Introduction

Screenwriting off the Page

The product of the dream factory is not one of the same nature as are the material objects turned out on most assembly lines. For them, uniformity is essential; for the motion picture, originality is important. The conflict between the two qualities is a major problem in Hollywood.

HORTENSE POWDERMAKER[1]

A screenplay writer, screenwriter for short, or scriptwriter or scenarist is a writer who practices the craft of screenwriting, writing screenplays on which mass media such as films, television programs, comics or video games are based.

Wikipedia

In the documentary *Dreams on Spec* (2007), filmmaker Daniel J. Snyder tests studio executive Jack Warner's famous line: "Writers are just schmucks with Underwoods." Snyder seeks to explain, for example, why a writer would take the time to craft an original "spec" script without a monetary advance and with only the dimmest of possibilities that it will be bought by a studio or producer. Extending anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker's 1950s framing of Hollywood in the era of Jack Warner and other classic Hollywood moguls as a "dream factory," *Dreams on Spec* profiles the creative and economic nightmares experienced by contemporary screenwriters hoping to clock in on Hollywood's assembly line of creative uniformity.

There is something to learn about the craft and profession of screenwriting from all the characters in this documentary. One of the interviewees, Dennis Palumbo (*My Favorite Year*, 1982), addresses the downside of the struggling screenwriter's life with a healthy dose of pragmatism: "A writer's life and a writer's struggle can be really hard on relationships, very hard for your mate to understand. Your ups and downs, the fact that you're spending all of these hours doing something that doesn't seem to have a tangible reward. Not to mention the financial strain. Because for most writers they have to take day jobs that don't bring them the kind of money and security that their mate would want, particularly if children start coming into the equation."[2] Palumbo reminds us that many professional

screenwriters struggle to make ends meet, a fact exacerbated by often-stark familial realities that undercut the aspirational myth of the economy of screenwriting.

As *Dreams on Spec* suggests, screenwriters have never had it easy in the hierarchy of cinema preproduction. They have always lived at the bottom of the Hollywood totem pole, their director and actor colleagues habitually eclipsing them in the cultural and economic discourse. Equally problematic, the creative freedom of the contemporary Hollywood screenwriter has been increasingly constrained in recent years as the list of genres and stories that studios deem fundable shrinks to an unprecedented low. The major studios are operating with greatly reduced production slates, making little more in-house than a few high-budget "tentpole" movies, or potential financial blockbusters, a scattering of teen and romantic comedies, and the occasional prestige drama often strategized as awards bait or to pacify important talent and their agents. The budgets of their shrinking development departments have been slashed, and so have the project pipelines that used to offer the possibility of funding for aspiring and established screenwriters alike, even if the movies they worked on never got made. As a consequence, the average feature screenwriter's family is more likely to go hungry today than it is to bask in prestige and associated riches.

THE SCREENWRITING FACTORY

Hollywood is buying very few original screenplays, in part because it is producing more and more of its films for an expanding global market. Character-driven drama, once a mainstay of studio and independent production, has increasingly been moved away from the movie theater to smaller screens. Production in the largely co-opted "prestige independent" sector has also shrunk from the boom it experienced in the early 1990s. On the one hand, microbudget production, fueled by digital technology and reduced production costs, is booming; yet it is far from easy for a successful microbudget screenwriter, who often doubles as a project's director and triples as its producer, to make a living from no-to-low-budget moviemaking. On the other hand, making a mark at microbudget is one way she or he may be discovered.

In the last two decades the industrial context for a screenwriter's labor has been changing faster than at any time since the coming of sound. For almost the entire history of cinema, Jack Warner's schmuck, or what we might now call the traditional screenwriter—or, to borrow from the lexicon of the tech industry, "screenwriter 1.0"—wrote either for the big screen of the movie

theater or, after its introduction, for the small screen of television. Today's writer—"screenwriter 2.0"—writes in the era of media convergence, an era that foreshadows the end of cinema as we think we know it. This new or convergent screenwriter is likely to practice her craft in new media and across multiple screens. Markets and media are changing and with them the craft and careers of those who write for those transforming industries and platforms. All is not lost, therefore, for the craft of screenwriting, despite the unprecedented reduction of opportunities to hit it rich with a spec script. Opportunities abound for writers willing and able to think off the page.

Dreams on Spec both understands the histories of the dream factory's own crafts and tells their stories through a well-established mix of "how to break in" stories and, once in, "war stories" of exploitation. For example, Snyder's documentary tells a compelling story about the struggles of aspiring screenwriters from within what film scholar Steven Maras calls the "practitioner" and "business" frames of industry discourse. "The practitioner frame," Maras writes, "tends to be about advice, experience, and the so-called creative process." The "business frame," in contrast, tends to be about industrial activities such as deal making and pitching.[3] Screenwriting professionals, along with the screenwriting paraindustry gurus (people and businesses that sell the hidden value of screenwriting to aspiring writers), typically address their craft uncritically from within these practitioner and business frames. They circumscribe the self-reflexive discourse through which screenwriting practice is framed within the industry. Missing from Snyder's otherwise provocative documentary, for instance, is an exploration of the effects of media convergence on both contemporary writers and the conglomerate studios that simultaneously drive and are driven by the craft of screenwriting. Missing, too, is how the screenwriters' trade union, the Writers Guild of America (WGA), functionally accedes in the propping up of an increasingly modernized assembly line that needs fewer and fewer original writers. The WGA's de facto stance is, in part, due to the narrow self-interest of its established membership and, in part, because its influence has been marginalized by and within the new media industries.

Hollywood limits the opportunities for aspiring writers while enhancing the viability of the few established writers who can write to contemporary tentpole formulas. It also co-opts the efforts of the WGA, which is obliged to focus much of its effort within the default employment formula presented by the studios and producers. Snyder's documentary, like much of the paraindustry, offers valuable insights into the business frame of screenwriting yet fails to address explicitly the conundrum of the studio/guild complex.

As we show in chapters 1 and 5, the wider the definition of professional screenwriting becomes, the harder it has been for the WGA to spread its jurisdictional umbrella to cover the new creative and industrial contexts in which professional screenwriters now strive to make a living. Even the writers' strike of 2007–8, which was fought over the economic implications of media convergence for the craft, centered less on increasing membership and thus expanding the ranks to different kinds of writers than on ensuring its established writers remained economically viable as studios spread their interest across new delivery platforms. As a result, the new convergent screenwriter is less likely to be a member of the guild or even to aspire to join it.

