical construction mimics the *feeling* the scene is meant to invoke in the reader/viewer rather than the informational value a simple instruction (such as, 'We see a village on the far shore') would provide. Mayer thereby utilises the screenplay in the same fashion poetry uses language to create perspective, mood and impression. However, Mayer combines this conventionally poetic manipulation of language with the drastic compression that is most common to the screenplay in all traditions (including today), thereby creating a unique effect, both strongly evocative and extremely sparse.

Mayer's screenplay lacks specificity on a practical level and seems to aim for a universal timelessness that can be observed, for example, by his generic naming of characters as 'Woman', 'Wife' or 'Husband'. Furthermore, his settings, while often loosely contemporary, lack a firm geographical space and, through the ambiguity of time and place, retain their allegorical quality. Mayer's screenplays are narrative scaffolding that can, such as the *Sunrise* script, be filled by the specifics a director brings to the visualisation, such as adding 25 passengers to a ferry. However, its atmospheric quality elevates Mayer's script beyond the mere framework of a story to

an independent narrative. Mayer *composed* scenes as images, imaginatively subverting seemingly technical language to draw interior conflict into the visible frame. This approach of merging the narrative with the technical, the practical with the imaginary, is a feature that distinguishes Mayer's writing from both commercial screenwriters in studio systems such as the US, as well as the expressionist poets in Germany who did not seek out language's potential for visual representation (in contrast to their contemporaries, the US Imagist poets). By attempting not only to render a literary text a technical document with much more specific aims than those of the standardised screenplays in the American studios, but by also expanding on precedents in expressionist poetry to achieve this aim, Mayer subverted technical language into a poetic form.

#### 3.4 *Der Letzte Mann*: Towards a New Objectivity

Having identified the key formal features that make Mayer's screenplays a fertile source for discussion of the screenplay in context to literary modernism in general, and Expressionism in particular, I would like to conclude by considering one of his best-known and most acclaimed films, *Der Letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924), to propose an extension of scope for Mayer's contextualisation within Weimar modernisms. Written and produced relatively early, during the most productive (and successful) part of Mayer's career in the early 1920s, *The Last Laugh* showcases many of his described stylistic features but *also* points to a move beyond an exclusive association with Expressionism towards an engagement with the second prominent strain of Weimar modernism, New Objectivity.

New Objectivity presented a significant shift away from Expressionism and reflected the changing conditions in the Weimar Republic since the end of World War I. As Dennis Crockett explains:

Hartlaub's *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition coincided with a major transformation in Germany's economy and self-image. The United States was widely perceived in Germany as model of political stability and economic strength. When Germany adopted the Dawes Plan in 1924, Germans in general eagerly embraced everything they believed to be American.

(Crockett 1999: 157)

During a period of relative economic stabilisation in the Weimar Republic, the turn towards an American ideal began to be reflected not just economically but culturally by an increasing infatuation with popular entertainment, which was furthermore reflected in that:

The German cinema became more technologically advanced, there was a move toward more realistic stories in more contemporary settings, a development accelerated in the stabilised period by the attempt to approximate American filmmaking.

(McCormick 1994: 7-8)

As previously noted, the German film industry had expanded significantly both during and after World War I and international successes, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, had established Germany as a serious contender in the international film market. (The impact of Hollywood on German filmmaking was not one-sided either, as the influence of expressionist lighting especially was visible long before Hollywood decided to embrace film noir in the 1940s (Schrader 1972: 9-10).)

In contrast to Expressionism, which was essentially backward looking in its, previously highlighted, indebtedness to nineteenth century philosophy and utilisation of both Baroque and German classicism, New Objectivity embraced industrial modernisation as Germans imitated the technical innovation they had seen transform living standards in the United States not only in industrial production but also in their cultural identity. This turn towards the new world also led to the absorption to some American cultural values, notably:

The so-called "New Objectivity" in the arts and culture of the Weimar Republic was characterized by an erosion of the boundary between the

"high culture" associated with the bourgeois public sphere and new forms of mass culture directed at other classes in the emerging modern consumer society.  
(McCormick 1994: 1)

Yet, this reorientation towards an American model of rationalisation and standardisation was not embraced by all:

Béla Balázs had criticised the trends associated with the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' because they showed how contemporary life was becoming commodified. Industrial rationalization was reducing human beings to a mechanical role [...] and the cult of 'Sachlichkeit' was merely an aesthetic reflection of that process and a manifestation of the 'reification' of culture under bourgeois capitalism.  
(Midgley 2000: 43)

In comparison to German Expressionism, New Objectivity rejected romantic anti-capitalism in favour of technocracy and while its representational art was 'equated with political conservatism almost from the outset' (Makela 2002: 39), it is its fascination with the 'new' (McCormick 1994: 6) and its subsequent disregard for established cultural hierarchies that provides a useful link when considering the screenplay as a literary form within Weimar's cultural landscape.

Written in the early 1920s, *Der Letzte Mann* is a film deeply steeped in a focus on the interior condition of the individual, but it presents its nineteenth century conflicts through a twentieth century lens. In its subject matter, *Der Letzte Mann* is probably Mayer's most specifically 'German' film: The story of social degradation of a hotel porter to a toilet attendant once he is considered too old for the porter position (and his subsequent miraculous good fortune derived from an unexpected inheritance) addresses deep-seated anxieties in German society that were activated and amplified during the years of hyperinflation and economic crisis. The loss of prized social status, signified through the loss of uniform, hit a nerve for both the working and the middle classes and highlighted that while modernity had brought progress and devastation alike, it had not freed the individual from the societal pressures of rank. It

also provided insight into how Germany was changing: ‘Murnau and Mayer juxtapose the uniform (the central sign in the language of social rank) with money (the central sign in the language of social class)’ (Loader 1988: 46). This juxtaposition of uniform and money can be read as an allegory of a transforming Germany and an extension of the juxtaposition between what Expression and New Objectivity respectively represent. To attach social rank to a uniform is irrational when compared to measuring an individual’s success by their material wealth. But the irrational importance placed on the ‘old’ signifiers of social rank is deep-rooted and part of the national identity that was challenged after the loss of the war. The societal shifts taking place in the Weimar Republic were of a progressive nature and the cultural shift away from the morbid (the war) and the mystical (the monarchy) reflected this. Colquhoun’s table contrasts the characteristics of Expressionism with Post-Expressionism and highlights the divide between these Weimar modernisms:

<b>Expressionism</b>	<b>Post-Expressionism</b>
Ecstatic objects	Sober objects
Extravagant	Severe, puritanical
Warm	Cool, even cold
Like unfinished stone	Like polished metal
Rich in diagonals, tilting, often pointed	Usually at right angles, parallel to the frame
Contesting the limits	Respecting the frame
Primitive	Cultivated

(Colquhoun 1994: 29)

What becomes evident from this direct comparison is the divide between the warm, primitive extravagance of the pre-war movement and the cold, cultivated puritanism

of the post-war movement. Echoing Expressionism's roots in the visual arts, Colquhoun's comparison focuses on the physically tangible and discards what can be described as 'mood' (which is arguably a large proportion of what Expressionism aims to achieve). Whereas New Objectivity across the arts, architecture and literature rejected the self-reflective – essentially Romantic – introspection of the expressionists, its opponents criticised the industrialisation of art and its de facto reduction to a commodity in capitalist society.

However, while New Objectivity gives the impression of aligning itself with the more positivist modernist movements (such as American Modernism), its pre-eminent examples in German visual art instead hint at the opposite and point towards a more critical – yet sober – realist reflection of the world around them. One can locate *Der Letzte Mann* (1924) alongside other unsentimentally realistic depictions of post-WW I Germany by artists such as Otto Dix and Georg Grosz; the film's style making full use of the technological capabilities of both camera and editing. But it is not a clear designation, as the film's ending (revised at behest of UFA) offers relief from Mayer's original – uncompromisingly bleak – outcome for the main character when it provides an unexpected (and unconvincing) happy ending. The reason for this dual nature of the film, combining harsh social realism with a Hollywood-worthy happy ending, gives critical insight to Mayer's working relationship with UFA. According to producer Erich Pommer, it took ten conversations with Mayer to convince him to rewrite the ending (Huaco 1965: 55). Given this interesting compromise of a 'film within a film' (faintly echoing *Caligari*, which was likely one of the reasons why UFA executives agreed to the structure), it would have been particularly interesting to evaluate the screenplay text independently from the film. Unfortunately, no copy of *Der Letzte Mann* has survived. Jürgen Kasten notes that

between 1924 and 1928, only five scenes from the screenplay were retained via inclusion in teaching books (Kasten 1994: 179), which were also used to promote the film.

Despite the absence of the screenplay text, the film of *Der Letzte Mann* can provide clues to Mayer's influence. In the scene of the film when the porter's aunt arrives at the hotel and realises that he has been demoted to become a toilet attendant, the camera moves quickly from the shocked porter's face to a close up of the incredulous aunt. Rather than cutting between the two shots, Mayer asked the cameraman Karl Freund if it would be possible to station the camera on wheels and move it between the actors (Freund 1947: 79). One can argue that this suggestion is less concerned with innovation in camera technique itself but an attempt to use the technical capacity of the camera to create narrative rhythm. As previous textual examples have shown, Mayer commonly used indication for cuts as a narrative device and accounted for them by adding conjunctions and adverbs, formally noting where and how a written image begins and ends. And while we cannot pinpoint the influence of the concerns of New Objectivity formally in the missing screenplay of *The Last Laugh*, its subject matter, and the way it was presented objectively without inward sentimentality, aligns it with this contemporaneous movement.

In the discussion of the screenplay as a form of literary modernism, and Mayer's work example of that argument, *The Last Laugh* can show us that Mayer's incorporation of expressionist literary devices was not a single instance of the screenplay's engagement with modernism in the Weimar Republic. On the contrary, it highlights the porous nature between literary practices and innovation in the screenplay form.

### 3.5 Conclusions

It is no wonder that historians have long been seduced by the Weimar Republic. It seems though the experience of a century was condensed into thirteen and a half years.  
(Crocket 1999: xvii)

If we accept Michael North's argument that 'modernism itself, as a pan-artistic movement begins with the critical interrogation of the relationship between text and image' (North 2005: 12), then Carl Mayer's screenwriting practice provides a vital component to understanding modernism in the Weimar Republic. Based on the formal assessment of three of Mayer's screenplays, and the characteristics indicated by the finished film of *Der Letzte Mann* in the absence of Mayer's screenplay, it is evident that his screenwriting practice exceeded any 'blue-print' function and contributed to a new engagement connecting words with images. What is more difficult however, is how to position Mayer's work within the previously set parameters of canonical modernisms. Given his deep connection to the beginnings of what can (loosely) be called German expressionist film and his use of expressionist literary devices in some of his screenplays, Mayer's work can arguably be situated within an expressionist body of work. Equally, however, what this chapter has demonstrated is that Mayer transcends this easy categorisation and that his work highlights the transitional, self-conscious nature of the screenplay, proving that while it was not a static technical aid that evolved merely to accommodate industrial requirements, it also transcended its literary contemporaries by increasing its expressive capacity, especially through its anticipation and evocation of emotional responses transcending the 'intermedial gap' in the process. Through Mayer, the screenplay took a new form entirely, one that turned the screenplay into the emotional and rhythmic heart of a film that directors could spell out into images.



Mayer was, similarly to Anita Loos in the United States, the highest paid screenwriter in his national film industry (Kasten 1994: 34). However, in contrast to Loos, whose direct engagement with American modernism was via her prose rather than her screenwriting, this chapter has shown how Mayer's screenplays utilise the tools of literary modernism to advance the screenplay form itself, independently – but concurrently – to literary modernism. During the Weimar Republic, the barriers between the old institutions of 'high' culture and mass culture were eroded not only through increased availability (and success) of popular art, such as the cinema, but also through the changes in modernism itself that can be traced in the evolution from Expressionism towards New Objectivity.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Anita Loos was a writer known for her wit and wise-cracking turn of phrase in her intertitles (Carey 1972: 39ff). Mayer, who has been referred to a 'screenplay poet' (Kasten 1994: 276ff) however 'would dispense with titles altogether for *Der Letzte Mann* (1924) and use them only sparingly in *Sunrise* (1927) [...]' (Price 2013: 107). Yet, Mayer's screenplays show much more visible literary traces than those of Loos. Therefore, the most ostensibly literary device in a screenplay can be seen to have little impact on its perceived literariness at all. And while the previous chapter established connections between Loos's screenplays and techniques employed by American modernists on how they attempted to recreate the visual in written form, Mayer's work can lead us one step further in the evaluation of the screenplay's potential: his attempt to trigger emotional responses that mimic the reactions evoked in audiences upon watching a film exceeds the objective of both the screenplay as blue-print and, I think importantly, the screenplay as literature, as the intention of Mayer's screenplay is not that of a final literary experience but that of a visually evocative encounter as a first step in a filmic

realisation. Therefore, recalling Ted Nannicelli's argument that intention and 'creators' successfully realised inventions determine artefact kind membership' (Nannicelli 2013: 34), I argue that Mayer's screenplays, which he specifically aimed to *be* films, are an intermedial form of writing that *combine* written and visual narratives, utilising the techniques of literary modernism.

## Chapter 4: Adrian Brunel: The Screenplay as Professional Practice

Some will, I expect, disagree with my theories, but I shall welcome their reactions.  
(Brunel 1948: 11)

In his memoir about his life in the film industry, *Nice Work* (1949), British writer-director Adrian Brunel recounts an incident when he was invited to lunch at the house of a ‘very famous novelist’ who had been commissioned to write a screenplay. Brunel recalls drily that

[...] why he should have been commissioned to write the script himself baffled me, when there were plenty of script-writers about, who [...] were usually called in to clean up the mess that the novelist [...] made.  
(Brunel 1949: 87)

Although merely an anecdote, this statement neatly summarises why Brunel’s work provides useful reference points for the evaluation of the screenplay and its relationship to contemporary literary modernisms. Having worked as a director, screenwriter, editor and producer, Brunel – despite occasionally penning the odd play for a pay cheque – positioned screenwriting as a defined skill set, best applied by trained professionals and distinct from other forms of writing, leading him to question why novelists should write screenplays if there were designated professionals for the job.

In this third case study, I will explore the concept of professionalization in screenwriting, using the example of Adrian Brunel’s early twentieth century screenwriting practice in Britain, to evaluate the influence of artistic professionalization on the screenplay’s development as a form of literary modernism. Situating Brunel’s work in the cultural context of inter-war London, with particular reference to the Bloomsbury Group, I aim to show how professionalization was a development not limited to the commercial arts, such as the film industry, but one that

gained traction through its interaction with cultural practices previously separate from commercial enterprise. By evaluating Adrian Brunel's career trajectory from 'start-up' producer to government propaganda filmmaker and studio employee in the context of contemporaneous modernist practice in Britain, the chapter will focus to a lesser extent on the formal assessment of Brunel's screenplays, instead aiming to highlight how screenwriting as professional practice was positioned alongside, and in dialogue with, the modernist movements surrounding it. Bridget Conor has argued that 'screenwriting is a fully industrial creative labour form' (Conor 2014: 46) and that it should therefore be 'separated out from the theorizations of other creative labour forms' (Conor 2014: 46). Although Conor's categorisation of screenwriting is correct, this chapter aims to show that the screenplay's industrial nature, while a defining and pervasive characteristic, is also an extension of the increasing professionalization across a range of literary practices during the first decades of the twentieth century and therefore an indication of the screenplay's connection to contemporaneous modernist literary practice.

As London became home to internationalist modernist movements such as Imagism in the 1910s, outlined in Chapter Two, more domestically focused groups, such as the influential Bloomsbury Group, created modernist practices reflecting distinctly English sensibilities that were ostensibly situated outside of the commercial cultural sphere. However, by highlighting how Bloomsbury's supposed 'amateurs' engaged with the growing class of creative professionals – and indeed professionalised themselves – I will show that the 'lingering view of the Bloomsbury Group as signifiers of high culture's "intellectual elite" – an association premised upon an elision of the marketplace' (Garrity 1999: 30) disregards how professionalization in the commercial arts influenced their practice and how modern

market forces governing the popular arts simultaneously created a ‘self-defined marketing segment, the world of Bloomsbury’ (Wicke 1994: 5). Identifying the reciprocal relationships and porous boundaries between professional and amateur practitioners, I will argue that the screenplay’s development in Britain during the 1910s and 20s was not confined to industrial sphere but influenced by interactive cultural encounters, positioning it within a broader context of British literary modernism.

