

The Segmentation of Screenwriting Brands

John Fraim

<https://midnightoilstudios.org>

Consider the world of screenwriting theory in Hollywood. Never has there been more ideas out there on what film structure should look like in the number of acts or steps it possesses. There are proponents of the three-act structure, the five-act structure, the eight-act structure, the thirteen-step structure, the fifteen-step structure, the twenty-two step structure. And so on. And of course, more numbers and structures will be invented every year. The point is that screenwriting education is composed of screenwriting gurus who protect their brands. And, one of the key areas of differentiation is the number of structural steps in their brand. The steps in a screenplay are tied closely to the guru's particular brand. In effect, certain screenwriting gurus own the number of steps in film structure.

Has there been any attempt to consolidate the various theories into a few - or just one - in the screenwriting industry? Very little it seems to me. The gurus put on expensive seminars each year to preach to their audience that their brand is the one to follow. I once wrote a manuscript titled Hollywood Safari that compared various screenwriting theories and structures. I never finished writing it, though, and have to continually update it since new screenplay theories continue to grow each year.

It seems that those who really want to consolidate screenwriting brands into one need to consider fewer number of steps. In other words, more has to be consolidated in reducing the number of steps than increasing it. Reduction of steps involves consolidation and discovering correspondences and similarities. Increasing steps involves creating new steps.

The whole thing sounds somewhat like a "family" dispute inside that relatively small world of screenwriters. Yet, is it? The differentiation of modern marketing and branding has demanded that screenwriting theory create more brands. More brands mean more views on screenwriting structure. More ideas on structure create more confusion for young screenwriters. More confusion for young screenwriters mean more confusing modern story structure is. Sure, we will continue to see stories streamed on Netflix. Yet, will we ever see a new type of story that has consolidated what many have learned about screenwriting in the past 40 years, since Syd Field in the early 80s?

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Will this ever change under the current model of modern capitalism? More brands equal more money for leading authors or gurus of the screenwriting education world. Unfortunately, those screenwriters who actually sell scripts or have contracts with producers and directors have little time for this education part of the screenwriting industry.

What is more important for the education of a screenwriter? Reading books by gurus? Or reading the screenplays purchased by Hollywood? The most important is often the least obvious. Original screenplays exist in PDF form on the Internet. Almost all the greatest scripts. A library of original art. Yet, they don't sing out their importance with new books and glowing recommendations about them. They simply exist out there, in silent cyberspace, waiting to be discovered by some reader. Sunset Boulevard by Billy Wilder. North by Northwest The screenplay was by Ernest who wanted to write "the Hitchcock picture to end all Hitchcock pictures." I think he might have accomplished this.

Consolidation into perhaps less brands and towards one idea is what one might eventually garner from reading the great screenplays rather than reading the great books on how to write screenplays. What should be the most important activity for screenwriters? Reading the how to book about screenwriting or reading the great screenplays? It really comes down to this in my view. And, reading the greatest screenplays does not take that long as most are no more than 120 pages of dialogue and narrative. In learning how the magic of drama is created, it seems to me that there is no better way than reading the original documents or pieces of literature. There is the art of a particular form of art. And then, there are those who write about this form of art and tell people how to create works of art in this form of art.

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Yet pulling other brands under one large brand is an act of insurrection in modern capitalism's age of a segmented markets and surveillance capitalism. Our modern political system depends on segmentation for its existence.

Just like our story-telling industry. It's weakness for many today is a result of following the advice of leading story gurus rather than leading screenwriters. The advice of the screenwriting gurus is loud with much marketing and advertising dollars behind this marketing. On the other hand, the quiet wisdom in the greatest screenplays, was not able to scream out at the screenwriter consumer market out there. The great screenplays of all time simply sat on the Internet in various indexes that were only activated when someone came to them. They had little power to send their message out to those out there like the screenwriting gurus could do.

I would argue that the confusion in America's story-making structure has a great effect on the nation. What are the key steps in modern the times. To think there is no connection between screenwriting structure and our times is naive. Yet, none of the guru teachers want to find this connection. It makes little sense in the world of segmented marketing. Has little relevance for brand enhancement.