To tackle the contemporary world of screenwriters and the screenwriting economy, we engage critically with Maras's practitioner and business frames through an analysis of a range of industrial texts such as the media trade press, craft guild publications, paraindustrial testimonials of all kinds, online outlets for screenwriters' discussions, and other records of and responses to the guild's collective action. We also look at scripts and production documents such as studio notes, as well as fiction films and documentaries. As professor-types, we also engage extant film and media scholarship; however, we are always keen to work between the registers of the paraindustrial and scholarly discourses that frame the craft of screenwriting for different purposes and for different audiences. We look at all—and employ all—critically and, we hope the reader will find, creatively.

Our work in chapters 2, 3, and 4 is also underpinned by interviews with working screenwriters from all sectors of the industry. Some of these interviews were conducted as background research and remain anonymous at the request of the writer. At the same time, we also offer several substantial interview-based case studies of prominent writers such as Pamela Gray (*Conviction,* 2010) and Shawn Ryan (*The Shield,* 2002–8) and others who are perhaps less well known but are navigating professional challenges that illustrate and bring into focus important aspects of the state of the screenwriting craft today. These interviews are intended to explore the attitudes unique and common to screenwriters in the contemporary moment, with an emphasis on current craft and trade practices, to illustrate the effects that broader corporate practices are having on the careers of working writers.

To be sure, interviews with professional screenwriters are also texts that require critical interpretation. In the research context they function as both primary and secondary evidence: evidence that either goes directly to a specific point, perhaps revealing industrial discourse, or that helps contextualize a broader point. Nonetheless, the subjects of these interviews are

just as embedded in culture—and, at times, the paraindustry—as those who sell the dreams of screenwriting via the usual "how to," and "war stories." Traditional screenwriters are well practiced in selling themselves, their industry, their experiences, and their ideas. Indeed, this kind of practiced self-promotion is a core professional skill among members of all the major Hollywood crafts. We are thus always careful to relate our interviews to wider issues and debates in contemporary screenwriting, as well as to the scholarly field that sees these types of texts as one of many forms of evidence. In this way the personal stories of our subjects should be taken to be illustrative and contextual rather than definitive.

We can say the same about our use of scholarly texts—of film theory, history, and criticism—and also the myriad texts of the screenwriting paraindustry. One need only search Google for "how to sell a blockbuster screenplay" to find a host of reputable and not-so-reputable institutions and individuals selling the hidden method to creative success, as well as screenwriting professors professing a winning "practitioner" formula and the associated dreams that will come true for those undergraduates and graduate students who learn how to write to formula. As we will discuss in more detail in our conclusion, film schools, even the most competitive and prestigious like UCLA, USC, NYU, and AFI, still market traditional screenwriting curricula with the aim of attracting students through the potential of Hollywood success. High demand from potential students and the economic imperatives of modern higher education have also ensured that, when there is insufficient space in their prestigious screenwriting programs, aspiring students that are not admitted can nonetheless secure the imprimatur of the prestigious institutions by taking screenwriting classes through their online or extension programs. Indeed, paraindustrial discourses—the selling of dreams of success, of the narrative of "breaking in" to share in Hollywood's riches—are now helping to meet the revenue needs of both public and private higher education.

The trade book market is equally rich with "how to make it as a screenwriter" books; a simple search of Amazon.com offers an algorithmic library of options to the buyer in search of Hollywood originality by way of the screenplay page. Hence, this dimension of the paraindustry, from how-to websites and books to formal and informal film education, is in the business of marketing the fantasy of "breaking in" from the perspective of Maras's third "story and structure frame." Here Maras refers to accounts of the nuts and bolts of writing a screenplay, viewed through an empirical lens. Execute carefully, the narratives of the story and structure frame advise, assemble with precision according to previously blueprinted formulae, and

understand how the industry came to work as it does, and the student screenwriter in and outside academe might just sell that spec script.

This educational dimension of the paraindustry also provides us with primary and secondary evidence of the "end of cinema." Screenwriting manuals, for example, offer blueprints for screenplay design that, in effect, sell variant narratives of success through conformity rather than innovation. From the perspective of film and media studies it is easy to dismiss these manuals and textbooks on the grounds of a long list of scholarly and perspectival limitations. Viewed through the discourses that give some texture to the screenwriting profession, however, many of these manuals offer sound practical advice and self-reflexive insights that shouldn't be dismissed or marginalized on the grounds of scholarly antipathy to Hollywood orthodoxies alone or, for that matter, scholarly debates that seek to limit evidence to textual analysis, critical theory, and, of course, canonical methods. We take them seriously yet engage with them critically.

Whether screenwriters and screenwriting professors like it or not, their profession is engaged in one of the most rule-bound forms of creative writing. Many of these rules—such as a prevailing three-act screenplay form that requires specific dramatic developments to happen at specified moments—are practical accretions that speak to the collaborative history of the medium and apply to many innovative independent features as much as they do to the most formulaic genre stories. It is precisely because of the particular kind of insight that they offer and because of the work they do in propagating and sustaining the realities and myths of the screenwriting profession that the paraindustry is worthy of critical attention, both as complex discourse and as primary evidence. As we hope to show in this book, success in screenwriting does trade to a greater or lesser extent on the ability of the writer to work creatively within the multiple accreted constrictions of her or his chosen profession. And that includes the parlance of a diverse paraindustry. We take it that our readers will bring their own critical judgment to our use of manuals, interviews, textbooks, and related paraindustry artifacts.

We also trust that they will do the same in parsing the attitudes of screenwriting professionals among whom there exists both a fair amount of critical insight and a commitment to a brand of industrial spin. UCLA screenwriting professor Richard Walter, for example, offers a good reason why his students would do well not to focus too hard too soon on the aspect of their careers that we could place within Maras's business frame. Although he doesn't use that kind of scholarly language, Walter is all in on the practitioner and story and structure frames because he has recognized that

focusing on the business frame will only sway an aspiring screenwriter either to focus on riches over story or to give up entirely. The prominent professor in effect tells his students that one needs to be a bit of a schmuck to enter the screenwriting profession. He encourages aspiring screenwriters to focus on story, character, thematic development—the stuff of a good Hollywood script—and to live with a degree of poverty. Indeed, many of the points we make in this book from our own historical and critical perspectives elucidate the harsh reality of the craft and industry that prompts and underpins his position as a screenwriting teacher.