Arguably one of, if not the, best known modernist ‘coterie’, the Bloomsbury Group started as an informal meeting of friends, initiated by Thoby Stephens (brother of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf) who invited university friends to his home for discussions on art and culture (Goodwin 2011:60). With ten key members (Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, E.M Forster, John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant and Desmond MacCarthy), the group was essentially a private club with no stated objective and Leonard Woolf later explained that the Bloomsbury Group ‘had no common theory, system, or principles which we wanted to convert the world to’ (Woolf 1964: 25). With ‘membership’ awarded ‘on the basis of a shared upper-middle to upper-class intellectual class position’ (Wicke 1994:9) – as artist and writer Wyndham Lewis acerbically put it, ‘its foundation-members consisted of moneyed middle class descendants of Victorian literary splendour’ (Lewis 1930: 123) – Bloomsbury’s wide-ranging engagement with literature and the visual arts (amongst other occupations) apparently represents, in its ostensible amateurism (despite its many professional engagements outlined later in the chapter) the antithesis of industrialised cultural practice.

By default, the concept of the artist as ‘gentleman-amateur’ on a private income stands in direct contrast to the salaried professional film worker such as

Adrian Brunel. But comparing what could be called Bloomsbury's 'disguised' professionalism, that is, participation of amateurs in the professional sphere without a primary commercial objective, in which 'the market is perceived to be a shadowy common room within which acts of much creative magic or transforming potential can be performed' (Wicke 1994:21) to the professionalization of film workers who – through the adoption of professional codes – aimed to elevate themselves from being craftspeople, highlights that despite their inherent differences, both amateurs and professionals gravitated towards a shared space defined by restricted specialist knowledge.

It is at this intersection, between the consciously commercial arts of film workers in Soho and the amateur experimenters on private incomes in Bloomsbury and Kensington that this chapter will explore the common ground that manifested in the creation of the Film Society, which held screenings of artistically outstanding films for its members. Alongside Brunel, another founding member, Iris Barry, one of Britain's first film critics (and subsequent founder of the Museum of Art Film Library in New York) (Sitton 2014: xiv) who was loosely associated with the Bloomsbury set via her relationship with Wyndham Lewis, can provide insight to the connection between modernist amateurs and professional creatives.

In the second part of the chapter, I will examine extracts from some of Brunel's early screenplays which, while formally less innovative than the screenplays in the previous case studies, provide insight on contemporary screenplay conventions in Britain and how the screenplay was employed during the production process. In addition, I will discuss Brunel's book-length screenwriting manual *Film Script: The Technique of Writing for the Screen* (1948) to highlight how the formalisation of screenwriting knowledge (in addition to the standardisation of screenwriting practice)

was an important contributing factor to the specialisation and therefore professionalization of screenwriters.

As this chapter will show, artistic professionalization was a development that connected the previously dissociated commercial artists (i.e. creative workers) with amateur artists whose practice was insulated from market forces through patronage. Identifying specific points of reciprocal influence between them, I argue that early screenwriting in Britain developed as part of an interactive cultural landscape that aligns – rather than distances – the screenplay to contemporaneous modernist forms.

#### 4.1 The Professionals: Film as craft

In this first part of this chapter, I will outline Brunel's professional trajectory from self-taught screenwriter to studio contracted director to elucidate the evolution of professional screenwriting practice in Britain at the beginning of the last century. Examining the different stages of Brunel's career in the broader context of professionalization of the British film industry, I will show how Brunel's screenwriting practice was informed by professionalization and influenced the development of the screenplay form.

Adrian Brunel's birth in 1892 roughly coincided with the beginnings of film. The son of a drama teacher, Brunel was an early enthusiast of the cinema and during his initial training as an opera singer, began writing about films in local Brighton and Sussex papers. While researching a local studio in 1912, he was given the chance opportunity to play Lysistrata in an adaptation of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Brunel 1949: 18) and as a result of this experience, took an interest in scenario writing, teaching himself the 'technique – such as it was – to write 'bioscope plays''

(Brunel 1949:20). Shortly after in 1914, Brunel began to work at the film distributor Moss Empires Bioscope in Soho.

Having volunteered and been rejected for active army duty in World War I, Brunel remained as his position at Moss Empires where he was responsible for arranging the bookings of films with cinemas across the country. In this capacity, Brunel engaged with both producers and filmmakers, acquiring extensive knowledge about the commercial aspects of the film business. After less than two years at the firm, Brunel decided to become a producer himself and wrote to the playwright George Bernard Shaw to ask permission to produce his play *You Never Can Tell*. Shaw declined via postcard, asserting: 'If I meddle with the cinema theatre, I shall write expressly for it' (Brunel 1949: 33), possibly sowing a first seed of recognition for the specificity of the screenplay in Brunel.

Despite this early rejection, Brunel left film distribution and founded a production company called 'Mirror Films' with his school friend Harry Fowler Mear. Together with Fowler Mear, he attended a screenwriting school, leaving unimpressed (Brunel 1949: 34), but subsequently writing his first screenplay *In Old Madrid* (1920). Employing his wife and friends as actors, the film was produced with private funding. However, this first foray into filmmaking produced a loss with the film negative scratched by a faulty measuring machine, making the film unusable. As a result, Mirror Films folded and Fowler Mear lost his investment of £700 (equal to approx. £130,000 in 2018). Nevertheless, the trade papers picked up on Brunel's effort, describing him as 'Britain's youngest producer' (Brunel 1949: 36) and facilitating his transition from amateur enthusiast to professional filmmaker.

After this disastrous first venture, Brunel joined the war effort by becoming a member of the newly created Film Department in the Ministry of Information,



producing propaganda films. In the context of efforts to professionalise film production across western film industries, the axioms laid down by the members of the new department as the basis of their work warrant consideration:

1. Full-time employees of the Film Department must be film experts. 2. In all our films we should strive, within the limitation of our knowledge of the facts, to tell the truth, and when hitting the Germans, we should aim at the “Prussian” and never hit below the belt. 3. In all our films, authors and producers were urged to look after the entertainment quality of their product, and the propaganda would look after itself. We would rather have a good film with ninety per cent entertainment and ten percent propaganda, than one with ninety percent propaganda and ten percent entertainment.  
(Brunel 1949: 40)

While in some aspects specific to propaganda, these ‘rules’ are helpful to identify some of Brunel’s key insights on screenwriting which he still advocated in his screenwriting manual some thirty years later.

Firstly, a strong emphasis on expertise: by introducing a qualification-based threshold as a requirement for employment, the film department elevated itself to the status of other government departments, which required specific expertise as a prerequisite for employment and bestowed a degree of professional prestige as a result. By adopting the stance that film production is an activity analogous to professions such as medicine and the law, film workers positioned themselves as rigorously trained experts with specialist skills. For screenwriting as the least ‘technical’ of film crafts, this is important ‘because [...] an increasing level of professionalization and specialization and a corresponding effort [helped] to justify the practices that were being established as the craft of screenwriting (Macdonald 2010: 75). A second requirement of the workers in the Film Department was the consideration of ‘truth’ and ‘fairness’. As described in Chapter Three, the (still relatively recent) introduction of the moving image presented a naturalism to audiences that suggested a realistic representation of physical reality, which was

undermined after more experimental forms, such as expressionist film, distorted this realism by moving ‘beyond conventional notions of reality, as established by realist and naturalist traditions’ (Hake 2005: 325). Therefore, the insistence on ‘truth within the limitation of our knowledge’ can be read as an acknowledgement of both film’s capacity to shape perceived truth through naturalistic representation, as well as the limitations on the concept of naturalistic representation given filmmakers’ abilities to distort it. Lastly, a specific emphasis is placed on entertainment, acknowledging the importance of audience reception for the success of a film. By recognising that entertainment could be propaganda but that propaganda in itself could not be entertainment, Brunel highlights the potential of popular film to take a variety of guises beyond entertainment itself. And, as shown later in the discussion of his screenwriting manual, Brunel put audience demands at the core of screenplay development, therefore acknowledging early on that popular culture ‘emerged as a consequence of the shift from product to consumer’ (O’Sullivan 2017: 286).

As part of his work at the Film Department, Brunel experimented with the form of propaganda films and developed so-called ‘film tags’, which were ‘short propaganda film[s] of about two minutes in length, which the Ministry of Information made for the various Government departments and issued to the newsreels for incorporating in their bi-weekly gazettes’ (Brunel 1949: 44). Film tags provided Brunel with the opportunity to produce short films which had to meet a number of requirements (to be entertaining while simultaneously conveying sufficiently patriotic messages), therefore affording the opportunity to learn to write screenplays to specific briefs. To effectively ‘train’ as a screenwriter as part of a government propaganda department was unusual but replicated, in its institutionalised setting, an environment not unlike that of a commercial film studio. Extending the comparison, it is

noteworthy that propaganda films produced by a government department ensured, by their very nature, a significant audience reach and therefore an inherent degree of cultural resonance that was however different to that afforded by audience selection alone, i.e. that of popular culture, which, recalling James O'Sullivan's argument, 'is mass culture having survived societal selection' (O'Sullivan 2017: 285).

After the war, Brunel left the Film Department and re-entered the industry. From 1925, he was employed by Gainsborough Pictures (Botting 2015: 155) and his full-time employment with the studio coincided with a period of increasing professionalization across the British film industry over the course of the late 1910s and 1920, which aligns with similar developments in both Germany and the US (Scholz 2016: 68-76). Charles Burr divides the period of British pre-1930 film history into three main stages:

1. Early or primitive cinema, from 1895 to around 1907.
  2. A period of rapid transition, at the level of both film form and production methods.
  3. A more settled period, starting around 1916, by which time certain standardised patterns of production and marketing are in place.
- (Burr 2009: 145)

But despite industrialising production and the adoption of an American-inspired 'central producer' system, as employed by Hollywood studio such as Paramount Pictures, with a 'modern manager of a well-organised mass production system [...] to produce the quality multi-reel film' (Staiger 1985: 134) (albeit on a smaller scale), British films struggled to reach the same audiences as the more popular, imported American films (Gledhill 2009: 160). Theoretically, the British film industry should have been in a favourable position: readymade distribution to British territories across the globe provided vast opportunities, but with competition from both American and, increasingly, European films, Britain resorted to a government-led protectionist approach to support its film industry. To fend off the threat of foreign films, the

Cinematograph Films Act was passed in 1927, specifying that exhibitors' programmes must include at least 7.5% of British films (Nelmes 2003: 324). In order to be considered a British film the following requirements had to be met:

1. The film must be made by a British or British controlled company.
  2. Studio scenes must be photographed within a film studio in the British Empire.
  3. The author of the scenario or the original work the screenplay was based on must be a British Subject.
  4. At least 75% of the salaries must be paid to British Subjects, excluding the costs of two persons at least one of which must be an actor.
- (Nelmes 2003: 324-325)

Assessed purely on the basis of production numbers, the quota act was successful:

The ten-year life of the Act saw a dramatic increase in the number of British films, with some 1,600 films produced and Britain becoming the most substantial source of production in Europe.  
(Ryall 2009: 203)

But the critical reception of 1920s British film was poor, especially that of the infamous 'quota quickies' produced to meet the 1927 Films Act, in comparison to critically lauded European productions as Christine Gledhill notes in her contribution to *The British Cinema Book* (2009):

The films of the 1920s have been castigated for evading the social changes that were accelerated by the Great War and climaxed in the class struggles of the General Strike. Found equally lacking is any substantial engagement with the modernist practices explored by the European avant-garde. Rather these films adopt a whimsical or feyness of tone, espousing romanticist escape into costume and disguise, using late Victorian and Edwardian popular, middle-brow sources and aesthetic predilections. As 'signs of the times', then these films reveal their engagement in indirect, implicit ways.  
(Gledhill 2009: 163)

Her assessment here indicates that British films of the late 1920s did not address relevant contemporary themes nor explored formal innovation in the vein of Germany's embrace of expressionist film. However, when considering Brunel's 'experimental' short films during the mid-1920s, she shows how Brunel engaged in filmmaking that was more innovative:

Adrian Brunel made a series of burlesques for Gainsborough in the mid-1920s while he waited for feature-length assignments, in which he also performed in various guises. Made on a shoestring budget, using his own back garden as setting and found footage as linkage, his parodies were spun out of verbal-visual punning and chop-logic juxtapositions playing on the absurdities to be drawn out of a range of popular cultural forms and practices: the travel film in *Crossing the Great Sagrade* (1924); film newsreels in *The Typical Budget* (1925); the boxing film and tourism in *Battling Bruisers* (1925); censorship in *Cut It Out: A Day in a Life of a Censor* (1925) and so on. (Gledhill 2009: 168)

Interestingly, these non-commercial ‘play-pieces’ were sharper and more socially conscious than Brunel’s previous work, addressing some of the criticisms of the film industry Gledhill raised previously:

In these parodies, acerbically inclined child’s play brings down the adult world of respectable authority figures and cultural forms, whether representing governments, nations or film industries. [...] The verbal-visual game-playing and illogical silliness [...], sliding cheerfully between parody and pastiche, bring culturally grounded stereotypes and attitudes into public visibility. (Gledhill 2009:168)

Brunel’s subsequent, and best-known, studio film *Blighty* (1927), a World War I themed film with a focus on the home front, can be seen as an extension of this approach.

In a 2015 article, Josephine Botting argues that *Blighty* takes an innovative approach to war films in that it does not emphasise military action but centres its narrative on domestic themes. Suggesting that ‘*Blighty* is ‘in some ways an [...] example of Brunel’s ability to combine his, admittedly modest, artistic ambitions with the necessity of appealing to a mainstream audience’ (Botting 2015: 153), she highlights that Brunel’s unusual take on the war film genre was a compromise between assuaging a conservative studio and a consistency with his personal political views (Botting 1927: 155, 168). While Brunel wrote the screenplay collaboratively (although it is Eliot Stannard and Ivor Montagu who share the writing credit) (Brunel

1949: 127), the film echoes the principles Brunel subscribed to when joining the Film Department during the war and its subsequent commercial and critical success supports Brunel's focus on an audience-led approach to story development.

With *Blighty* only briefly preceding the Films Act, it is noteworthy that Brunel's most productive professional period was in fact during the lifetime of the Act and he directed numerous 'quota quickies' in the early 1930s subsequent to his studio films *The Constant Nymph* (1928), *The Vortex* (1928), *A Light Woman* (1928) and *The Crooked Billet* (1929) until he was effectively blacklisted by the studio over a legal dispute (Brunel 1949: 155ff). But comparing Brunel's work within the studio system with his previous work on propaganda films, the continued progression towards professionalising film – and by extension screenwriting practice – in order to empower cultural workers is a persistently prominent dimension. Thomas Strychacz argues for the importance of professionalization to gain position as

Professionals were able to establish new sources and kinds of authority, not least of which was their avowed autonomy within new corporate and bureaucratic structures. Certainly, the common perception that professionals constitute uniquely neutral, impartial groups existing outside the conventional class divisions, standing apart from corporate modes of production, has accorded them great prestige.  
(Strychacz 1993: 22)

Strychacz's description of professionals as 'neutral' and 'impartial' suggests the attempt of cultural producers to be perceived as objective experts similar to engineers or civil servants – professions of growing centrality and prestige in late Imperial Britain – that in turn aligns them with the later formalist New Critics, as described by Latham and Rogers: 'rigorously trained experts (rather than simple people of taste)' (Latham and Rogers 2015: 43).

Arguably, increasing professionalization also had a positive impact on the quality of British films as

By 1926, [...] things were starting to change: 1. A new and business-like body of filmmakers was emerging. It's as if enterprise and innovation had skipped a generation, but now returned. [...] 2. The Film Society was founded in London in 1925 to show important new films from abroad as well as significant revivals, and to act as a forum for discussion. (Burr 2009: 150)

This 'renaissance' of British film in the late 1920s coincided with the height of Brunel's career at Gainsborough before he ceased work with the studio at the end of the decade.

Finding himself without a studio contract, Brunel took on a variety of assignments, some of which can provide insight on how he engaged with the nature of the film medium and the intermedial connections between visual and narrative art.

About his production of an animated cartoon films for Sir Gordon Craig's *Bonzo* series, he remarks:

In theory, the writing of cartoon film scripts should be one the most satisfying and fascinating forms of writing, for there are no technical or natural limits of one's imagination and one is as free as air. I wonder what sort of films William Blake would have written and drawn? Or teaming writer and artist, what would have resulted from the collaboration of Swift with Gilray, Shelley with Turner, and Lewis Carroll with Sir John Tenniel? I wonder. (Brunel 1949: 111)

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Brunel's fantasy of writers and artists collaborating became an increasing reality, albeit removed from the professional studios of conventional film production. Experimental, privately funded networks such as POOL, financed by Bryher, brought together modernist writers like H.D. with industry professionals such as the cinema critic and writer Robert Herring (Townsend 2019a: 2, 4), publishing *Close Up* and books, as well as producing Kenneth Macpherson's avant-garde feature *Borderline* (1930). As Chris Townsend has argued, the prolific participation of professionals affiliated with POOL shows that this private coterie cannot be 'constituted within literary modernism, but rather represents the

reciprocal intercalation of modernism within the media industry and the media industry within modernism' (Townsend 2019a: 22). Bryher's conscious efforts to bring together the artists she championed through patronage with media industry professionals differentiates POOL and its extended circle from the Bloomsbury Group. But given that Bloomsbury evolved from a private group of friends to a cultural shorthand so ubiquitous that it appears both canonised in reading lists and referenced in Laura Ashley homewares, where exactly do we demarcate the distinction between professional and amateur in British modernism and how did Bloomsbury differentiate its practices from that of professional cultural producers?

#### 4.2 The amateurs: Separate, not removed

In contrast to POOL's primary focus on the visual arts, the Bloomsbury Group had a multidisciplinary scope. Moreover, where Bryher was the key financial backer of POOL, and patron to individuals associated with it, the Bloomsbury Group 'had no acknowledged leader, no official rules, and no recognised identity' (Goodwin 2011: 60), highlighting the familial nature of their association, firmly situated in the private – amateur – sphere.

Counting the prominent economist John Maynard Keynes as a core member alongside Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry, Bloomsbury's contributions extend from the narrative and visual arts to social sciences and public policy. As an informal group based primarily around unceremonious gatherings, Bloomsbury did not subscribe to any particular orthodoxy or 'programme' but Craufurd D. Goodwin suggests that two characteristics are key to the assessment of the group's practice and continued relevance. Firstly, he suggests that

[...] they adhered to certain foundational texts [...] the first was G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* ([1903] 1993), which they came upon in their



youth. Above all they concluded that Moore freed them from the Benthamite utilitarianism that most had imbibed, often through the writings of John Stuart Mill. In reaction to Bentham's hedonistic injunction to pursue life directed by the calculus of pleasure and pain, Moore ([1903] 1993, 237) had suggested that, instead, the ultimate goal of human life, requiring no further explanation, should be the achievement of states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. (Goodwin 2011: 63)

Subscribing to the pursuit of 'pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects' gave the Bloomsbury Group license to resist the Victorian values of their upbringing and consequently 'they were democratic not authoritarian in their fundamental political assumptions' as well as 'romantic [rather] than classical in their basic aesthetic attitudes' (Rosenbaum 1987: 33).

The second overarching characteristic Goodwin identifies is 'a strong commitment, usually unspoken, to multidisciplinary endeavours' (Goodwin 2011: 63). The group's interdisciplinary approach seems a natural consequence of the fact that it was not structured around a particular discipline or set of interests but a formation of friends whose individual occupations provided diverse contributions to the collective. In context to the concurrent development of the screenplay and the professionalization of artistic practice, Bloomsbury's interdisciplinary focus warrants closer examination.

As 'Bloomsbury aesthetics [...] developed in the realm of the visual arts [and] there was also a belief in the interdependence of the arts' (Antor 1986: 77), Virginia Woolf's treatment of the relationship between word and image provides us with a further response to the impact of the photographic image, in addition to those provided by other modernists, such as Imagists, and industrialised forms of writing, such as the screenplay. Victoria Rosner writes:

In an era when technologies of perception, from the motion picture camera to the x-ray machine proliferated, Woolf [...] became interested in

the ability of the artist to provide other kinds of insights into how the mind receives and sense data. It is the task of the modern writer, Woolf asserted, to record these impressions, to give the reader nothing more or less than a portrait [...]. This same focus on the subjective, the ephemeral, and the partial underlies Post-Impressionist painting.  
(Rosner 2014: 10)

Although Woolf's 'stream of consciousness' mode to impart subjective sensuous impressions has been noted (and disputed) on the basis of her extensive use of interior monologue (Snaith 1996: 136), the integration of visual imagery in her novels can also provide clues to how her amateur practice overlapped with those of professionals in the representation of the image via the written word.

In her article 'Intermedial Woolf: Text, image, and in-between' (2004), Liedeke Plate makes a compelling case for Virginia Woolf's use of imagery as an integral part of her narratives. Using the example of Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), Plate highlights the inclusion of 'photographs of her [Woolf's] niece Angelica Bell and her friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, and paintings of the latter's ancestors' (Plate 2004: 299) and argues that

[...] the relationship of the pictures to the text they 'illustrate' is complex. Never is it simply a matter of doubling the text. Rather, meaning arises from the interplay between text and image, and from the tensions to which their juxtaposition gives way.  
(Plate 2004: 302)

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the interactive relationship Plate suggests between Woolf's text and her chosen images is (perhaps surprisingly, given their respective locations on the cultural scale) reminiscent of Anita Loos's inclusion of illustrations in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) three years earlier. Plate argues that Woolf uses the images as they

[...] illuminate her own intermedial practice, showing the use of pictures in her texts to serve one of two ends; to construct a work of art wherein the tension between the media dissolves as to fuse into a single but complex meaning, or, on the contrary, to foreground the tension between

text and image, jarring the reader into an awareness of the constructiveness of her intermedial practice.  
(Plate 2004: 301)

The self-conscious attempt to create awareness of her intermedial practice in addition to ‘fusing’ the narratives differentiates Woolf’s text-image from that of Loos, whose illustrations were self-contained narratives providing an additional layer of narrative to the text.

As S.P. Rosenbaum suggests that ‘one of the most salient features of Bloomsbury’s modernism [...] is their mixture of genres in writing and painting’ (Rosenbaum 1987: 8), which, if we recall Michael North’s argument that ‘the most radical formal experiments of the twentieth century can be traced back to the new association of word and image suggested by the photograph’ (North 2005: 12) implies that modernist writers such as Woolf responded to the photographic image in ways not altogether dissimilar to that of professional screenwriters such as Loos. Woolf later wrote that ‘painting and writing have much to tell each other: they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see’ (Woolf 1966: 241). The novelist ‘who wants to make us see’ is a concept of note in the context of screenwriting, as the ‘visualising storyteller’ can be both a novelist and a screenwriter. Here, it is the designation of a primary medium that matters: the novelist who visualises remains committed to the word as the primary and final signifier while the screenwriter uses the word as an evolutionary tool.

Further examination suggests that Woolf’s engagement with the photographic image (and by extension cinema) was not confined to including photographs or drawings in her novels. Leslie K. Hankins notes that in 1926, ‘Virginia Woolf published a meditation on the cinema in *Arts* and the *Nation & Athenaeum* [...] and in September Gilbert Seldes reviewed her essay in the *New Republic* (Hankins 2004:

494). And while English ‘amateurs’ distinguished themselves through a careful separation from any *perceived* commercialized public discourse and what Virginia Woolf would later call ‘the low aims of money, fame, power or prestige’ (Woolf 1962: 155) by presenting themselves as ‘public intellectuals’ (Goodwin 2011:74), the group’s many engagements with professionalised commercial practice suggest a closer relationship. Exemplified through (amongst others) the Omega Workshops, the Hogarth Press, and Woolf’s magazine writing it becomes clear that ‘Bloomsbury’s very existence forecloses the temptation to see art and “the market” on two utterly divergent paths, or on paths that can only intersect with muddy, or smutty, results for both sides’ (Wicke 1994:22).

While members of the Bloomsbury Group could be considered ‘amateurs’ given that their practice did not originate via the commercial channels of cultural production, Bloomsbury was not divorced from the market. The two most prominent examples of their commercial projects are the Omega Workshops, established by Roger Fry in 1913, and the Hogarth Press, founded by Leonard Woolf together with Virginia Woolf in 1917 (Southworth 2014: 145). The Omega Workshops, based at Fitzroy Square in London, provided artists associated with Bloomsbury with the opportunity to exhibit and sell original domestic items such as furniture, textiles and domestic accessories. The Workshops were essentially a commercial venture in that the featured furniture and textiles were exclusive items and priced accordingly. But they distinguished themselves by featuring numerous manufacturers who had to remain anonymous, with every piece featured in the workshop displayed only under the Omega label. Roger Fry published an accompanying catalogue in 1915, outlining the aims of the Omega Workshops:

The artist is the man who creates not only for need but for joy [...] The Omega Workshops, Limited, is a group of artists who are working with

the object of allowing free play to the delight in creation in the making of objects for common life.  
(Fry in Anscombe 1981: 32)

The project of designing and treating objects of utility as pieces of art precedes the principles the modernist German *Bauhaus* movement advocated from 1919 onwards. Laura Marcus explains that ‘Fry set up the Omega Workshop and, with his team of artists, set about the design of objects that would combine utility and beauty’ (Marcus 2014: 173), similar to Walter Gropius’s later attempt to ‘bring art back to the people’ through the mass production of beautiful things’ (Gropius in Lane 1968: 67), allowing Fry (together with Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant) to apply their personal aesthetic to domestic objects for sale to the public. As such, the Omega Workshops present us with an amateur-professional hybrid; a professional enterprise whose primary focus was not only the production and commercialisation of high-end furniture but an extension of the Bloomsbury visual aesthetic.

Similarly, the Hogarth Press came into being as an extension of Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s interest in book printing, as ‘they moved away from the collectible “book beautiful” toward greater emphasis on utility’ (Southworth 2014: 145). In addition to publishing Virginia Woolf’s books, the Hogarth Press championed many new writers who were unconnected to the Bloomsbury Group and actively advocated ‘young, unknown writers whose work might not attract the publishing establishment’ (Woolf 1967: 130). By choosing and advocating new writers via publication in the Hogarth Press, the Woolfs provided not only a commercial platform for distribution but also legitimised their work as part of a ‘Bloomsbury canon’. Furthermore, ‘despite continual claims of amateurism, he [Leonard Woolf] also contributed to the publishing enterprise a shrewd business sense, gained as a civil servant in Ceylon, as well as his own and Virginia’s experience with publishers’ (Southworth: 2014: 147).

Utilising the benefits of a wholly owned press, the Woolfs were able to provide a self-determined space for Virginia Woolf's own work as well as extend their literary ambitions through the work of new writers. Jennifer Wicke writes that

Leonard Woolf once commented on the relief it gave Virginia to have her books published by their own Hogarth Press, as then she was free [...]. However antipathetic Woolf, and other modernists, may at times have been toward that small subset of the larger market, Woolfian modernism does not target publicity or consumption per se as problems [...]. (Wicke 1994: 21)

The Woolfs' publishing activities and the Omega Workshops both highlight how the Bloomsbury Group adopted aspects of professionalised cultural practice on their own terms. But while ostensibly commercial and inclusive of contributors outside the group, both ventures were still ultimately extensions of Bloomsbury's particular aesthetic tastes and social entanglements. The resultant 'exclusivity' attained through its positioning outside of the conventional professional realm meant that Bloomsbury's 'amateurism' was viewed critically by some prominent modernists:

The tradition of amateurism figured heavily in the ambivalent relationship both [Wyndham] Lewis and [Ezra] Pound developed toward British high culture. The two were united by a belief that poetry and the other arts should be viewed as professions, worthy of respect, and not as diversions or sporting events for the well-to-do. (Sitton 2014: 50)

Bloomsbury's self-referential exclusivity particularly infuriated Wyndham Lewis (closely associated with Ezra Pound on the creation of the Vorticist magazine *BLAST*). He rejected the lack of cohesion amongst the English avant-garde who, despite their common rejection of many Victorian values, continued to embrace and perpetuate class divisions. He singled out Bloomsbury's amateurism as a tactic to restrict meritocracy:

In England for a very long time this sort of *societification* of art has been in progress. [...] The notorious *amateurism* of the Anglo-Saxon mind make this doubly likely. In *Bloomsbury* it takes the form of a select and snobbish club. [...] Where they approximate to the citizens of this new

cosmopolitan Bohemia is in their substitution of money for talent as a qualification for membership.  
(Lewis 1930: 123-124)

Although some of Lewis's misgivings can be attributed to his personal conflicts with members of the group (Rosenbaum 1975: 332ff), his opposition to Bloomsbury's amateurism highlights the fragmented nature of how contemporaneous modernist groups in London responded to changes in the discourse of cultural production. Where previously, the delineation between producers of different types of cultural products had been clear – expressing itself even through geography, with the film industry primarily based in and around Soho (reinforcing vaudeville associations), removed from privately funded cultural practitioners in either Bloomsbury (near the British Museum and the University of London) or the more traditionally bourgeois Kensington – the professionalization of artistic practice created a meritocracy that unsettled the old order. And while 'Bloomsbury style, and Bloomsbury writing, acknowledges technology and capitalism with relaxed acceptance' (Wicke 1994: 8), Bloomsbury distinguished itself from professional cultural producers through what can be described as its 'brand' of aesthetic and social exclusivity that capitalised on its amateur status.

Amplifying the focus on the closed coterie aspects of Bloomsbury practice, comparisons between professionals and supposed amateurs are often drawn on the assumption of fundamental differences that allow for little nuance. But while the various factions of cultural producers in London maintained social stratifications, their practices were impacted by the same forces of modernity, resulting in closer alignment than necessarily assumed. An example of the interactions between cultural workers and amateur practitioners was the Film Society, which, through its attempted

popularisation of formally outstanding films, exemplifies the influence of the new professionals on the cultural landscape.

#### 4.3 The Film Society: Popularising ‘films of merit’

In spite of the wave of Bloomsbury beards, the Film Society has been a good thing.  
(Brunel 1949: 116)

In 1925, Adrian Brunel became one of the founding members of the Film Society, which, in the words of its preliminary manifesto,

[...] has been founded in the belief that there are in this country a large number of people who regard the cinema with the liveliest interest, and who would welcome an opportunity seldom afforded the general public of witnessing films of intrinsic merit, whether new or old [...].  
(Brunel 1949: 112)

The Film Society’s aim to bring films of ‘merit’ to a larger audience marks an intersection between the groups of professional film workers and amateur cultural practitioners discussed above. The Film Society presents us with an example of a space where film practitioners came together with a wide audience of film aficionados from across the cultural spectrum to appreciate the technical and narrative achievements of the film medium. A closer look at the Film Society also shows how modernist writers engaged with commercial film to create entirely new professions, such as commercial film criticism, a juncture exemplified by Iris Barry, who, ‘before her leadership role with the Film Society [...] was a familiar figure in London as a writer, poet, and satirical novelist in the bohemian circles of little magazines of the teens’ (Hankins 2004: 490).