So do the many insights offered by scholars in such diverse disciplinary fields as textual analysis, industry studies, and production culture studies. Here scholars such as John Thornton Caldwell figure in our story. A pioneer of production studies who draws on Powdermaker's important anthropological fieldwork of several decades earlier, Caldwell encourages research that helps ground a scholarly enterprise focused on the "here, now and how" of Hollywood. Discussing Caldwell in greater detail later in this chapter, we treat his work and the work of other scholars much the same way we treat manuals, interviews, WGA rhetoric, and other paraindustry texts: both critically and creatively. Hence, we're interested in more than a synthesis of the craft-centric frames of the screenwriting profession today, engaging also with Maras's fourth frame, the frame of screenwriting as "discourse." At the same time, we rely broadly on the production-studies method to help us foreground the ways in which today's screenwriters write both on and off the page—that is, how they work in and out of the production process today.

Professional screenwriters, like the moviegoers they serve, are not merely dupes alienated by the false ideologies of a conglomerate industry. Those who have come to understand the ever-shifting complexities of the movie business are still able to navigate and adapt to it with some success. Their brand of industrial spin provides us with diffuse entry points to this aspect of cinema's convergent turn. At the same time, of course, today's working screenwriter is being asked to put new syntax to tried-and-true formulas designed to improve the economic performance of the studio's parent company. The days of Hollywood studios being independent corporate entities concerned primarily with making movies are long gone, as the screenwriter Billy Ray (*The Hunger Games,* 2012; *Captain Phillips,* 2013) noted in a recent polemical piece titled "A Warning for Our Next Great Screenwriters":

> When I started writing there were still a few mavericks out there; a few gunslingers who ran studios.

These were people who went with their guts and would make a movie just because they believed in it.

But that's not the process anymore.

Today, before a studio chair can green-light a movie, that movie must also be blessed by the head of marketing, the head of foreign sales, and the head of home video.

It must be subjected to a process called "running the numbers," which means that the movie's cost—or, downside—is compared against its potential value because of its cast and what it might do in foreign markets.

This process takes into account every variable except the variable which actually matters—the one that can't possibly be gauged by any sort of calculus—which is whether or not the movie's going to be any good.

And yet the process continues.[4]

Professor Walter's advice points to another trend, if only at the margins, that either rationalizes hope or suggests a path out of the rhetoric of the tentpole paradigm: where there is creative will and talent, and perhaps some luck to go along with pluck, today's working screenwriter can find opportunities to tell other kinds of stories. And this is more than hinted at in the broad definition of the word *screenwriter* offered in the reference from *Wikipedia* with which we opened this introduction. This so-called nonspecialist resource is aptly, if awkwardly, suggesting that the contemporary screenwriter might be writing "screenplays" for comics and video games as much as for movies and television. In other words, *Wikipedia*'s definition speaks to the transformative expansion of the screenwriting profession in the flattening era of media convergence.

And this is a key concern of this book. For students, film enthusiasts, and aspiring screenwriters to understand the new screenwriter, they, like us, have to rethink the two constituent words that have combined to delimit the traditional screenwriter: *screen* and *writer.* Today's screenwriters can write for a panoply of screens, pushing and at times exploding tried-and-true formulae. They also collaborate in the broader *scripting* processes—to deploy another insightful term borrowed from Maras—of syncretistic media texts with professionals from other crafts. In so doing, they require us to expand our definition of writing beyond the simple inscription of words on a page and to think of the scripting of a project as a collaboration that may extend authorship far beyond the traditional boundaries of the craft of screenwriting. This begs the question: how has the craft of screenwriting changed to accommodate those screens and those convergent collaborations?

Off the Page: Screenwriting in the Era of Media Convergence explores how both the craft and the industrial context of screenwriting are changing to accommodate new forms of writing on new platforms in a new millennium and how we got to this point of dramatic change. Of course, many established Hollywood screenwriters continue to do what they have always done: they write movies and television shows. Yet those writers are now working on conglomerate assembly lines that exert particular commercial and creative pressures on their labor. As old markets and opportunities contract, new generations of writers—and some established writers—are expanding the profession, moving it away from media familiar to previous generations of screenwriters and engaging with new markets, new media forms, and new technologies in their search for creative opportunity and economic security. These "new" screenwriters do not merely stand on the shoulders of fellow schmucks; they also walk where there are few giant footprints to follow.

The episodic and serial narratives of comics and the less linear and more interactive stories found in many of today's video games have become lucrative arenas for the screenwriters who increasingly work across platforms. Television drama and comedy storytelling, which still have a well-established apprenticeship model, are alive and well on HBO, Showtime, FX, and even the old major broadcast networks (some would argue in ways that are more interesting than big-screen storytelling). And then there's the online world of expanded television (Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu, inter alia), independent features, and short films. There is creative opportunity for screenwriters and independent writer-directors in the complex, converging business of show business, though perhaps not so much in many studio executives' offices.

Although providing some opportunities for screenwriters, the issue of transmedia storytelling is more complex than that of comics, video games, and television. For clarification, we see a narrow distinction between transmedia storytelling as an (always) emerging practice for the creative development of story worlds and storytelling and corporate transmedia as more or less straightforward synergistic cross-platform marketing strategies. In the former context the development of an intellectual property (IP) or a story world that can be explored across subtly interacting narrative and expositional frameworks in different media, often without a conventional ending, let alone a clear act structure, offers unique opportunities for writers to engage with the limits of contemporary digital and online culture. A famous example of this was the creative extrapolation of the *Matrix* "universe" from movies, through different kinds of video games, including a

Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG), to comics, to animated shorts (*The Animatrix*).[5] In the latter context conglomerate Hollywood is simply able to maximize the monetization of IP by marketing and spinning off products across media in ways that do not necessarily deepen the storytelling potential of the material or open up opportunities for working screenwriters at the margins of economic success and industrial cachet. The new starship designs, characters, troop types, and combat scenarios seen in the science fiction war movie *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) will soon make their appearance across the tabletop product line of licensee Fantasy Flight Games in games such as *X Wing, Star Wars: Armada, Star Wars: Destiny,* and *Star Wars: Imperial Assault,* for example.