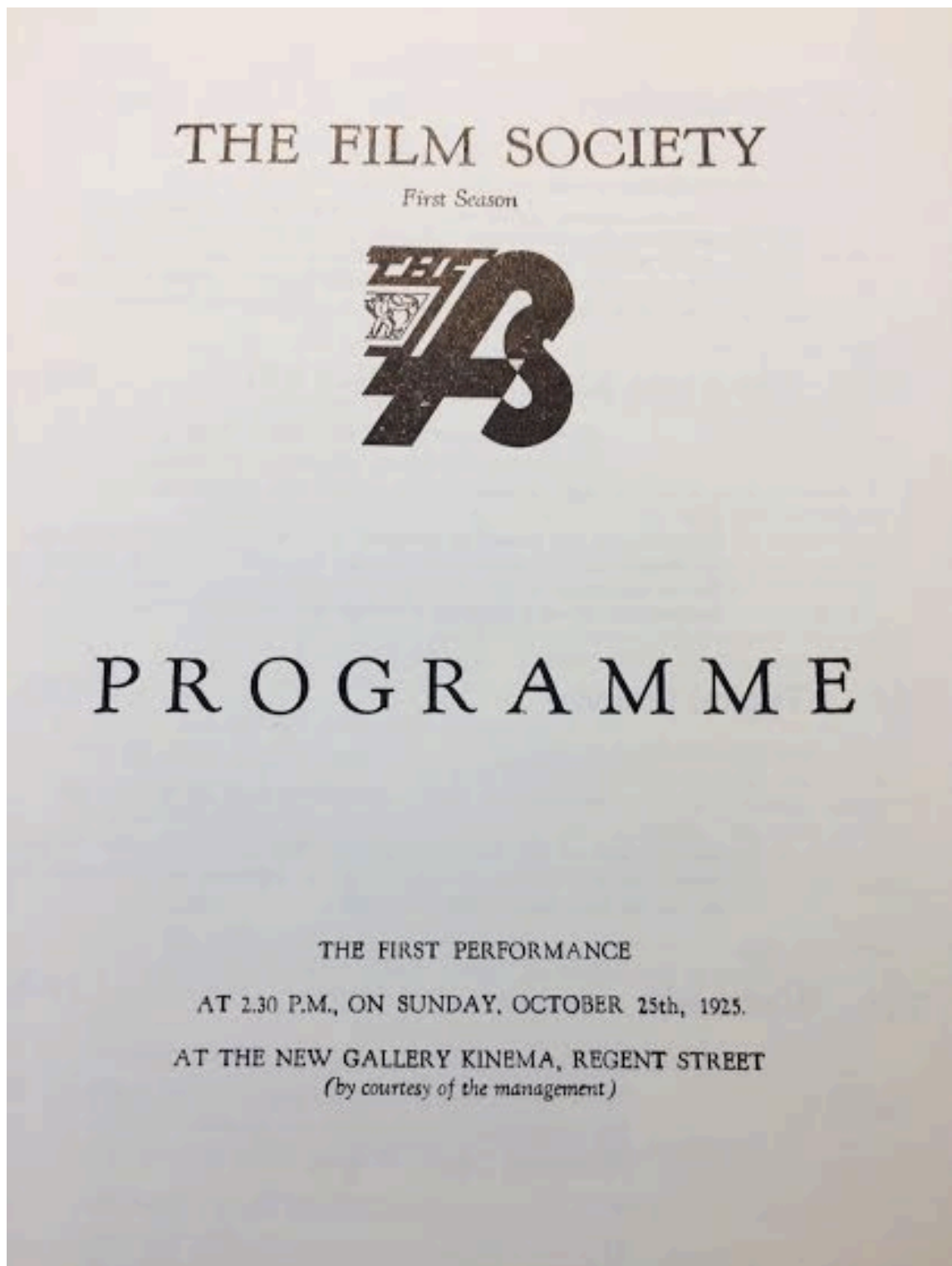


Figure 11: Title page from The Film Society Programmes 1925-1929 (Film Society [1925] 1972)

In the programme for the first Film Society screening, the original council members (film exhibitor Sidney Bernstein, then-recent university graduate Ivor

Montagu, Adrian Brunel, film critics Iris Barry and Walter Mycroft, and actor Hugh Miller) set out the following:

The Society is under no illusions. It is well aware that *Caligaris* do not grow on raspberry bushes and that it cannot, in a season, expect to provide its members with an unbroken succession of masterpieces. It will be sufficient if it can show a group of films which are in some degree interesting, which represent the work which has been done, or is being done experimentally, in various parts of the world. It is in the nature of such films that they are (it is said) commercially unsuitable for this country; and that is why they become the special province of the Film Society.  
(Film Society [1925] 1972: 3)

The Society had a high threshold for the inclusion of films. In its 14 seasons, it organised 108 sessions, with approximately five films each. Holding screenings at the New Gallery Kinema in London's Regent Street members were encouraged to inform the Council which films they would like to see and why. The programme gives an overview and also a history of the film shown and provides 'remarks' and sometimes an 'English synopsis' is provided for non-English films.

Brunel explains the society's importance in introducing films that are now considered part of the film canon to the British public:

The Film Society was the first to show all the great Russian films such as *Potemkin*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Storm over Asia*, *The General Line*, *Mother*, and *Bed and Sofa*, and secured the famous Russian directors, Pudovkin and Eisenstein, to lecture the members on film technique.  
(Brunel 1949: 113)

Devoting a full chapter of his autobiography to the Film Society, Brunel draws a distinction between popularity and technical accomplishment which, even if not commercially viable, was nonetheless important to consider for the professional film worker on the basis that they highlighted advancements in the capacity of the medium:

For although intelligent films such as *Nju* and *The Last Laugh* may not be what is desired by the greatest number of people, yet there can be no

question that they embody certain improvements in technique that are as essential to commercial as they are to experimental cinematography. (Brunel 1949:112)

Brunel explicitly states that the technical advancements evidenced in the films chosen by the Film Society were relevant for *both* commercial and experimental filmmakers. It is a direct acknowledgment, firstly of his awareness of the parallel tracks on which the film industry was developing in Britain, and secondly of his conviction that skill and craftsmanship were necessary to excel in both. In this context, he treats commercial and experimental film as strands of the same practice rather than opposing exercises.

While David Trotter suggests that Virginia ‘Woolf attended a meeting of the Film Society in London on 14 March 1926’ (Trotter 2007: 166), which arguably proves direct interactions between Bloomsbury and industrial filmmakers, it is a less known writer, and acquaintance of Woolf’s, who exemplifies modernist professionalization upon engagement with commercial film.

Today principally remembered as the founder of New York’s Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Iris Barry entered London’s modernist circles through an acquaintance with Ezra Pound (Sitton 2014: 26), who championed Barry’s career as a minor poet during the war, before she began spending increasing time at the cinema, ostensibly to allow her partner Wyndham Lewis privacy for his work (Sitton 2014: 66). Turning her private interest into a means of supporting herself after the end of her relationship with Lewis, Barry became a prolific film critic in the national press, writing ‘over forty essays for the *Spectator* in 1924-1927, at least five essays for the British *Vogue* in 1924-1926, and over sixty columns for the *Daily Mail* from 1926-1930’ (Hankins 2004: 489) before the publication of her full-length book on cinema *Let’s Go to the Movies* (1926). Hankins argues that it was Barry’s work for *Vogue*

specifically, which had previously published Woolf and other modernist writers (Garrity 1999: 37), that legitimised the cinema in the eyes of an elite audience:

The magazine fashioned film as another modernist must-have cultural accessory for the intelligent, chic modern woman. [...] In her influential series of *Vogue* essays of 1924-1926, Barry both shaped and critiqued the *Vogue* fashioning of cinema.  
(Hankins 2004: 500)

In her transformation from amateur modernist poet to professional film critic, Barry combined her aesthetic judgments with her experience as an 'ordinary spectator' to create a mode of cinema criticism that was both accessible and authoritative.

Furthermore, she championed professionalization in screenwriting specifically, preceding Brunel's manual in insisting that knowledge of the film medium is essential to writing screenplays:

[...] established writers of fiction and plays are too much wedded to their own medium to be able successfully to adapt themselves to writing for the films. The best scenarios are written by men who know how films are made: who know what can be done effectively and what cannot. And it certainly looks as though this experience of practical cinematography were almost essential to the making of a live photo-play.  
(Barry [1926] 1976: 164)

Emphasising the importance of a 'visual imagination', she further suggests that the high proportion of female screenwriters in the industry was a natural response to this particular requirement of writing for the screen:

As to the persons to be employed, they would be of a special type. They would be women rather than men because (a) women are more visually minded on the whole, and (b) because the cinema is more for women than men. They would be persons of education, not necessarily with any kinds of diplomas or degrees [...] above all able to project a story in pictures in their own imagination, and to transfer it to paper by means of very non-literary words, very graphic words, and also by means of intelligible sketches.  
(Barry [1926] 1976: 176-177)

And although Barry's suggestions of 'non-literary words', 'graphic words' and 'intelligible sketches' are reminiscent of the guidance found in contemporaneous

American screenwriting manuals and programmes like the Palmer Course, she also stresses that film's visual nature 'should be the aesthetic alternative to the stage's beauty of language' (Barry [1926] 1976: 25), therefore taking a notably medium-specific approach to the cinema.

While Barry's transition from amateur poet to professional film critic bridged the perceived divide between the commercial and 'the highbrow', Brunel's association with the Film Society proved more problematic:

I had long ceased to be a member of the Council, as my employers [Gainsborough Studios] insisted that my association with the Society would damage the prestige of the films I made for them! The campaign in some Press circles suggested that they were "high-brows" and implied that therefore we were an evil influence, as well as being half-witted. (Brunel 1949:114)

This 'reverse snobbery' highlights that delineation between modernist and commercial practice was not one-sided but encouraged by industrial producers, such as Gainsborough Studios, presumably to protect their brand. Commercial filmmakers aimed to reassure their audiences that their product was of an accessible nature without any airs of 'artistic ostentation'.

Despite Brunel's resignation from the Film Society Council in order to assure his studio employers he was not about to embark on avant-garde adventures, Martin Stollery positions him at the intersection of modernist film and the purely commercial companies. Indeed, he asserts that Brunel and Montagu's production company Brunel & Montagu Ltd (which became primarily known for taking on editing assignments to 'fix' films) was, due to its association with the Film Society, 'viewed with suspicion by some conservative figures within the more commercial end of the industry' (Stollery 2009: 375) but while sitting on the fringes of the more experimental end of commercial British filmmaking, their firm was 'for all its culture of playfulness, more attuned to the industrial disciplines of the emergent British studio system than the

other British alternative film cultural formations of the mid to late 1920s' (Stollery 2009: 375). In Brunel's memoirs, he describes it as follows:

As our business was almost entirely confined to the treatment of completed films with which there was something wrong, we discreetly omitted our name from the credit titles of the majority of those films which passed through our hands; but for this fact, ours would have become a household name in all cinemas [...].  
(Brunel (1949: 118)

Through their service to 'improve' completed films, Brunel and Montagu applied many of the advanced techniques they admired (and tried to popularise) through the Film Society to mass-market commercial output. Thus theirs was a middle ground between experimentation and the commercial, grounded in professional expertise, a service ethic, discretion and competence.

Of course the Film Society, while ostensibly also providing a middle ground here between the commercial film industry and highbrow amateurs, is also distinctly different from what has been broadly described as middlebrow culture. While (as described in Chapter Two) the middlebrow sought to appropriate and commercialise 'high culture', the Film Society was engaged in the dissemination of what it considered to be culturally valuable. Here, an important difference is to be drawn between cultural validity and cultural value: Brunel and other commercial filmmakers did not dispute the cultural validity of popular culture; in fact, popularity validates a cultural good within a society as it becomes part of the society's cultural fabric, or, as James O'Sullivan suggests 'popular culture is the culture of the people, reified as though cultural products [which] were democratically elected' (O'Sullivan 2017: 285). In contrast, cultural value is not tied to popularity but is inherent and distinguishes itself through particular technical achievement or artistic merit, the result of which may or may not prove popular. What the Film Society aimed to do is to ensure that these culturally valuable films gained an audience so they could

influence commercial filmmaking practice and therefore enhance the quality of the commercial output. Brunel's own screenplays are useful tools to show how such broad exposure to different types of artistic practices influenced screenwriting and filmmaking in Britain.

#### 4.4 The screenplay as foundation

Brunel's surviving screenplays, held at the archive of the British Film Institute, are in remarkably good condition. Hand-bound booklets of carbon copies, neatly annotated in differently coloured inks, they not only provide insight into the evolution of the screenplay format in Britain during the early twentieth century but also into Brunel's practice as a writer-director and the way he employed the screenplay as 'both the guideline and the organization plan for the [film] production' (Tieber 2014: 227).

Formally, Brunel's screenplays do not provide the same level of formal specificity or idiosyncrasy as Anita Loos's and Carl Mayer's work, and thus do not lend themselves as readily to formal comparisons with their contemporaneous national modernisms. Nevertheless, viewed in the context of professionalization of screenwriting practice, they do provide insight on formal screenplay conventions in Britain, how the screenplay was employed during the production process by a writer-director, and what this practice implies for the assessment of the screenplay as a form of literary modernism.

Brunel's earliest surviving screenplay text is the treatment for *In Old Madrid* (1917) for his production company Mirror Films. Billed as 'A romance of two generations', the story is set in both 1885 and 1916. The shooting script (if one existed) has not survived but the treatment provides insights into both the types of

narratives that were popular and some formal conventions of screenwriting in Britain at the time.

The story begins in the past in 1895 when an English diplomat, the Earl of Darlington, visits Madrid from his post in Paris and seduces the beautiful Countess Montoro, the wife of Count Montoro. After she abandons her child and husband to flee to Paris and be with Darlington, the Count hunts them down and challenges Darlington to a duel. Darlington agrees but insults the Count further by telling him that he has grown tired of the Countess. The Count dies in the duel with Darlington but leaves a letter for his baby daughter Juanita to receive on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, instructing her to avenge her family. The narrative then fast forwards to the present in 1916: Darlington is dead but has a son of good character. Coincidentally, he travels to Spain to go shooting, which coincides with Juanita learning of the past and wanting to avenge her family. She makes him fall in love with her in order to kill him but then falls in love with him too. On a ride out, she is abducted by bandits:

One day, the Earl has gone out shooting, alone, and Juanita mounts her horse and gallops away unattended. On and on she rides until she is many miles from the Lodge.

Of a sudden, half a dozen bandits spring from their hiding places and in a moment, she is captured and at their mercy. She gives a loud cry for help before they gag her and it echoes away over the mountains until it reaches the ears of Darlington who is ~~strolling out there~~ stalking [illegible].

(Brunel 1917: *In Old Madrid*, Treatment, Extract)

When the bandit's leader is about to rape her, the young Earl comes and saves her.

They declare their love and she tells him of the letter but admits that while his father stole her mother's honour, he saved hers.



The 10-page treatment is a working copy with amends noted within the text, which include semantic amends that would not necessarily make a significant difference to how a scene would be visually adapted. Instead, the corrections influence how the scene can be read and how the flow of the narrative is conveyed to the reader. The way the synopsis is written is similar to the early American screenplays discussed in Chapter Two, in that it adopts a primarily narrative format with minimal distinction in formatting or specified convention. The story line is a good example of the popular narratives that Christine Gledhill has described as ‘whimsical [...], espousing romanticist escape into costume and disguise’ (Gledhill 2009: 163). It combines costume drama with romance and a moral tale, all of which are aimed towards mass appeal, again echoing the targeted tastes of American screenplays / films of the period.

A progression towards an adoption of more distinctive formal screenplay layouts is evidenced in Brunel’s 1920 screenplay for *The Bump of the Explorer*, which is based on a story by A.A. Milne and told in the screenplay in a total of 64 scenes:

THE BUMP OF THE EXPLORER

By A. A. MILNE

Scenario by Adrian Brunel.

---

Scene 1.    Black curtain background.

SUB:       LILIAN MONTREVOR

Long shot.

Iris half opens on a very long shot of Lilian Montrevor, dressed in white evening frock and bowing to the camera.

The effect should be of a very diminutive figure

and could be obtained with reversed telescopic lens.

SUB: BETTER TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT HER, SHE IS THE HEROINE.

Shot A. Close-up.

Very close view of Lilian, smiling at the camera. The iris closes very quickly.

(Brunel 1920: *The Bump of the Explorer*, Script, Extract)

Brunel's screenplay evidences a move away from 'outline' scripts in favour of 'scenario script' conventions, including numbered scenes, sub-/intertitles and camera directions such as 'close up'. This change highlights the British adoption of American tactics to produce films in a more 'predictable, efficient assembly system' (Staiger 1985: 125) that Staiger credits with both an improvement in production efficiency and an improvement of the film's quality (Staiger 1985: 125-126). Brunel's adoption of scenario script conventions supports Steven Price's claim that 'by the 1920s the [European] film industries were looking to Hollywood for a model of greater efficiency and each identified the script as a key factor' (Price 2013: 102). But nevertheless differences remain: for example, each scene has its own page, even if they are very brief. Camera directions, including technical details such as 'the effect should be of a very diminutive figure and could be obtained with reversed telescopic lens', are included as part of the primary screenplay text (rather than an annotation in the director's copy, for example). Furthermore, the subtitles perform the function of an omniscient narrator who withholds information from the viewer and directs his gaze:

Scene 4. Black curtain background.

SUB: IT'S JUST POSSIBLE HE MAY BE THE HERO. WE ARE NOT SURE YET. HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT HIM IN CASE.

Close-up.

Iris is still half-open as in scene 2, but this time we get a close-up of John Brice taken from the back. Iris closes quickly.

-----End of page

Scene 5. Black curtain background.

SUB: ON THE OTHER HAND THE HERO MAY BE FREDDY FANE, WHO DANCES DIVINELY.

Close-up.

Iris half-opens quickly on Freddy's feet. doing(orig) remarkable dancing steps.

Mix-to.

Close-up of Freddy's smiling face and dance-affected shoulders, Iris closes quickly.

(Brunel 1920: *The Bump of the Explorer*, Script, Extract)

The screenplay is consistent within its set own conventions, dividing scenes by shots:

Shot A, Shot B, Shot C, D, E, F, all of which are each designated either a long or medium shot or close-up. Each scene is structured by what exactly the camera shoots and how it shoots it. Even visual effects such as 'in Vignette' are noted. Locations are named but are also allocated letters a, b, c etc. What is notable about the above screenplay extract is that it tells us very little about the narrative but instead focuses entirely on the specific technical detail of the production. Therefore, while not entirely consistent with American conventions, Brunel's screenplay is nevertheless primarily a production document that serves pre-production and production purposes beyond that of the narrative basis alone.

The formal specification of Brunel's screenplays is further evolved in 1921's *The Beggar's Syndicate*. Another adaptation (this time from an original story by MLL Wadham) that Adrian Brunel labels a 'continuity', now explicitly references the

vocabulary of American screenplays. Yet, at the same time, he also includes conventions traditionally employed in play texts with the first page a 'list of special props, list, including:

Rolls-Royce car  
Builders estimate  
A cat  
Props for Selfridge's roof  
"Times' Newspaper  
Overalls  
Asparagus and other food  
(Brunel 1921: *The Beggar's Syndicate*, Script, Extract)

The next page lists all locations and which scene numbers correspond to each location, with all characters appearing in a scene listed in the bottom left corner of the page. Here, Brunel merges American screenplay conventions with existing play text conventions in order to create a 'practical' document serving his needs. In the narrative, Brunel continues scene sub-numbering by shot, a, b, c, etc. as in *The Bump of the Explorer* (1920) but changes slightly how these are displayed on the page:

Scene 10.            Libbon's attic.

Long shot.

Libbon returns. He takes "Times" newspaper gives dog a biscuit and then seats himself and looks at newspaper. Sees something.

Shot A. C.U.

Bust of heading "Business Opportunities" or "Tenders".

"Tenders invited for re-decorating house in Putney. Apply personally before 11 a.m. or by letter to Mr. Dell, Laurel Bank, Laurel Road, S.W.

Shot C. Medium shot.

Libbon sits and thinks about it. Then decides to go off and interview the Dells. He dresses himself completely and takes his hat and goes out.

IRIS OUT.

(Brunel 1921: *The Beggar's Syndicate*, Script, Extract)

As per other scenarios, it is obvious that Brunel used the document during shooting, noting in pencil on the page for scene 33: ‘Use 2<sup>nd</sup> take’ or one page 37 crossing out the screenplay’s stipulated medium shoot and inserting ‘Long shot’ instead’. He also ‘rewrites’ the script by deleting Scene 54 and noting on the page for scene 53: ‘Continue to Scene 55’, insisting on specifying each scene even if they are incredibly brief:

Scene 58.                      Garden, Laurel Bank (Location B)

Dog walks away in disgust.

(Brunel 1921: *The Beggar’s Syndicate*, Script, Extract)

Brunel’s screenplays were living documents as part of the production process, and he used them to keep a record of the filmed material. This fact sets them apart specifically from a screenwriter like Carl Mayer who treated the screenplay as a self-contained artefact whose words and syntax were a precise means of signification. In contrast, Brunel’s screenplays are very clearly blueprints that are reworked, revised, and thus primarily a means to an end rather than independently conceived narratives. Interestingly though, despite his evident pragmatism in aid of efficient film production, there are also what can only be described as unfilmable scenes as they denote no specific action:

Scene 103.                      The dining room. L.B.

Flash Maggie is getting fed up.

(Brunel 1921: *The Beggar’s Syndicate*, Script, Extract)

While this direction is very loose and reads essentially like a stage direction to an actor, it can also be read as a very broad description for a scene that Brunel will specify further when on set with the actor. This is notable as it renders the screenplay a (writer-)director’s short hand, an aide-memoire rather than a detailed description of a visual narrative. Compared with the previous case studies, it is notable that neither

Anita Loos nor Carl Mayer used this short-hand mode – but neither of them directed the films they wrote.

The screenplays for *The Bump of the Explorer* (1920) and *The Beggar's Syndicate* (1921) provide a useful comparison with Brunel's later screenplay *Wilson's Atonement* (1923). At six pages long, the plot is simple: A young doctor, Wilson, wishes to marry Elsie, a match her father, Colonel Morrison, approves of but which she rejects:

SCENE 2. In the Garden. Elsie comes along with a book in her hand and sits down on a garden seat and prepares to read. Wilson appears. He sits down beside her and takes this opportunity to propose, but she refuses him and runs in doors.

SCENE 3. In the Hall of the Morrisons' House. People can be seen dancing in one of the rooms. Elsie come out on Jack Sidgwick's arm. They make for the Terrace.

SCENE 4. The Terrace. "Why Elsie refused Dr Wilson" (On screen). Jack and Elsie appear and walk along the Terrace to a seat where they sit down. She tells him about Wilson which spurs him on to proposing himself. She accepts him. They look round to see if no one is looking and then kiss. As they are doing so Wilson strolls out on to the Terrace, sees them, and then steals back unobserved. Two couples stroll by: Elsie and Jack look at their dance programs and hurry back to where the dancing has begun again.

(Brunel 1923: *The Wilson's Atonement*, Script, Extract)

Dr Wilson learns of the engagement and denounces Jack to Elsie's father. When Jack then asks for Elsie's hand, he is refused. Elsie and Jack elope and the Colonel disowns her. Away from home in New York, now with a baby, Jack and Elise fall on hard times as Jack cannot find work. This changes when Jack receives an unexpected letter from the Western Gazette Offices to ask him to undertake the editing of their London edition. They pay for his and his family's fare to London. Once they arrive, the baby

is not allowed to enter the country due to a suspected infection. (The subtitle is ‘Doctor Forbids Baby to Land’). Elsie returns with the baby to New York, leaving Jack in England. Upon arrival in New York she is unexpectedly met by Dr Wilson who takes her into his surgery to examine the baby. He declares that nothing is wrong with the child and issues a certificate to that effect. When Elsie attempts to pay him, he refuses, declaring via subtitle (here the convention changes):

SCENE 17. Wilson’s Consulting Room. They enter. Wilson examines child’s eyes and declares nothing is the matter. He writes out a certificate which he gives to Elsie. She takes her purse and asks what she owes him. He puts his hand over hers and shakes his head, and says: (Screen) “I got Jack that job and I want to send you back to him to be happy because – because I wronged him once.” She takes his hand gratefully when he has told her all.

(Brunel 1923: *The Wilson’s Atonement*, Script, Extract)

*Wilson’s Atonement* is another story with a moral lesson at its core, which aligns it with Brunel’s other screenplays of the period. The screenplay format however differs significantly in that each scene is written in a near short-story format that does not include any of the technical direction evident in both *The Bump of the Explorer* and *The Beggar’s Syndicate*. Instead, more reminiscent of scene descriptions in a play, *Wilson’s Atonement* denotes individual actions as if it is transcribing a film being watched: a notable point, given that Brunel later suggested the transcription of films as screenplays as a useful way of learning screenwriting (Brunel 1948: 20).

The character list provided on the inside cover page further draws on traditional play texts:

Dramatis Personae.  
Colonel Morrison  
Mrs. Morrison  
Elsie (their daughter)  
Dr. Wilson (in love with Elsie)  
Jack Sidgwick (a journalist: in love with Elsie)

(Brunel 1923: *The Wilson's Atonement*, Script, Extract)

In contrast to *Wilson's Atonement*, *The Bump of the Explorer* and *The Beggars' Syndicate* were adaptations and it might be possible that the availability of the original story text led Brunel to focus the screenplays more on the narrative's visual realisation while *Wilson's Atonement* is an original story idea. The, fairly illegible, working copy of Brunel's script for *Five Pounds Reward* (1920), another adaptation from a Milne story, supports this distinction between original scripts and working copy adaptations as the document is filled with notes such as how many feet of film have been used thus far ('60 feet by scene 7') and editing notes in the text such as on the page of scene 8, the handwritten reminder that '1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> takes wash out, 3<sup>rd</sup> take bad because they don't walk out of picture 4<sup>th</sup> take 9 feet' (Brunel 1920: *Five Pounds Reward*, Script, Annotation), rendering the script not just a production but also a post-production/continuity document.

The above examples evidence four uses for the screenplay: an original story told via a screenplay; an adaptation of a short story into a story to be told visually; a production aide; and a log to prepare editing. These uses are all reflective of Brunel's practice as a filmmaker for whom the screenplay, while a specialised form that had to be mastered, was a part of the larger film production process rather than a self-contained form of writing. This incorporation of the screenplay into a consolidated filmmaking practice highlights one of the screenplay's key differences to other written forms engaging with the photographic image: the produced screenplay is not necessarily an independent narrative providing a written version of a visual representation of reality. Instead, it can function as what Macdonald and Jacob describe as 'a record of a screen idea that offers clues to what the filmmakers thought was important for production at the time' (Macdonald and Jacob 2010: 162) therefore



making it ‘a historical and cultural document’ (ibid.). But even when acknowledging the screenplay as a work in its own right, as Macdonald and Jacobs do (Macdonald and Jacob 2010: 163), this positioning still privileges the screenplay’s auxiliary capacity instead of foregrounding its formal capacity to achieve its aims, in and outside of the production process.

The screenplay’s formal specificity is primarily defined through its connection to a distinct and singular application, which means that writing screenplays came to be defined as a specialist skill. As part of the industrialisation of filmmaking, the professionalization of screenwriting relied on the formalisation of specialist knowledge not dissimilar to that of other professions. Daniel Gritten argues, in his article “‘The Technique of the Talkie’: Screenwriting Manuals and the Coming of Sound to British Cinema” (2008) that the technological advances in the 1920s allowed screenwriters to ‘differentiate themselves from drama to establish screenwriting technique distinct from theatrical usage’ (Gritten 2008: 267), although arguably, dialogue positioned film *closer* to drama by adopting its key formal characteristics. Instead, I would therefore maintain that the screenplay’s capacity for *visual* narration in conjunction with its *industrial application* remained its defining characteristic – notwithstanding the introduction of sound – and that it is the unique combination of formal specificity within an industrial context that warranted screenwriters becoming positioned as professionals.

Donald Scott explains that a professional group ensures ‘an effective monopoly over a particular body of knowledge, [and] arrogates to itself the authority to determine what constitutes knowledge in this field’ (Scott 1983: 13). While in the US correspondence courses provided aspiring screenwriters with (at least the hope of) a route to a ‘formal qualification’ as a screenwriter, Britain used an informal vocational

apprentice system to train a workforce of film workers, before British screenwriting manuals by British screenwriters/directors, namely Brunel's *Film Craft* (1933) (which is not dedicated to screenwriting technique but covers it amongst other topics) and Norman Lee's *Money for Film Stories* (1937), entered the market in the 1930s. By training apprentices in what was increasingly a specialised technical body of knowledge, British film workers elevated the work of craftspeople and aligned themselves with universities (the natural home of other professions), differentiating themselves from untrained amateur practitioners. Brunel describes how he and Ivor Montagu took on young apprentices:

So many brilliant film workers graduated through working in our cutting-rooms that we were regarded as a sort of film university, and parents were offering us premiums to train their sons.  
(Brunel 1949: 119)

The language Brunel employs, such as 'film university' and 'offering us premiums to train their sons' indicates that he wanted the training he and Montagu provided to be viewed as on a par with the specialised skills taught to aspiring professionals such as lawyers or teachers.

It was only after he had effectively left the film industry that Brunel published his dedicated screenwriting manual *Film Script* (1948). In the preface he 'admits' to "breaking the rules of the industry" by giving away clues on its specialist knowledge:

This outline of the technique [...] is intended primarily as a guide for amateur film enthusiasts, but it may amuse professionals. In fact, the mere thought of such a book has already convulsed several of my friends, while quite a number of others have been infuriated by those sections which have been appearing serially. It seems that I have been guilty of some sort of trade union disloyalty – I have given the game away.  
(Brunel 1948: vii)

And while Brunel's screenwriting manual shares many of its descriptions on formal characteristics of the screenplay with American manuals such as Loos's, 'unlike their Hollywood counterparts, throughout the British manuals runs a seam of political

engagement with issues of sound, national cinema and mainstream/minority film culture' (Gritten 2008: 264). Furthermore, in his manual, Brunel puts a sincere focus on the *craft* of screenwriting, rather than treating it as a glamorous extension of the film industry, thereby providing an insight to the considerations driving the evolution of the screenplay in Britain during the first decades of the twentieth century.

#### 4.5 Teaching the screenplay: Brunel and the screenplay as craft

The dedication in Adrian Brunel's *Film Script: The Technique of Writing for the Screen* (1948) is surprising: 'To the screenwriters who have the will and the courage to be like Carl Mayer' (Brunel 1948: Dedication). By dedicating a screenwriting manual made up of rules to a writer who broke all the rules of screenwriting, Brunel makes an important point at the very beginning: That mastering the rules is the start rather than the destination of effective screenwriting.

Positioning screenwriting as a craft that could be taught and learned, professional film workers were those who had undergone training and honed their skills like any apprentice plumber, or indeed doctor, would. In *Film Script*, Brunel characterises writing for the screen as a distinct skill set and advocates its specificity, echoing Iris Barry:

[...] too many successful writers in other spheres have not sufficient foreknowledge of the difficulties of sufficient humility to realise that the making of films is an intricate technical job about which they should know a fair amount before they pose as script-writers.  
(Brunel 1948: 87)

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Brunel's first foray into film was via a 'scenario writing course' to learn how to write 'Bioscope photoplays' (Brunel 1949:20). He never left this – essentially didactic – approach behind.

*Film Script* in 1948 covers a broad range of subjects, combining the illustration of basic principles with personal anecdotes from professional experience. Brunel's screenplay manual echoes many of the recommendations (e.g. 'describe what can be seen', 'use the direct tense' etc.) of the early American manuals and courses discussed in Chapter Two, but he takes a different approach by beginning his book not with the general principles of filmmaking but with the choice of subject for a film. With this, he places narrative, and the importance of narrative, before the medium through which it is conveyed. This is further emphasised by his last chapter, which is titled 'Choice of subject – Again' (Brunel 1948: 128-131). It also differs from American manuals, which are more outcome-oriented in their focus on the interaction between writer and studio, in that he does not dedicate a chapter on the engagement with studios, but sections on 'How to present your manuscript' (Brunel 1928: 110-117) and 'Script conferences, revisions and developing a camera eye' (Brunel 1948: 123-127).