Hollywood has experimented with more creative transmedia marketing. At its most innovative this involves elements of complex interactive storytelling and gaming, as with the yearlong, Internet-driven "Why So Serious" teaser puzzles anticipating the release of the Batman movie *The Dark Knight* in 2008. To date, and as the WGA strike of 2007–8 foreshadowed, the investment of marketing resources at this level is disproportionate to its effect on the box office. Given its limited impact on the corporate bottom line, creative transmedia marketing of this type does not appear likely to become commonplace anytime soon.[6]

We engage these constraints through the range of texts, or evidence, we introduce above, revealing the repercussions of conglomeration, globalization, and union co-optation; we then turn to the creative ways writers are working through all attempts to, in the political philosopher Antonio Gramsci's conception of ideology, coerce them into consenting to the Hollywood matrix.[7] For Gramsci, advanced capitalism works to establish hegemony, or temporary domination, that seeks the "consent" of labor through the "coercive" forces of ideology. For the screenwriter outsider, this consent manifests itself around the narratives of breaking in and persevering in the hope of selling a script and becoming rich and popular. For the Hollywood insider it is manifested in an acceptance by the creative worker of coercive, underhanded, and adhesive practices on the part of employers. When the most egregious of these practices are resisted, through collective action and even the withdrawal of labor, it is with the expectation of limited gains weighed against the fear of losing the dubious privilege of continuing to occupy the spot at the base of the conglomerate totem pole. The subordination of the screenwriter to the studio system, the narrative of the duped schmuck, has helped to produce a hegemonic "common sense" that successful Hollywood screenwriting is about conforming to a particular kind of storytelling.

We frame this ideological reading within the larger corporate and cultural trends that inform the industry. We analyze the recent history of the Hollywood studio development paradigm alongside different iterations of "independent" screenwriting, including "microbudget" and expanded-screenwriting practices, theories, and microeconomic models. Our goal is to write critically about the American screenwriting profession, to engage with its current industrial state, and to contextualize the commonsense discourses of the academic and paraindustries in an effort to offer a creative analysis. Equally important, we engage in the close textual analysis of screenplays, considering them as historical documents that communicate much more than story. Indeed, screenplays and similar texts reveal a great deal about the industry for which they are written through their format, through how their prosodic styles are implemented by their writers to target implied readers, and through how they are read within the industry. Recent examples of screenplay form and content also reveal how the screenwriter's labor is, in some measure, adapting to technological developments both within and outside their own craft and to new modes of onscreen storytelling. In this turn of the enterprise some of these scripts demonstrate creative resistance to conglomeration and ideology in the working world of the screenwriter. In grounding our readings in this way, we attempt to avoid, or at least to minimize, the kind of critical self-indulgence that can diminish the value of close textual analysis.

How do corporate interests, union struggles, and paraindustrial myths frame today's screenwriting profession? What is the current state of Hollywood's tentpole paradigm, and how has it solidified the opportunities of a few screenwriters to the exclusion of others and reinforced economic hierarchies within the craft? What role does teamwork play in television and even video game writing? Where are writers now turning to express their ideas in words, to create different worlds through story, to engage audiences in meaningful ways, and to make a living? More abstractly, in what ways do the radical changes in the mediated work of storytelling portend the end of cinema?

In addressing these questions, the following chapters will consider the potential of new technologies and platforms (including interactivity and the Internet) that are transforming the screenwriter's understanding of character, plot, and structure. They also consider the role of the screenwriting industry: from the conglomerates to social media companies and festivals. The early chapters set the stage with our own additions to the business frame long-fetishized by the paraindustry, considering the industrial context and labor reactions of the tentpole era of Hollywood screenwriting,

where the latest iteration of the blockbuster holds up the financial interests of multinational media companies. Later chapters reveal the opportunities and practices in independent and convergent media that are transforming the labor of screenwriting, as well as our collective understanding of the profession. Our conclusion pushes the definition of the screenwriter firmly past its conventional and preconvergent boundaries while reflecting on how those obsolete boundaries are nonetheless being solidified in today's film schools.

But first, and given the discussion about evidence and method above as critical to our project, we position *Off the Page* in the context of the scholarly models that have been applied to the academic study of screenwriting. This, too, we hope will be taken critically by the reader.

THE SCHOLARSHIP FACTORY

Of all the major craft disciplines involved in the production of motion pictures, screenwriting has been, until recently, the least studied and theorized within film and media studies. The academic literature on directing, acting, editing, cinematography, and sound is generally better established. With few exceptions the screenwriting profession is rarely mentioned outside introductory film production or history textbooks—"outside," to use the language of film theory and criticism, auteur, star, style, and, until recently, industry studies. When film and media studies engage with the question of story, the focus is typically on narration and discourse as it is manifest in finished films; also writing and development threaten to get in the way of auteur theory.[8] As a result, with few exceptions, the primary structuring text for what we see on the screen, the screenplay, slips past scholarly scrutiny. Historically, we academics have not been doing our part to challenge the common sense of screenwriting practice and the profession.

An instructive example can be found in the otherwise admirable standard history of Hollywood in the 1980s, Stephen Prince's *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980–1989*.[9] In his chapter on the filmmakers of the period, Prince is rightly keen to acknowledge the importance of creative contributions beyond stars and directors. He makes space for sections assessing the most influential "below the line" talent, or cinematographers, production designers, and editors, among others, who have "rates" but whose salaries are not fixed and can vary depending on actual work performed. Prince acknowledges that screenwriters should be grouped with "above the line" talent, or those receiving residuals, like the directors, producers, and stars, whose salaries are negotiated and fixed in the

budget. Prince, however, gives screenwriters no section of their own and focuses entirely on the other "craft" professions. This oversight notwithstanding, every film made by Hollywood is based on a screenplay that was written by one or more screenwriters.

Recent interventions within what film and media scholars call "industry studies" have begun to expand our understanding of the discourses, labor, and ideology of the craft. Notable contributions include the work of the Screenwriting Research Network; Kevin Alexander Boon's *Script Culture and the American Screenplay*; Steven Maras's *Screenwriting: History, Theory, and Practice*; Steven Price's *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism*; the collection edited by Jill Nelmes, *Analyzing the Screenplay*; and Bridget Conor's *Screenwriting: Creative Labor and Professional Practice*.[10] All have been published in the last decade or so. We believe that industry studies, along with the related field of production culture studies, offers the greatest promise for developing an in-depth critical approach to the screenwriting profession and the major role it has played and continues to play in Hollywood mythmaking.

Of particular note is Miranda Banks's *The Writers: A History of American Screenwriters and Their Guild,* which provides a rich, rigorous, and critically insightful analysis of the historical role screenwriters and the WGA have played in Hollywood filmmaking and attendant discourses since the turn of the millennium.[11] Banks also considers contemporary production culture—the conditions of preproduction and production filmmaking informing the working life of screenwriters—in ways that are both critical and instructional. Banks's analysis of the WGA's ambivalent role in both supporting screenwriter rights and limiting membership in the profession is particularly insightful and undergirds our analysis of "tentpole" cinema in chapter 2.

For all of its insightful points, Banks's work—and the work of many of the aforementioned industry studies texts—fails to engage fully with the complexity of the screenplay text, its format, and its prose since the turn of the century. No single book can cover all dimensions of a complex phenomenon like screenwriting, but Banks's work is the best sustained historical analysis of American screenwriting yet published. Few academic books actually engage in close analysis of the style, format, and tropes—in short, the textuality—of screenplays as a way to reveal how the widgets of the professional writer, the results of her labor, articulate both story and power dynamics.

When they do address the screenplay-as-text, analyses are usually broad and the points illustrative but general. Nelmes's edited collection, *Analyzing the Screenplay,* is a case in point. It offers a broad, international perspective

on script analysis and its related industrial practices. Borrowing from both film historiography and theory, *Analyzing the Screenplay* looks at the screenplay as an industrial form rather than screenwriting as a set of creative and institutional practices or as a locus of debate within larger shifts occurring in the culture of filmmaking, script reading, and film viewing. Contributors to Nelmes's collection tend to reinforce the orthodox notion that the screenplay is the default object of screenwriting studies and, in so doing, fail to accept the challenge offered by the emerging and, in many cases, already proven arenas in which writers have seen their words transformed into moving pictures.

Andrew Horton and Julian Hoxter's coedited collection, *Screenwriting,* focuses on the history of screenwriting as a craft and thus offers a sort of prehistory to *Off The Page.*[12] Their book offers broad historical insights in terms of Maras's "practitioner," "story and structure," "business," and "discourse" frames. But because the focus of the contributors to Horton and Hoxter's collection is largely on the history of screenwriting before the turn of the present century, its coverage of the contemporary industrial moment is narrower and far less substantial than what we aim to cover here. The same could be said of Steven Price's otherwise admirable *A History of the Screenplay,* which also falls short of engaging at length with the broader contemporary moment of conglomeration and convergence.[13] In focusing on the contemporary moment, we hope to offer deeper analysis of a more tightly focused set of issues immediately relevant to today's reader: what is the current state of the screenwriting profession, how did it come to be, and where is it heading in 2017?

Contrary to its coverage in the field of film and media studies in the academy, screenwriting as craft and practice is without a doubt the most overtheorized craft in the paraindustrial market treating with the movie industry. With a high degree of what John Thornton Caldwell calls industrial self-reflexivity,[14] the screenwriting industry looks positively on itself as a way to extend, or spin, its share of the more "rigorous" self-help market. That market has, in fact, exploded over the last three decades as writing a spec screenplay has increasingly been seen—and marketed—as an accepted route by which the Hollywood outsider can break into the business. Many working in academia have, in fact, given it even greater legitimacy. There may be some modest credibility to that claim, since it appears far more difficult for producers, directors, and actors to sell what they do on "spec" (the audition process notwithstanding).

It is important to reinforce the point we made earlier that some paraindustrial texts grounded in a kind of research do influence the Hollywood

industrial mind-set. Famously, Syd Field's 1979 how-to manual, *The Screenplay,* popularized the notion of a three-act, post-Aristotelian structure for mainstream movies. As prominent film historian David Bordwell notes, it went on to become the default shorthand for story development in studios and has remained a prominent resource ever since.[15] Importantly, Field filled a gap left by more critically minded scholars at a time when film studies was yet to be widely accepted by the academy. Similarly, the trajectory from Joseph Campbell's Jungian (and après Vladimir Propp) notion of a heroic monomyth, expounded in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* was influential among Hollywood filmmakers like George Lucas. Subsequently it has become another version of development shorthand after being adapted explicitly into screenwriting terms by Christopher Vogler in *The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers.*[16]

Fortifying this growing body of how-to texts is the proliferation of for-profit screenwriting workshops, screenwriting competitions, and story consultants with advanced degrees. The expansion of the *Writers Store* from a single West Los Angeles storefront in 1982 that offered computer packages for screenwriters to an expanded online operation replete with an online journal *(Script Magazine)* and an educational and training entity calling itself Screenwriters University is indicative of the health of the paraindustry. Similarly, the publisher of *Final Draft,* the industry standard formatting software for screenplays and related media that is used and taught at many film schools, now runs its own major screenwriting competition *(Final Draft Big Break),* capitalizing on the aspirational message that keeps it in business by offering incentives and spec dreams for purchase. After all, *Final Draft* and similar products would not be profitable if they only sold their software to working professional screenwriters and educators alike.[17]

The paraindustry extends and pretends to scholarly theories, extrapolating rules and guidance from established models of storytelling and recodifying and reselling that guidance back to the established craft, as well as to its aspirants. Specifically, the paraindustry has retooled the long legacy of Aristotle's *Poetics* and, as noted above, a broadly Jungian model of narrative archetypes and repressions inspired by Joseph Campbell (who has been appropriated by the screenwriting paraindustry as the acceptable theoretical complement to Aristotle) to inform many popular screenplay manuals and workshops.[18] Yet the appropriation of Campbell's Jungian theory remains largely unchallenged by either scholars or practicing screenwriters despite the fact that it actually influences, if not dictates, the structure of many blockbuster movies.

Bringing with it a rigid conception of a three-act story structure paying off in a generalized and entirely desacralized iteration of Aristotle's catharsis—

referred to more simply as the "redemptive ending"—the paraindustry's informal screenplay theory sits at the heart of industrial debates around genre: from action to science fiction to horror and comedy. This is what Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush in *Alternative Screenwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* see as the often repressive impulses in mainstream movies: "The pattern of transgression, recognition and redemption," they argue, "makes the restorative three-act structure a very comforting form. . . . But to find a way to respond to the arbitrariness and indifference of the contemporary world, we have to look elsewhere."[19] In short, what we see is a reductive application of Aristotle's work—sometimes combined with a totalizing appropriation of Jung's theories of psychoanalytic-derived archetypes, mixed in with a practitioner's commonsense guide to self-help from screenwriting experts, infused with genres as marketing vehicles—that looks toward blockbuster redemption and teasing an entry into the dream factory as an explicit happy ending.