Despite the conversational tone of the manual, Brunel covers a significant amount of detail about the specificities of the screenplay form and elaborates on the different types of scripts, covering the treatment and shooting script both individually and in relation to each other. On the treatment, he writes: 'The word "treatment" is, I suppose, derived from the word "treatment" used by painters' (Brunel 1948: 31). This of course means a type of sketch, an outline in pencil before the painting is fully realised in its intended material. This sheds an interesting perspective on the idea of the 'screenplay as blueprint', if one considers that it seems to be necessary to create a blueprint for the blueprint. Is it the story which needs to be realised via the different media of short prose, screenplay and film? Or is it an evolution of form? Brunel even uses the word 'sketching' 'to describe the purpose of the treatment:

An advantage of writing a treatment before you embark upon your full and detailed shooting script, is that it gives you an opportunity for sketching in tentative scenes [...]. The treatment is a good testing ground for new ideas.  
(Brunel 1948: 69)

Encouraging writers to ‘sketch’ a screenplay before writing a full draft can be viewed in the context of the screenplay’s increasing economic function but Brunel also stresses its importance for the development of the screenplay itself, suggesting that the treatment provides

an opportunity for sketching in tentative scenes, experimental sequences, those clever little touches and those brilliant ideas, without the possibly fruitless labour of writing them up fully. The treatment is a good testing ground for new ideas.  
(Brunel 1948: 69)

Chapter Four in *Film Script*, headed ‘The Shape of Your Story’, shows a significant difference between Brunel’s approach to screenwriting from that of his American counterparts and one that situates him closer to continental European screenwriting practice: as the introductory example for the ideal shape of a story, Brunel does not feature a classical three or five act structure narrative but instead uses Walter Ruttmann’s ‘city symphony’ *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), a silent film lacking formal narrative structure and content. *Berlin* was a film co-written by Carl Mayer (with Ruttmann and Karl Freund), whose visual narration Brunel describes:

Although a screen writer’s medium is words, spoken words, words of description and words of instruction he is, as a writer a specialist who sees things not so much in strips of celluloid for the editor to assemble and juggle with, as with life viewed through a cine-camera lens.  
(Brunel 1948:126)

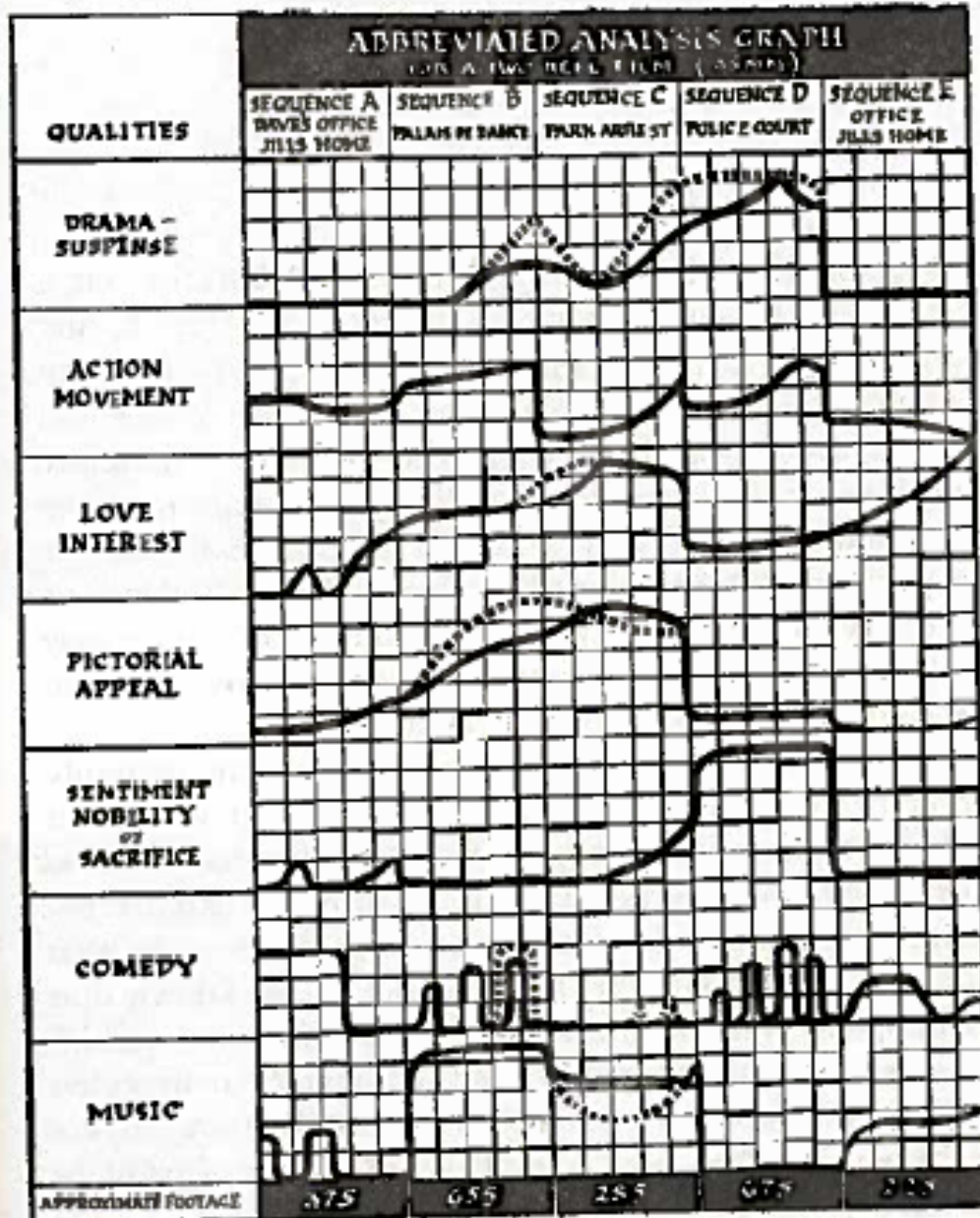
Brunel foregrounds Mayer’s intermedial practice that uses words both to guide visual narration while retaining (and therefore passing on) the literary quality of capturing a specific mood.

In addition to highlighting examples of formal excellence, Brunel impresses upon the aspiring screenwriter the importance of keeping in mind the practicalities of filmmaking. Here he focuses especially on the likely budgets of any films that are made, imbuing the mind-set of both a producer and a distributor to encourage early considerations of the commercial viability of any screenplay and its eventual realisation.

Despite being primarily a silent filmmaker and having expressed reservations about the introduction of sound as he worried that ‘the mainstream use of dialogue [would] supplant visual with aural storytelling’ (Gritten 2008: 272), Brunel dedicates a chapter to the importance of dialogue in the screenplay. He takes the approach of considering the screenplay’s dialogue to that of other genres, mainly the novel. The major difference he identifies is that ‘a novel is made to be read in silence and not be spoken in public’ (Brunel 1948: 97). Again echoing earlier American manuals, Brunel instructs that the screenwriter ‘should avoid literary style. He should write as people talk, even though it may be inelegant’ (Brunel 1948: 98).

Interestingly, in addition to formal and stylistic considerations, Brunel also dedicates a section to the critical evaluation of screenplays and highlights strategies he previously employed which then became common across major film production. Pre-dating modern studio focus groups, Brunel drafted in readers to rate screenplays before they were developed further:

I once evolved a form to assist readers to assess the qualities of a story. In sending me their reports, they had to fill in a form with marks which forced them to evaluate some fifteen qualities or characteristics. The most important of them were: Drama and Suspense, Action, Plot Value, Sentiment, Sex Interest, Characterisation, Atmosphere, Pictorial Value, Comedy, Originality, Musical Appeal, Dialogue. [...] Our readers used to mark their Story Report form with a maximum of ten marks for each category and we found these invaluable in helping us to a conclusion. (Brunel 1948: 106ff)



The above is an abbreviated analysis-graph of the qualities estimated in a short script ; an outline for a fuller analysis is indicated in the text. The dotted lines show corrections after the first analysis (black lines).

Figure 12: 'Analysing Treatment' Chart (Brunel 1948: 109)

Again, it is important to note that Brunel refers to rating a 'story'. In no way does he refer to asking readers to rate how the story is told (although one can argue that this is considered implicit in the rating of the story itself). It is however important to distinguish: Brunel attempts to ensure that a screenplay prominently displays the narrative characteristics that the majority of viewers will find enjoyable once the film has been made. It is essentially a pre-production version of a test-screening. It is an approach that puts the commercial viability of a screenplay at the forefront and embeds consumer feedback within the process of screenwriting, assigning it a part within the practice. What this implies of the screenplay is telling: it is a pre-production vehicle for a film to ensure, firstly, that the story being filmed is aligned with consumer tastes and secondly, that the production of a subsequent film is economical by avoiding any last-minute changes. In this context it is relevant to remember that, in addition to being a screenwriter, Brunel was both a producer and a director so the efficiencies and economies a well-thought-out screenplay could provide took on particular relevance.

This approach highlights a divide between the screenplays Brunel championed for their formal excellence, i.e. *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* (and Carl Mayer's oeuvre in general), and the screenplays aiming for commercial viability by incorporating audience preferences. Hence, there were therefore essentially two types of screenplays, as there were two types of films: those that were commercial and catered for the enjoyment of the maximum number of people (in that sense, almost utilitarian films), and then those screenplays and films that might be enjoyed by fewer people but developed the form and therefore were deemed to be held in particularly high regard as they progressed the craft of screenwriting and filmmaking. Brunel's advocacy for both suggests that he considers them both significant, and more



importantly implies that the latter can improve the former in a similar way that the screenings of exceptional films at the Film Society could have a positive influence on commercial film production on the whole.

Similarly to Loos, Brunel was strict about the screenplay's formal conventions and suggested that 'an attractive looking typescript is appetising, inviting and a well-typed, well set-out typescript is easy to read' (Brunel 1948: 113). He provides specific guidance in a self-deprecating fashion as if to apologise for the pedantic requirements of the industry, while simultaneously inviting innovation:

In typing your synopsis and your treatment, you should stick to the conventional double spacing (with treble spacing between paragraphs) remembering that the bulkier or fatter your work, the wider should be the margin down the left, where your sheets are bound; in typing the shooting script you will use single spacing, with quadruple spacing between paragraphs, and your action and dialogue will be more or less separated – the action being placed on the left side of the page, and the dialogue on the right. I am not certain that this is really the best arrangement, but it is a convention which should be obeyed – until some rebellious genius forces us to use his better plan.  
(Brunel 1949: 116ff)

But it is here again that Brunel emphasises the screenplay's place within the larger commercial – and importantly, professional – framework. With convention and utility key considerations when using the screenplay in an industrial context, the correct usage of conventions also provides the legitimacy to protect the professional class of screenwriters:

It is of the utmost importance – if you want everyone concerned to understand how you visualise the picture about to be shot – that you and your associates should master the technical jargon of your craft and that you should all use the same words for the same things.  
(Brunel 1933: 79)

This appeal to follow standardised industry conventions sits in the broader context of Brunel's writing on the screenplay and leads us back to the earlier considerations of professionalization in the film industry and the implications of this professionalization

on the screenplay. The implied assumption that standardisation opposes experimentation discounts the practical uses of standard practices across an industry and with the establishment of institutions such as the Film Society, Brunel and others aimed to encourage the highest standards of professional practice. By approaching screenwriting and filmmaking as crafts to be learned from the most skilled and to then be honed over years, Brunel stripped their forms back to highlight only their most essential constituents – which could be used either commercially or subverted in experimental form.

#### 4.6 Conclusions

There was a time when every man and woman knew what baking was: but now it is carried on in secret, by routine craftsmen in inaccessible works. So it is with all the processes, like weaving, turnery, agriculture and so forth.  
(Barry [1926] 1976: 16)

In discussions of the screenplay, its industrial nature is frequently cited as one of the defining characteristics distinguishing it from other written forms. What is less frequently explored is how the professionalization of industrial screenwriting contributed to the evolution of the form and how this aligned – rather than distanced – the screenplay to concurrent developments across early twentieth century literary practice.

In this chapter, I have identified three key types of cultural producers to consider in England at the beginning of the twentieth century: the amateur, the worker and the professional. The traditional types of producers were the first two, namely the amateur and the worker. The amateur held a privileged position that relied on the protection from the market through private income or patronage, removing his cultural practice from commercial imperatives. In direct contrast, the worker earned a

living with the means of his practice, therefore mostly meeting an economic objective but elevating his efforts through exceptional skill. The emergence of cultural professionals at the beginning of the twentieth century unsettled the previously binary division between these spheres of cultural production as professionals challenged both the amateur and the worker.

The privileged position of the amateur was undermined principally by the fact that professional writers and artists obtained their position through the acquisition and formalisation of specialised knowledge with the subsequent commercialisation of this knowledge affording a favoured status reinforced by the market. Similarly, professionals elevated the practice of the worker by standardising practices and containing them within a privileged group of practitioners, affording skilled workers a new degree of authority. With professionals emerging from groups of amateurs and workers both, they eventually *combined* the skills of the worker with the cultural *hinterland* of amateurs, legitimising the authority of the professional in the artistic landscape.

But the emerging cultural professional class was not unique. Instead, it was an extension of the proliferation of professionalization across a spectrum of vocations, from civil servants to university lecturers and medical professionals but

Very few recognized [...] literary production in the twentieth century was to be shaped and legitimated by professional associations of writers, literary magazines, and by the rise of the university. Modernist writing, in particular, responded to a new discourse of professionalism [...].  
(Strychaz 1993: 5)

As Strychaz suggests, while professionalization created a distinct class of workers, it also affected cultural practices across the artistic spectrum. As the chapter has shown, it was not just networks such as POOL that began to engage with professionals outside its inner circle. The Bloomsbury Group, more contained and less inclusive

than POOL, professionalised itself, significantly within the parameters of its own coterie, partially afforded by their privileged economic position and breadth of expertise within the confines of their group.

Through the continued protectionism afforded by their private incomes, the Bloomsbury Group did not have to aim for popular legitimisation in order to secure their livelihoods or maintain their practice. In contrast, the trained professional is an (albeit elevated) worker (regardless of background) who uses specialist skills and knowledge within the capitalist system to compete and succeed through popularisation of his goods. And although similar to Brunel's insistence on the importance of audience-led production, Bloomsbury engaged in the new consumer-producer dynamic from outside the commercial discourse. As Jennifer Wicke has argued:

Bloomsbury is a group, a coterie, and it "consumes", or chooses from the market, in a concerted effort of knowledge, taste, and power. Bloomsbury is an example of the way consumers now must, and will, acquire definite codes for material living.  
(Wicke 1994: 10)

Bloomsbury engages and interacts with modernity and the market but it does so within a sub-set of the market that is much narrower than that of commercial cultural producers such as Brunel and, importantly, it does so – it can afford to do so – on its own terms.

As previously highlighted, Bloomsbury was a self-selected group of private individuals who socialised 'on the basis of a shared upper-middle to upper-class intellectual class position' (Wicke 1994:9) and the importance of class stratifications takes on particular significance in the context of professionalization. Adrian Brunel was acutely aware of England's class structures and writes, in an unpublished and undated essay titled "Why Public Schools are Crowded" (n.d.), that 'the public school

is definitely a breeding ground for snobs'. He continues, 'so are many clubs, so are the Varsities, so is the Army, the local Tennis Club and the Suburban Boarding House' (Brunel n.d.: 1). A political progressive, Brunel was aware of his own background and the prejudices he would have likely internalised through his schooling<sup>7</sup> in contrast to the fact that he was now obliged to earn a living from his work in film. His transcendence of classical class boundaries as a public school educated 'worker' was one indication of the new social porosity provided by the professionalization of cultural work.

It was however through innovative organisations, such as the Film Society, that the engagement of closed modernist circles with professionals increased. Film critics like Iris Barry bridged the divide as she

Strategically, [...] associates film with the more reputable arts to raise its status – as would H.D. and Dorothy Richardson a few years later in *Close Up*. She compares movies to literature, finding the appeal of cinema to be more immediate because "the moving picture is really extraordinary"; [...].  
(Hankins 2004: 500)

With Barry's film reviews appearing in *Vogue* from 1924-1926, the same publication to publish Virginia Woolf, 'the high fashion and highbrows certainly did take up the [Film] Society in 1925 and 1926' (Hankins 2004: 492), in no small part due to the magazine's fashioning of cinema as a cultural accessory. Equally, the increasing exposure of 'films of merit' to a wide audience of professionals and tastemakers heightened the influence of international film conventions on British productions, arguably improving the quality of films that Christine Gledhill suggested had thus far

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<sup>7</sup> In his memoirs, Brunel writes about how he was received by the secretary at his first job at Moss Empires' Bioscope: 'I think she was a little suspicious of me at first. I suppose I didn't look her idea of a two-pounds-ten-a-week worker; she had seen on some form I had had to fill in that I had been to a school that had a reputation (deservedly) for producing snobs and possibly my accent put her off. However, I quickly sensed what was wrong with me. I told her something about myself and my circumstances, mentioning casually that my mother was a "professor of elocution" and that, I hope, accounted for my manner of speech' (Brunel 1949: 27).

been ‘espousing romanticist escape into costume and disguise, using late Victorian and Edwardian popular, middle-brow sources and aesthetic predilections’ (Gledhill 2009: 163).

British class stratifications were not prevalent in countries such as Germany or the United States and a conflicted understanding of the professional cultural producer in light of these stratifications is a nuance that arguably complicated how British film professionals positioned themselves in comparison to both the industrialised American productions on the one hand, and the continental model of more self-consciously modernist experimentation on the other. But Brunel’s career trajectory as well as his screenplays provide us with examples of how the British film industry responded to professionalization as well as industrial and stylistic influences from the United States and continental Europe. As extracts of his screenplays have shown, Brunel adopted American industrial conventions while rendering them applicable for his own mode of film production. In Brunel’s reflections on his working life in his autobiography *Nice Work* (1949), as well as his screenwriting manual, he made no reference to modernism nor did he engage in theorisation about the relationship between word and image. His writing on screenwriting and filmmaking remained consistently focused on creation and production (regardless of the institutional framework) and engaged less with critical enquiries of the possible meanings arising from the proliferation of new media and practices.