The critical impulse of Dancyger and Rush notwithstanding, there is very little scholarly work on the new avenues of professional practice pursued by today's new convergent screenwriter. Yet writers in the ever-shifting arena of independent filmmaking have repeatedly tested the boundaries of conventional storytelling and, thus, the attendant theories that inform the craft. The availability of affordable digital production technologies, the post–Sundance Film Festival boom, and the relative democratization of certain kinds of Internet-based distribution mechanisms have encouraged a new generation of filmmakers to rethink the work of screenwriting, just as new approaches to transmedia storytelling have been offered up by scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Lev Manovich.[20] Where there is a paradigm, a kind of one-way-fits-all model, there is a writer seeking to undermine it in favor of other creative pathways.

The script and screenplay text remains critical to this endeavor, as well as an investigation of the relationship between screenwriters and screenplay buyers. This task is easier said than done, as the fields of industrial and textual analysis of screenplays is far less developed than, as we noted above, the published analysis of directing, producing, or production studies. Although we are unconvinced that a united approach benefits the field (scholars, like screenwriters, should and must argue across and against paradigms), the divides, particularly those involving the theoretical underpinnings of multiple fields, pose particular challenges for one fundamental reason: they often replicate the divides that reframe old debates in the major intellectual movements of the last one hundred plus years—from Marxism to deconstruction—and thus reify the very paradigms that are

being challenged. At this point, and to be fair to our colleagues, we think a little meta-analysis might be in order.

THE FILM STUDIES FACTORY

Scholars that rely on political economy, a benchmark Marxist model, tend to focus on macrolevel questions concerning conglomeration as a mode of production, regulation as democratic contradiction, and texts as ideologies supporting the structure of the conglomerate and its capitalist interests. Often unable to avoid circular arguments and universalizing tenets ironically equivalent to "it's the economy, stupid," political economy often neglects the cultural processes that contextualize media production; the range of diverse and competing decision-makers involved in creating film, television, and other works; the complexity of the texts themselves; and the creative activity of viewers. Instead, approaches to film and media studies based in political economy often posit that media ownership rests in the hands of a small, "elite" collection of capitalists that, by definition, produces a one-way flow of communication from monolithic media industries to passive receivers. As a result, they simplify the creative work of production, reduce the complexity of the text to capitalist ideology, and essentialize the viewer, or reader, as a passive receptacle of those ideologies. We saw something quite different in the course of our research, though, to be sure, we also saw the work of late capitalism.

Despite our obvious affection for it, textual analysis represents yet another potential critical pitfall. In film and media studies, textual analysis is a well-defined method that underpins approaches from formalism, or neoformalism, through semiotics, to content analysis, to name a few. Scholars working within these models emphasize the text's narratological and discursive features often at the expense of broader socioeconomic factors. As such, the text is closely analyzed for its meaning-making codes and related formal systems. Yet scholars that rely on textual analysis, like those that rely on political economy, also implicitly replicate the divides found in the larger intellectual movements that underpin their work.

As we suggested above, a common charge is that close textual analysis tends to be self-indulgent in the way its proponents focus on film and media discourse at the expense of historico-industrial factors (including the work of producers, network executives, and their various industrial structures and cultures of production). Moreover, scholars who rely too much on textual analysis can be relativistic or prefer to describe codes and signs outside of a consideration of dominant forces such as capitalism, racism, homophobia,

and misogyny. Their studies can also produce a kind of viewer utopia when they stretch the conclusion that texts are infinitely polysemic, as prominent television scholar John Fiske has argued, such that viewers can thus read them outside or in opposition to dominating formulas like capitalism or the interplay between social formations.[21] In this model the reader is not a passive receptacle but rather an ahistorical and, ironically, essential figure. As Gregory Curry asks: "To what extent is cinematic meaning a construction of the viewer rather than something the viewer finds in the work?"[22] We think the latter, though admittedly it is almost impossible to prove the composite versatility of script reading—given also the provisos of accreted industrial and craft rules in screenplay form—let alone film viewing.

Yet there is great value in political economy and textual analysis, and film and media scholars have attempted to synthesize these approaches. Douglas Kellner calls for an approach that addresses both macrolevel structures offered by political economy and the microlevel practices offered by cultural studies. Critical of what he sees as an overemphasis in the field of textual analysis in the formalist model, Kellner argues that the traditional gap between empirical, social science–based approaches of mass communication and the humanities-based textual analysis approach creates an artificial bifurcation within the field.[23] Instead, he argues, film and media scholars should explore the interconnections between the production of culture, its political economy, and textual complexity:

> Political economy grounds its approach within empirical analysis of the actual system of media industry operation, investigating the constraints and structuring influence of the dominant capitalist economic system and a commercialized cultural system dominated by powerful corporations. Inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced and distributed can help elucidate features and effects that textual analysis might miss or downplay. Rather than being antithetical approaches to culture, political economy can contribute to textual analysis and critique. The system of production often determines what types of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be shown, and what kind of audience effects cultural artifacts may generate.[24]

Kellner wants to engage the capitalist dimensions of Hollywood from a Marxist perspective to show how labor—and one can extend that to screenwriting labor—is alienated from the means of production.

By synthesizing political economy and textual analysis via cultural studies, film and media studies can analyze texts such as screenplays, institutional practices such as conglomeration and convergence, and labor relations

such as strikes within existing networks of power and creative expression. In so doing, the scholar is able to locate the forces that make up the circuit of culture in media studies and the forces for resistance, of thinking outside the screen, that complete that circuit. After all, states Kellner, the media industries are not "innocent" and "inherent bastions of enlightenment, creativity and abundance."[25] They legitimize the dominant organization of society and idealize social norms. Yet there are forces, or "players" in the 1990s vernacular, made up of committed screenwriters and filmmakers very much aware of the social and economic structures they inhabit and that constrain their work. They are no more dupes than readers and viewers.

Kellner's reference to the notion of the "circuit of culture," elaborated by Birmingham Centre scholar Richard Johnson, provides scholars like us with a useful lattice on which to build a more encompassing approach to studying the art and business of writing for the entertainment industry. Specifically, Johnson's approach emphasizes the need for scholars to study the interdependent circuit of media production, textuality, and consumption in specific cultural contexts. Johnson places particular emphasis on the analysis of the capitalist conditions of production quite differently from practitioners of political economy. Scholarship, suggests Johnson, not only must understand how the material means of production and the organization of labor are structured by capitalist imperatives but how the production sphere creates texts from "a stock of already existing *cultural* elements drawn from the reservoirs of lived culture or from the already public fields of public discourse."[26] As practicing screenwriters, as well as academics, we agree: only by studying production culture in relation both to economics and to texts made by individuals, specifically the means by which a diverse cadre of creative decision-makers exercise cultural power within the confines of industry common sense, can scholars more fully conceptualize the state of the screenwriting profession.