With all of the criticisms that can validly be made against the Bloomsbury Group’s forms of creative exclusion, screenwriting itself is fairly close to the idea of a practice based on exclusive codes that separates ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders’. Through standardisation, screenwriting became a practice defined by a set of rules that make writing ‘screenwriting’. This industrial standardisation transcended national

boundaries and created a new community of workers who were accepted as equals due to their possession of the required specialist knowledge.

Brunel's screenplay manual differs from American screenwriting courses and manuals who gave the illusion of access while the industry remained in fact inaccessible. During his time in the film industry, Brunel facilitated entry to the industry through his apprentice scheme based on the conviction that screenwriting (and by extension filmmaking) are the practical skills required for professional film production. As part of this, he expressed great belief in the contribution of the screenwriter to film. He closes his manual *Film Script* by emphasising what he considers the mission of film and the screenwriter's role in it:

We have a definite mission and we do not exist merely to drug our neighbours with unadulterated entertainment. [...]. We must hold our audiences, interest them, move them to sympathy, to laughter, to understanding, to activity – so that when our films have been shown those who have seen them will have been stimulated and will know more of certain subjects that need our collective understanding and active attention. The person who can set the ball rolling is the screenwriter. (Brunel 1948: 131)

Therefore, if we accept Jennifer Wickes's assertion that for Bloomsbury 'art remade the market, and the market remade modernism' (Wicke 1994: 22), I suggest that the reciprocal interactions between modernist coteries, such as the Bloomsbury Group, and commercial screenwriters facilitated by professionalization shaped the development of the screenplay in Britain. And while Bridget Conor is correct to suggest that it is screenwriting's immersion in a 'capitalist-intensive system of creative production that has contributed to its problematic claims of artistic legitimacy' (Conor 2014: 1), I argue that the screenplay is in fact merely the most defined expression of literary professionalization during the early part of the twentieth century. With no precedent and no amateur tradition providing it with a 'legitimate' provenance, it was a designated industrial form from its inception. But the screenplay

is not *just* an industrial form. Significantly, it is also a *professional* form of writing – a fact that aligns it with contemporaneous modernist literary forms.



## Chapter 5: Conclusions: The Screenplay as Reluctant Modernism

Many of the most radical forms of the formal experiments of the twentieth century can be traced back to the association of word and image suggested by the photograph. In fact, it would not be too far wrong to say that modernism itself, as a pan-artistic movement, begins with the critical interrogation of the relationship between text and image, brought equally into literature and the visual arts by mechanical recording.  
(North 2005: 12)

The starting point for this study has been curiosity about the fact that the screenplay emerged and formally evolved at the same time as modernism responded artistically to the fundamental changes western societies underwent at the beginning of the twentieth century. And while the artistic reverberations in response to these changes all expressed a conviction that previous modes of representation were no longer adequate in light of the transformations brought on by these events, the term ‘modernism’ is a broad umbrella shielding the wide range of views and practices of highly divergent cultural practitioners and thinkers across different national and international contexts.

What connects this wide range of artistic responses is the overarching characteristic of change and a rejection of old forms in favour of *the new*. A number of critics have emphasised (North 2005/1999, Scheunemann 2000) that, as a key vector and symbol of this newness and of cultural responses to change, the photographic image – and by extension the moving image – takes on particular significance in assessments of this period. The photograph’s immediate supersession of all previous artistic attempts to reduplicate physical reality compelled a new focus on formal specificity to justify the continued existence of traditional art forms.

Recalling Dietrich Scheunemann’s argument that

Although the strategies of the various movements differ, and each developed its own, unmistakable profile in terms of general aims and

specific styles and techniques, they all have one moment in common: their aesthetic innovations emerged as a response to the advances of photography. They counter photographic imagery, the precise depiction of material objects, the illusionism of forms of representation striving for imitative functions.  
(Scheunemann 2000: 24)

In addition to the ensuing experimentation in established media such as painting and literature, new technologies created new narrative forms, pre-eminently cinema. As a result, old forms were altered, new forms were established, and sometimes, established forms were utilised in aid of new forms. The screenplay emerged as a new form that appropriated established forms to achieve a modern aim.

In basic terms, a screenplay is a written narrative that is created to outline a visual sequence of events in an industrially-sanctioned verbal format in order to be transformed into a film. As such, it is *both* an original story form and a production aid. At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined the key paradigms in which the screenplay has been considered in the past, namely the screenplay as blue-print, the screenplay as literature, and the screenplay as intermediary. As the subsequent case studies have shown, the screenplay has the capacity to be considered within all of the above categories but I have proposed that to assess it divorced from contextualisation within the period of its inception and evolution overlooks key connections of reciprocal influence between the screenplay and contemporaneous literary forms.

Hence, I argue that for us to understand the early screenplay fully, it needs to be considered as part of the different national modernist discourses that produced distinctive modernisms during the first decades of the twentieth century, not least ‘as the modernist understanding of the relationship between human beings and reality [had become] radically different from that of [...] nineteenth-century thinkers and writers (Sheppard 2000: 59), who provided the narrative templates screenwriters used to create their practice. And as the three national modernisms covered in this thesis

confronted modernity in different ways, the screenplays emerging from their respective cultural spheres provide a range of perspectives on the form too, allowing us to trace the contemporary screenplay to its heterogeneous roots.

Today, the screenplay is an established, internationally standardised form – a written narrative with distinct formal characteristics – but it is still created in support of the production of another form, film. As the screenplay standardised, its economic function increased and in addition to ensuring a professional production process as part of ‘a predictable, efficient assembly system’ (Staiger 1985: 125), it increasingly also ‘became the basis for the setting up of the deal to make the film’ (Stempel 1982: 17). As such, the screenplay evolved into an art form fully integrated into the commercial framework of national film industries, serving multiple purposes during different stages of the production process. During this process, the screenplay is not formally secure. On the contrary, it is likely to undergo multiple iterations (by possibly a number of screenwriters) and is very possibly (even probably) not actually made into a film. The question of whether an unproduced screenplay is still a screenplay – or more precisely, how we understand a screenplay differently when it has not been translated/transposed into a produced film – has been answered in divergent ways. Howard Rodman suggests that screenplays ‘either become films, or they don’t. Their worth is determined not by the quality of the writing but by which side of the previous sentence’s comma they fall on’ (Rodman 2006: 88). In contrast, Ted Nannicelli argues that as long as the screenplay is an object that reflects the defined formal requirements of the writer’s intended form, i.e. the screenplay, it continues to be a screenplay regardless of its later utilisation or redundancy (Nannicelli 2013: 34). But the screenplay’s uncertain ontological status sets it apart from other written forms as screenwriting emerged as a new practice without the self-

conscious desire to integrate in the literary landscape. Instead, it was defined by its transient nature, a form that dissolves into another.

This study has examined the screenplay within contexts of literary scholarship by asking the particular question of whether the screenplay can be designated a form of *modernist* literature, on the basis that early screenplays, across western countries and their emergent national film industries, display influences of modernist practice specific to their national literary cultures. The thesis's methodology, assessing screenwriting practices within the context of a number of national modernisms, has suggested that affinities to modernist forms and practices are neither accidental nor isolated, but that early screenplays persistently reflect and are connected to the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of their respective national modernist (literary) cultures.

### 5.1 Industrial blue-print and/or modernist literature?

Definitive questions about the identity of the screenplay are inevitably frustrated: they invite a multitude of answers. Thus to ask the binary question whether the screenplay is an industrial blue-print or a form of modernist literature does not deliver a singular answer. Rather, the research presented in this thesis proposes that the screenplay has typically been both, and indeed both at the same time.

As we have seen in the preceding case studies, prose outlines were used as scripts early on and there is no reason why a narrative intended to be filmed has to be set in the particular written form that continues to be used today. (Especially when a visual outline such as a storyboard or comic strip could be equally – if not more – effective). However, as the formal requirements – that is, the professional conventions – of the screenplay have been established through a process of industrial

standardisation, a screenplay is designated a screenplay because it conforms to the requirements of its (industrially standardised) genre. But what influenced the development of the screenplay's form?

The screenplay as a narrative in a regulated template can be interpreted as a reflection of the appropriation of previously determined forms for a new use in industrial cultural production. Its existence as a document destined for industrial application, rather than private consumption, consecrates a new category of written narratives that is distinctly modern in that it is an adaptation of an existing form to facilitate a new (visual) form within a capitalist structure. This alignment with industrial forces –increasingly penetrating the cultural sphere in the early twentieth century – set the screenplay at odds with defenders of the separation of art and commerce (i.e., commercially-produced artforms). But as we have also discovered, modernism's relationship to dominant capitalist culture it is not simply one of antagonism. While previously prominent critics have positioned modernism in tension with modernity (Bürger 1992, Berman 1982), new modernist studies have increasingly questioned previously assumed boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art and explored how 'modernist ambitions were entangled with the language of advertising and commodification of the bohemian [...] [and] how modernist writers absorbed and remade forms of mass culture rather than merely disparaging them' (Mao and Walkowitz 2008: 744). Consequently, it is argued that modernism positions itself from within (rather than divorced from) capitalist society and is informed by this experience, thus suggesting that it 'is and always has been, the culture of capitalism' (Cooper 2004: 23).

If we accept the screenplay as a written form that exists to facilitate visual narration in a capitalist framework, we privilege the visual experience (one that

became progressively more powerful through the popularisation of film) over verbal narration, which as a result threatens the status of established forms of literature. But in contrast to the screenplay's connection to the visual being considered a threat, it can instead be seen as a radical signifier of literature's expanded capacity in the age of industrialised modernity. The screenplay's form, words, do not stand in opposition to images, as it in fact attempts to merge the word with the image, or at least, to make the two simultaneous in the sense that the written word of the screenplay can translate seamlessly into the moving image of film. Therefore, when we consider the screenplay in context to Michael North's assertion that, 'modernism itself, as a pan-artistic movement begins with the critical interrogation of the relationship between text and image' (North 2005: 12), the screenplay's inherent intermediality – its explicit connection of words with images – means that we have to assess it not just as a modern but a *modernist* form.

While modernism in its many manifestations always distinguishes itself through the attempt at 'new-ness', the professionalization of artistic and critical practices (as outlined in Chapter Four) meant that modernisms were increasingly assessed by attempts to assign value to artistic outputs and efforts to canonise what was considered most valuable. The screenplay's positioning as part of the industrial production process of filmmaking outside of the critical literary discourse excluded it from evaluation within the increasingly professionalised – and specialised – critical discourses. Similar to the professionalization of artistic practice outlined in Chapter Four, the New Critics introduced the concept of expert knowledge (in contrast to 'good taste') to the study of literature, (Latham and Rogers 2015: 43) and therefore consolidated their influence on literary studies through the institutionalisation of this knowledge. And while popular culture can claim cultural validity as popularity

validates a cultural good within a society as it becomes part of the society's cultural fabric, it was nevertheless excluded from mid-twentieth-century critical discourse if it failed to meet the requirements of cultural 'value', i.e. the experts' definition of technical merit. Recalling James O'Sullivan's convincing argument that 'popular culture is the culture of the people, reified as though cultural products were democratically elected. [...] popular culture is mass culture having survived societal selection' (O'Sullivan 2017: 285), popular culture receives its legitimacy through its audiences rather than critical appraisal. In contrast, cultural value is not tied to popularity but distinguishes itself through a particular technical achievement or artistic merit, the result of which may or may not prove popular. This distinction captures the differentiation that has been made between 'high' modernism and 'low' popular culture and the modernists' supposed aim to elevate the 'valuable'. By creating critical canons of 'valuable' work and excluding forms that were validated by the public 'simply' through their popularity, modernists and critics set forth to show that lasting cultural value was more important than to aim for cultural validity via entering the broad public consciousness. With the screenplay as an 'invisible' written form inherently tied to a popular visual form, it was scarcely considered in modernist discourse.

## 5.2 Similarity versus difference

Comparing the three case study screenwriters directly with each other helps to draw out some of the key characteristics of the screenplay in relation to the question of how different modernisms have affected its development. The three screenwriters included here as case studies were selected to enable a more comprehensive evaluation of the screenplay across multiple national modernisms and studio contexts. With early

Hollywood cinema, Weimar cinema and British cinema distinctly different, albeit connected through an increasing interaction of practices and investment, I aimed to identify common attributes that allow for the evaluation of the screenplay within a modernist framework. Using this approach, it is possible to examine the screenplay from angles of particular, rather than generalised, modernist practice and to draw parallels and distinctions between prevalent forms of modernist literature and screenplays developing in different national contexts.

In direct comparison, the screenplays of Anita Loos, Carl Mayer and Adrian Brunel show certain similarities that help us to understand how the screenplay evolved into the internationally standardised format it maintains today. The differences in their practices however emphasise the specific alignments to national modernisms, and the varying tensions within those alignments, that the screenplay experienced in the US, German and British film industries. The three examined screenwriters all produced exceptional work and advanced screenwriting as a form. They do however differ markedly from one another, sometimes to an almost contradictory degree. This opposition is also reflected in the respective national modernisms within which, as this thesis has demonstrated, their work can be contextualised. As we have seen, these parallels are not incidental but support the claim that the screenplay evolved as part of the universe of modernism(s) rather than in isolation from it.

One overarching characteristic that all three of the screenwriters in this study share, and which places their screenwriting practice in direct opposition to what is generally considered one of the key characteristics of modernism, is a lack of modernist self-consciousness. None recorded any expressions (that have survived) of their intention to produce anything other than a written narrative to be transposed into



a narrative film. They were self-conscious insofar that they employed certain techniques in order to facilitate a particular aim, but they were not self-conscious about their practice removed from the aim of visualisation. This raises the question of whether it is possible to be a modernist *faute mieux*, given the generally self-conscious nature of the attribution?

As a first example, Anita Loos's practice, viewed through the prism of American modernism, is an optimistic, commercial take on the screenplay as a tool for industrialised filmmaking and is innovative in how it renders a traditional form (i.e. the written word) to facilitate expression in a new form (i.e. the moving image) in an industrial context. In this regard, her work is reflective of American modernists' responses to the changes generated by modernity that tended to embrace rather than reject or denounce technological and industrial innovation (Sheppard 2000: 86). It also offers some clear points of comparison to the American modernist genre Imagism, which, in its attempts 'to present an image' (Lowell 1915: viii) while using 'absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation' (Pound 1954: 3) showed 'a clear parallelism between their point of view in verse and the intimate-and-friendly photoplay' (Lindsay [1915] 2000:157). American modernism exhibited a less anxious relationship between literary modernism and the popular arts, with critics like Gilbert Seldes, whose assessment of (American) popular art in the study *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924) made American popular culture a legitimate object of criticism, combining engagements with the popular with their participation in formulating the public definition of literary modernism.

Despite screenplays being by a large margin her principal body of work, it is primarily through her famous novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) that we gain insight to how Loos engaged with the contemporaneous modernist practices around

her. In *Blondes*, Loos appropriates (and mocks) modernism by adopting its formal characteristics for the mass-market and as such ridicules the seriousness of modernist writers. Her attempt at formal appropriation is however not dissimilar to how ‘James Joyce and T.S. Eliot [...] borrow from [mass culture’s] various modes of production in development of their own aesthetics [...] and thus they return to intermediality’ (O’Sullivan 2017: 306). When considering the appropriation of modernist modes in popular art (and vice versa), the concept of intermediality offers insight into the reciprocal relationships that I argue have informed the screenplay’s development. The modernists’ reliance on intermediality O’Sullivan alludes to is also evident in *Blondes*, which, in a notable reversal of the screenplay-film dynamic, uses illustrations as auxiliary devices to add an additional layer of narrative to the novel. Here, Loos fuses verbal and visual narratives and creates multiple possible readings of the text. As highlighted in both Chapter Two and Four, this strategy of visual-verbal fusion was not unique to Loos and is also evident in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando* (1928) in which she incorporates photographs and drawings. While the intermedial practice in these novels is explicit (in that visual and verbal narratives co-exist), the screenplay’s intermedial practice is constituted via the screenplay’s attempt to represent the visual in written form, similar to how Imagists tried ‘to present an image’ (Lowell 1915: viii). And while the screenplay has been previously considered as an ‘intermediary’ form, this disregards the reciprocal influences between written and visual narratives across genres, as evidenced by both Imagist poetry and novelists’ incorporation of visual imagery in their novels. On the basis of its explicit attempt to ‘stand in’ for the visual narrative – in fact to *be* the visual narrative in verbal form – the screenplay can instead be considered an *intermedial* modernist form.