Scholars have been grappling with the solutions proposed by Kellner and Johnson. In the introduction to their edited collection, *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method,* Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren put forward a solution to the divide between macrolevel political economy and microlevel textual analysis by arguing that media scholars should approach cultural production as "sites of struggle, contestation, and negotiation between a broad range of stakeholders," from the screenwriter to the studio executive, whose texts are produced for a diverse global audience across a multitude of media platforms.[27] More specifically, Holt and Perren urge scholars to embrace more culturally based theories that explore the nuances and contradictions of various genres, series, and episodes at what cultural theorist

Stuart Hall calls the "encoding" stage: how players exercise cultural power and engage in decision-making that produces texts like scripts and films within larger media structures.[28] Such an approach, they conclude, further challenges top-down, linear models of communication advanced by academics applying political economy and embraces Johnson's "circuit of culture" model, reifying the give-and-take of script writing and selling, that integrates analyses of production, text, and sociohistorical context.

Caldwell's ethnographic model advanced in *Production Culture* is, in our view, especially useful in this regard, as it provides a method for studying the various dimensions of production to include the degree to which, in our case, screenwriters are coerced into consenting to the ideology of the tentpole paradigm. Focused on what is left out of macro- and microlevel approaches, Caldwell also studies trade and worker publications and artifacts. He moves beyond the paraindustry to the industrial trade. Following Powdermaker's lead, Caldwell also engages in ethnographic fieldwork by embedding himself in production spaces (the set, editing rooms, etc.), as well as professional gatherings like industry conferences and workshops. He does this within the context of industrial analysis and, at least in past books like *Televisuality,* close textual analysis of style, representation, and narrative discourse or the product this labor produces.[29]

Richly detailed and expansive in scope, *Production Culture* makes the case "that the social performance of show making itself must also be considered to fully understand film and television form. Taking this approach means considering how media creators function as industrial actors in a large ensemble of creative workers."[30] In short, Caldwell considers the complexity of the production environment in a way that works against the political economic tendency of oversimplifying it or reducing it to a singular cause (the economic base of late capitalism). We hope to follow suit.

Since 2008 several academic books and journal articles have been published by scholars who have studied under or with Caldwell in an effort to advance what is emerging as a production-cultures emphasis within industry studies. In addition to *Production Culture* and *Media Industries*, Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic provide a general framework for examining the media industries in their essay "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach."[31] For these scholars, creative forces interpret and redirect the economics of media institutions. Vicki Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell offered the field a second edited collection in 2009, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries,* which also attempts to traverse the divide between political economic approaches to the industry and textual analytic approaches by focusing on production

cultures. "Production studies," they note, "borrow theoretical insights from the social sciences and humanities, but, perhaps most importantly, they take the lived realities of people involved in media production as the subjects for theorizing production as culture."[32]

Many of the methodological insights offered in these and other works of industry studies helped us to better understand the business of screenwriting today. Yet in the course of our work we discovered that our attempt to link close analysis of screenplays to the conditions of production requires emphasis on the decisions made by screenwriters—how their consent materialized in terms of form and how resistance resisted form. And here we had to take some care as to how we account for and incorporate "industrial spin," as Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell call it, offered by screenwriters and studio executives, not to mention screenwriting educators like ourselves during our interviews or with the interviews we quote. Yet perhaps, like some of the writers in *Dreams on Spec,* we are not blinded by our own self-interest. We are, in addition to being academics, working screenwriters, aspiring, like all the other shmucks, to sell scripts on spec.

The main challenge that Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, as well as those working more prominently in industry studies, find in accessing above-the-line decision-making is the fact that producers, directors, and writers tend to hold the process, procedures, and documents they use to produce media close to the proverbial vest. And they are not always forthcoming in interviews, preferring instead to rely on what Timothy Havens calls "industry lore."[33] Just as studios would never reveal their "ultimates" (the final accounting statements of an individual movie's profitability), save for when they are hacked (as happened to Sony), so Hollywood development keeps the granular secrets of story sausage-making top secret. As Caldwell notes: "Fieldwork for a study of this sort is complicated by the fact that film and media today reflect obsessively back upon themselves and invest considerable energy in over-producing and distributing this industrial self-analysis to the public."[34] Caldwell concludes that interviews with below-the-line workers, people with less (or no) stake in the back-end profits generated by Hollywood texts, tend to offer less industrial self-reflexivity, less lore, in their interviews. Caldwell is nonetheless self-conscious about this assumption: "'Naive ethnography,'" he writes, "proves to be as problematic as naive textualism in accounting for cultures of media production. Having access, and informants, and backstory information on industry may by itself position the industry scholar as a 'text' being written by the industry."[35] Our point is more than cursory: below-the-line interviews and observations need to be approached by the scholar with the same degree of

skepticism as above-the-line interviews. So do the texts generated by those espousing to objectivity, like scholars.

There is also an important hierarchy within and between the above-the-line crafts and professions. Our own case studies for this book focus on above-the-line subjects working in an above-the-line craft, as well as other subjects for whom the distinction is largely irrelevant; however, with the exception of the showrunner Shawn Ryan and the recent producing work of the animation writer Robert Moreland, their credit status does not necessarily imply empowerment within the development process. Indeed, they often explicitly argue the reverse. In the old media, screenwriters are employed and credited per WGA rules, but they do not share the influence of their producing and even directing peers even as they do their above-the-line status. Screenwriters working in new media such as video games are employed according to the practices of individual producer entities, and their status varies widely, as does the visibility of their credit.

All this to lead to our scholarly goal: we seek to contextualize what screenwriters, producers, and executives tell us in print and on camera. But we must admit that an analysis of screenwriting in the era of media convergence must live with an ironic level of industry lore and thus our own participation in the paraindustry. Hence, the interview material we use is supported and challenged by primary research to include analysis of scripts, related production documents (e.g., WGA policies and reports), and, of course, industrial data to include box-office figures and ratings reports. The intention here is to substantiate the conventional grids of critical and industrial analysis with concrete examples that include the diverse voices of today's working players.

OUR FACTORY

Each of the following chapters addresses particular dimensions of the contemporary screenwriting profession. They are all divided into linked sections, each of which critically interrogates an aspect of industrial and creative screenwriting practice or a cognate analog. Chapter 1, "Millennial Manic: Crisis and Change in the Business of Screenwriting," provides a detailed critical introduction to American screenwriting since 2000. Building on Banks's work specifically, and the larger field of industry studies, it assesses the impact of the transformation of the studio model in the 1980s on the freelance screenwriting paradigm, as well as on the film school and paraindustry models. Acting as a kind of "prehistory" to the chapters that follow, it considers the impact of digital and high-speed network

technologies on the style, the format, the practice, the distribution, and the exhibition of screenwriting since the highpoint of the "spec boom" in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also considers the import of the 2007–8 WGA strike on the status of screenwriting today.

In chapter 2, "Atop the Tentpole: Hollywood Screenwriting Today," we focus on the latest shift toward franchise series, comedies, and big-budget spectacular movies such as *Harry Potter, The Hangover,* and *Transformers* as this affects Hollywood screenwriters. The screenwriter of the 1989 version of *Batman,* Sam Hamm, suggests that to understand the current status of studio screenwriting we must first acknowledge that "genre won."[36] The postconglomerate Hollywood studios are more focused than ever on producing big-budget movies that play to "four-quadrant" audiences, the male/female and young/old masses, and thus have easy international appeal as well as ancillary market potential (e.g., toys, video games, amusement park rides, etc.). And yet most of the genre movies that are still green-lighted by major Hollywood studios—notably spectacular science fiction and adventure films, raunchy and romantic comedies, and thrillers of different kinds—are less diverse and less challenging in their content than broadly equivalent productions were in previous decades. The entrance into the tent for the writers of spec scripts is clearly getting smaller, more exclusive, and in many ways less interesting to navigate, amid a carnival of emerging, if not odd, attractions. Finally, chapter 2 begins our attempt at the close textual analysis of screenplays.

In chapter 3, "Running the Room: Screenwriting in Expanded Television," we focus on the way complex dramas have been successfully reimagined away from the big screen, first on pay cable *(The Sopranos),* then on basic *(The Shield),* and, finally, both online *(House of Cards)* and, at a point in the circuit, on network television *(Hannibal).* This chapter addresses screenwriters telling prestige stories both for prestige small-screen networks and for formally insignificant broadcasters that remade themselves on the backs of innovative drama series. We examine, in particular, the role of the television showrunner as an empowered writer-producer. Chapter 3 considers the recent work of Aaron Sorkin on HBO and looks more closely at the influence on the transformation of basic cable drama series of Shawn Ryan, formerly the showrunner of *The Shield* (FX), who also played a prominent role in the 2007–8 WGA strike.

Chapter 4, "New Markets and Microbudgets: 'Independent' Storytellers," considers what happened to the promise of a strong independent sector after the "indie boom" of the late 1980s and 1990s. Here we begin our attempt to show how practicing screenwriters are both obliged and able to find new

alternatives for screen storytelling and income generation in the era of media convergence. Although the indie boom bore early fruit, we suggest that in recent years the prestige independent film has become little more than a niche genre sold through corporate festivals such as Sundance and Cannes or developed by the remaining prestige arms of studios such as Fox Searchlight. Nonetheless, it remains the dominant aspirational model taught at progressive film schools and espoused in a pile of paraindustry texts.

Our extended interview case studies in this chapter focus on screenwriters who are struggling with the contraction of traditional markets for independent screenplays (Pamela Gray), creating their own commercial markets in emerging screens and through entrepreneurialism (Robert Moreland), and working at the microbudget level, outside of the conventional Hollywood and independent structures and institutions (Travis Mathews). Indeed, the microbudget scene has revitalized American independent filmmaking in the last decade, encouraging experimentation and opening up opportunities for new and younger filmmakers led by a ripple rather than a wave of "mumblecore" naturalism from filmmakers like Joe Swanberg *(Nights and Weekends),* Lena Dunham *(Tiny Furniture),* Lynn Shelton *(Humpday),* and the Duplass Brothers *(Baghead).* Microbudget production opportunities have also increased for minority and women filmmakers, some of whom are able to take risks with their storytelling and representations in ways that would not have been possible without the budget savings of digital production and the distribution potential of the Internet and the regional festival circuit. Again, we offer comparative close textual analysis of screenplays as a way to complete an analysis of the indie market.

Chapter 5, "Screenwriter 2.0: The Legitimation of Writing for Video Games," focuses on where many of today's young (and not so young) screenwriters are heading when they can't sell scripts to the studios. Given the retrenchment in Hollywood and the decline of the spec market for freelance screenwriters, many writers are looking to other platforms to provide regular employment or the kind of proof-of-concept that will attract studios to their intellectual properties. At the same time, studios are increasingly looking to adapt story- and spectacle-driven product originated in the comics and video gaming industries with built-in audience recognition and fan bases in the all-important youth sector. In some ways, in fact, the big screen has become an ancillary market for video game and comic book "studios," including Electronic Arts and Marvel respectively, as well as social media companies like Facebook. With the emergence of new markets and media for screenwriting come new challenges for the WGA. This was true of the emergence of television in the late 1940s, and it has proved to be

equally true of the video games industry in the last decades. This chapter focuses on how the WGA has worked to legitimize writing for video games for its membership through its practices and publications in expanding its definition of craft, in outreach to producers and writers, and in attempting to establish jurisdiction. The almost complete failure of the guild to cover convergent scripting in the video games industry reveals much about the nature of employment and production in the converging media.

We wrap *Off the Page* with a postscript of sorts: "Conclusion: Scripting Boundaries" reviews the key critical points raised in preceding chapters, while also imaging the emerging cultural trends informing the scripting of unconventional screen stories in newly convergent forms. In particular we examine the diversity of online content creation and consider how far one can push the definition and boundaries of screenwriting before they break. In the process our conclusion also wraps up our discussion of the state of screenwriting education in film schools and the paraindustry, mapping out the antipodal directions in which the craft of screenwriting is going at the end of cinema.

As Hoxter notes in *Screenwriting*, there is an inevitable "'to-be-transcended-ness' that circumscribes the work of the professional screenwriter."[37] That work is both present and absent—always structuring yet always already moved beyond—in media texts. *Off the Page* attempts to transcend the textual and cultural instability of the products of screenwriting across contemporary media, to elucidate and make sense of the creative practices that underlie that work and the shifting economic contexts, industrial imperatives, and production cultures from which it emerges or against which it strives.