But despite her conscious engagement with contemporary modernism, there is no evidence that Loos sought any association with formal modernist discourses. In Chapter Two, I have baptised Anita Loos an ‘accidental modernist’, a writer conscious of modernist practice but not actively participating in it. But similar to modernism’s participation in the professionalization of culture and subsequent complicity in its industrialization, Loos becomes an accidental modernist by employing modernism’s own techniques in the creation of commercial culture. Loos created a fluid style that moved between and borrowed from modernist literature for film and from film for modernist literature. As a commercial writer, Loos was very specific about the commodification of everything she produced. Positioning herself as the ‘screenwriter as star’, her promotion of this image with publications and magazine articles all served the intended purpose to increase her marketability and ultimately, net worth. But more so than either Mayer or Brunel, Loos showed a playfulness when engaging with the modernist realm which afforded her a position of power, supported by the influence her popularity lent her.

In comparison to Loos, Carl Mayer’s work is a much more native expression of modernist experimentation in the Weimar Republic. The body of his work traces the trajectory of modernism in Weimar by appropriating Expressionist literary devices for his screenplays as well as subsequently adopting themes of the New Objectivity once Weimar modernism moved on from Expressionism’s attempts to externalise internal conditions towards an increasingly naturalistic mode. By employing definitively Expressionist literary devices such as unusual grammatical constructions to signify intention, as well as single nouns and adverbs to anticipate emotional responses, Mayer created an Expressionist screenplay mode that aimed to mimic the reactions evoked in audiences upon watching a film. Through this, he can almost be

considered a ‘double-modernist’ in that he uses modernist modes but subverts them to achieve a different aim. However, in contrast to Loos, who, while not being explicit, at least gives the impression of modernist awareness, Mayer does not show that he engages with Expressionism consciously. The context of Mayer’s writing practice in Weimar Germany compared to both Loos and Brunel could hardly be more stark as he did not engage in any (known) public discourse on the screenplay (such as Loos’s appearances in film fan magazines or Brunel and Loos’s respective publications of screenwriting manuals). Additionally, Mayer was ultimately unsuccessful in popularising his personal approach to screenwriting practice in order to ensure continuing commercial success.

And although he worked on advancing the screenplay form to an ever more specific mode of writing, Mayer did not (again in contrast to both Loos and Brunel) display any interest in writing in other forms. The fact that he abandoned screenwriting in favour of editing during the last stages of his life instead indicates that he was primarily concerned with the idea of visual storytelling rather than written narratives *per se*.

Despite the lack of evidence to prove modernist self-consciousness in his screenwriting practice, Mayer displays all of the purposeful and deliberate actions of contemporary modernists – they were merely employed to a different end. Based on the analysis of his surviving screenplay texts, one can argue that Mayer aimed to ‘write’ the actual film rather than an approximation of or preparation for it, therefore merging the screenplay with its visualisation in a similar way that Imagists aimed to find the *exact* word to describe the single image representing a unique experience and the Expressionists attempted to externalise internal conditions.

In a less formally explicit way than Mayer, Adrian Brunel's screenwriting practice offers yet another model of engagement with modernist practice. Reflecting on the broader changes to the modes of cultural production at the beginning of the twentieth century in Britain, Brunel's body of work highlights how cultural practice diverged between the amateur practice of private coteries and that of salaried cultural workers, while at the same time the emergence of the 'cultural professional' facilitated both a realignment of cultural hierarchies as well as positioning of the screenplay as an archetypal form of the new literary professionalism. Viewing the development of the screenplay through the prism of the hierarchies of early twentieth century cultural discourse, it therefore becomes evident that the screenplay's engagement with modernism extends beyond formal similarities alone and suggests that – although formal analysis remains paramount in evaluating how much the screenplay's development has been influenced by numerous modernist practices – the contexts in which interactions with modernist practice took place need to be considered also.

Assessing Adrian Brunel's body of work as a commercial screenwriter and filmmaker during the early years of the industrialising British film industry allows us to examine how screenwriting practice in England differed from that of contemporaneous American and Germany screenwriters and how Britain's particular take on the modernist/popular divide influenced the practice. In contrast to Loos and Mayer, Brunel was not exclusively a (screen-)writer. Probably best remembered today as a director, Brunel wrote, directed and produced films, in addition to running his own production company, which became primarily known for taking on editing assignments to 'fix' films (Brunel 1949: 118). As a professional film worker he was 'viewed with suspicion by some conservative figures within the more commercial end

of the industry' (Stollery 2009: 375) due to his involvement with the Film Society and the 'experimental' reputation of his production company Brunel & Montagu Ltd (Stollery 2009: 375). Inhabiting a space between industrial film production and the fringes of the more experimental end of commercial filmmaking, Brunel was neither fully integrated in the British studio system, nor was he aligned with the modernist coteries who operated in their own, privately funded circles outside of the commercial studios. The relative distance Brunel maintained to both (although he was periodically contracted by studios and co-founded the Film Society with film critic and minor Imagist poet Iris Barry), highlights the peculiar position of the new type of cultural worker he exemplifies – the professional.

Of the three case studies, Adrian Brunel is the screenwriter who exemplifies most clearly this new category of the professional cultural producer as he actively participated in the formalisation of his specialist knowledge by training apprentices in the 'craft' of filmmaking (Brunel 1949:119), producing manuals to formalise screenwriting convention and by establishing institutions (in form of the Film Society) to legitimate his expert knowledge by virtue of association. Through his co-founding of the Film Society Brunel also aimed to facilitate larger audiences for critically accomplished films, in order to popularise them and therefore influence commercial filmmaking practice, aiming to enhance the quality of commercial film production as a result. In comparison, the examples of Bloomsbury's professionalization discussed in Chapter Four are divided between their personal commercial projects (the Omega Workshops, and the Hogarth Press) and their direct engagement with the professional literary realm with Woolf's publications in magazines such as *Vogue* as examples. They highlight the realisation of the previously privileged amateurs that knowledge was becoming increasingly specialised

and that formalising and subsequently containing this knowledge afforded a degree of authority that might otherwise be lost – across all parts of the cultural spectrum.

As previously established, modernism can be defined by its focus on form as a response to the photographic image but as the discussion of professionalization across commercial and modernist discourses has shown, the designation of the modernist label is not predicated on formal innovation alone. The shifts in cultural production, and the unsettling of existing power structures within cultural frameworks all contributed to the fact that new forms such as the screenplay were assessed primarily through their association to industrial popular culture instead of their form alone.

When considering the choice of the three screenwriters discussed as case studies, it is important to highlight that they represent merely a small sub-set of the many interactions between the screenplay with modernism during the period. Screenwriting practices in France and Russia in particular provide fertile ground for further examination but I suggest that the principle of the link between modernist practice and the development of the screenplay form will be visible across all different national contexts.

In summary, there are key characteristics of the screenplay that can be identified across all three case studies. Firstly, the screenplay as a demystified form of writing that places it in direct contrast to the literature of the nineteenth century, notably that of Romanticism, or as Steven Price has argued ‘the screenplay text is clearly a product of the kind of advanced industrial practice to which Romanticism is in direct ideological opposition’ (Price 2010: 9). Screenwriting is a pragmatic, even utilitarian form subject to a subsequent translation in a mechanical process, based in realism and removed from myth. It is an industrial form. The aim to capture the visual in a written format was of course far from confined to the screenplay, but in contrast

to modernist takes on traditional forms, such as Imagism's attempt to replicate the visual image in verbal form, the screenplay supported, rather than rivalled, the photographic image. Secondly, the screenplay only marginally exists as an aesthetic object regardless of how specific it is in its construction. As discussed in Chapter Four, Adrian Brunel's screenplays were working copies that were annotated and amended during the production process, thus standing in direct contrast to Carl Mayer's demands for his screenplays to be 'transcribed accurately' (Mayer 1926: 1). Yet, regardless of how the writer treats the screenplay as an object, it becomes subordinate (if not redundant) as soon as the film based on it has been made. The texts themselves continue to exist (and can provide clues about the construction of the film) but they become a secondary object for everyone (bar the writer herself, and only arguably so) involved in the production process as well as the audience of the film, as in its totality, the word has been superseded by the image.

Thirdly, appropriation is an important concept when viewing the screenplay through a modernist lens. The idea of using templates of playwriting and poetry to effectively storyboard films created new applications for existing forms. But rather than radically challenging how to represent the image on the page, the case studies show that the screenplay combined different existing forms to achieve its desired effects. At the same time, the screenplay was not the only intermedial form of writing. And although it is the screenplay's aim to capture the image through words that aligns it most closely with modernist forms, its efforts are rooted in the requirements of industrial processes that remain at the heart of its conception and need to be acknowledged as a key influence on the screenplay form.

Modernism in all its forms is an expression of tension. This tension may be positively charged, in that it facilitates progress, confronting technological and



societal change. It may also be negatively charged, in that it highlights anxieties and conflict in the engagement with modernity. The screenplay exemplifies modernist tension between the traditional (the word) and the modern (the image) in a capitalist society. Viewed as such, the screenplay can be considered a quintessential twentieth century literary form, not only containing but indeed embodying all of the tensions experienced in the realm of cultural production. It is a commercial document that is written by professionals who have to have specialist knowledge. It is also rooted in the traditions of poetry and drama and it adapts these for modern application.

What the case studies in this thesis have shown is that the assumptions about what constitutes a ‘modernism’ should be treated with caution as definitions are narrowly defined and, to a degree, arbitrary.

### 5.3 The screenplay as reluctant modernism

The question if the screenplay can be considered a form of literary modernism is ultimately a question of how we define modernism. And as studies on what ‘modernism was and what it became’ (North 2005: 208ff) expanded in scope across ‘what we might think of as temporal, spatial and vertical directions’ (Mao and Walkowitz 2008: 737), over the past decades, I argue that the screenplay should be considered as part of the

[...] vertical reconfiguration [that] exerts a kind or degree of disruptive force on modernist studies that it may not on any other period-based field, since for many years modernism was understood as, precisely, a movement by and to a certain kind of high (cultured mandarins) and against a certain kind of low (the masses, variously regraded as duped by the “culture industry” [...]).  
(Mao and Walkowitz 2008: 738)

As identified through the case studies, the reasons for the screenplay’s exclusion from consideration in modernist frameworks is nuanced and, I argue, primarily due to

three factors: firstly, the screenplay is, in its inherent connection to the film medium, at risk of being considered an auxiliary, rather than an independent form. Noël Carroll takes this approach when he suggests that screenplays ‘are ontologically ingredients in the motion pictures with which they are associated rather than being independent artworks’ (Carroll 2008: 69). The second reason why I suggest the screenplay has not been considered in a modernist context is its perceived lack of medium specificity. The ‘utilisation’ of verbal narrative for visual aims pits the screenplay against Clement Greenberg’s influential argument that ‘a modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium’ (Greenberg 1961: 139). The third reason why I suggest that the screenplay has not been included in assessments of literary modernism extends beyond formal analysis and addresses its integration in industrial cultural production. As ‘modernists created an audience for their art by associating it with qualities such as seriousness, modernness, or prestige’ (Mao and Walkowitz 2008: 744), the screenplay’s inherent connection with the mass-market focused film industry distinguished it from these modernist forms. It would be a significant omission to exclude the strong disdain of some prominent modernists towards mass culture. Writing in *The Egoist* in 1914, Ezra Pound puts forward that

[...] the artist has no longer any belief or suspicion that the mass, the half-educated simpering general [...] can in any way share his delights  
[...] The aristocracy of the arts is ready again for its service.  
(Pound 1914: 67)

Pound’s view here represents an antagonism that fails to acknowledge the inherent relationships between modernists and mass culture – even when these relationships were defined by an active positioning against mass culture. But it is important to highlight that these were tensions based less on modernity’s impact on modes of consumption, i.e. the increasing move towards the visual, but primarily on anxieties

over changing power structures within the cultural landscapes as even modernists supposedly hostile to mass-culture recognised and embraced the move towards the visual (Beasley 2007: 17). These three key objections to the screenplay's consideration via a modernist framework show that the screenplay's perceived lack of autonomy together with its 'intermedial utilitarianism' and integration in commercial film production position it in a space with few allies.

But as the three case studies have shown, the screenplay does warrant consideration in a modernist framework for a number of reasons: firstly, if we accept Dietrich Scheunemann's assertion that despite their various differences, all modernist movements 'have one moment in common: their aesthetic innovations emerged as a response to the advances of photography' (Scheunemann 2000: 24), then the screenplay's *a priori* connection to the photographic image recommends it as an ideal modernist form. Secondly, the way screenwriters have adopted and appropriated modernist literary tactics to convey meaning (most clearly evidenced through Carl Mayer's employment of Expressionist literary devices) in conjunction with the concurrent adoption of modernism's publicity tactics (highlighted especially by Loos's celebrity self-positioning in fan magazines such as *Photoplay*) show that screenwriting practice was not contained in a formal vacuum within industrial production processes but reflected preoccupations of its respective national modernist discourses. And lastly, the reciprocal relationships and influences between modernist writers and purveyors of popular culture that have been – and are being increasingly – uncovered (Townsend 2019 a/b, North 2005/1999, Hankins 2004, Plate 2004) show that the screenplay was in a *shared* dialogue with modernist literature, exemplified by how private coteries such as POOL engaged with professionals (Townsend 2019a: 21)

and how modernists writers such as Woolf engaged in intermedial practices (Plate 2004: 299-301) similar to those of professional screenwriters.

The screenplay distinguishes itself from other modernist forms in that it does not draw attention to the materials of its construction. In fact, a successful screenplay deliberately transcends its verbal form both figuratively (enabling the reader to ‘see’ a film) as well as literally (in its actual realisation in a film). But as previously discussed, the term ‘modernism’ provides us merely with an umbrella term sheltering different practices that are often far from aligned and often even antithetical to one another. Yet the binding glue is experimentation; to alter and to transform, which should explicitly include the screenplay. What the emergence of the screenplay as a ‘literature in flux’ (Sternberg 1997: 27) added to the modernist discourse was radical; it challenged the parameters of modernist literature in that its intermedial nature expanded the parameters of literature. It remade literature into something new, something transient, something beyond – or perhaps supplemental to – literature itself: less an ur-text than a new kind of intermedial *paratext* that sits both outside and inbetween.

The question of the screenplay as industrial blue-print or screenplay as modernist literature is often discussed in terms that imply the two models as mutually exclusive. I argue that the screenplay’s specifically literary modernist qualities can in fact enrich a blue-print and make it a better, more nuanced template for a film. To argue that the screenplay is one thing or the other is futile as the screenplay can, and has been proven to be, both. Screenwriting is less about the written word than it is about visual storytelling in an industrial setting. It is a pragmatic form that stayed true to itself by utilising the new modernist tools around it, just as the modernists employed the tools of mass-culture.

So even when we accept that modernism is the art of capitalism that responds to the representation of physical reality put forth by the photograph, it is important that we recognise the difference between the screenplay and other arts in the capitalist framework. While the broad distinction between ‘low’ and ‘high’ art has been discredited (Jaffe 2005: 6ff, Cooper 2004: 29, North 1999: 9) (amongst many others), the screenplay provides us with a tangible example of a work whose formal characteristics can render it a modernist form but whose *status* in the cultural hierarchy as part of an industrial product disqualifies it from attaining a modernist label. And even if the screenplay is not a ‘traditional’ modernism, what can it teach us about the nature of modernism?

On the basis of the research in this study, I argue that the screenplay’s very existence challenges the general parameters of how we define modernism. The screenplay is a hybrid, it is contradictory and it is distinctive. Its response to the relationship between text and visualisation provides us with a bridge between the word and the image and it is a form that engages with modernity, with technology and the visual arts in a way that no other written form does. I have argued that the parameters of inclusion and exclusion in the modernist fold have been defined not by formal considerations alone but by the complex interplay between different parts of the cultural discourse. Similar to the professional who unsettled the traditional division between the cultural worker and the amateur, I suggest that the screenplay unsettled the demarcation between modernist and popular arts.

A screenplay can be modernist literature but it is not modernist by default. It shows characteristics of what we consider modernist literature but it does not comply with the rules that would designate it a canonical work. The screenplay is a written form that was born of modernity and developed as part of it – it is therefore a true

expression of the capacity of the written word in a new mechanical, but most importantly, visual age. And as such, the screenplay is indeed an – albeit reluctant – form of literary modernism.

## **Bibliography**

### **Abbreviations**

Anon.: Anonymous

BFI: Reuben Library, British Film Institute, London.

MHL: Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

n.d.: Not dated

SDK: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.

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