

**The Art and Craft of Screenwriting**  
By Janos J. Kovacs

DLA Thesis

Academic Supervisor: Károly Makk

University of Theater and Film Arts, Budapest, Hungary

Summary

Screenwriting is a complex and applied literary art form. Norms and requirements regarding structure, form and breakdown vary from region to region depending on the financial structure that supports filmmaking in the given country and environment. In places where filmmaking is not only a tool for artistic expression but also a financial enterprise of industrial dimensions, in order to minimize the risk, the market demands the development and use of comprehensive scripts that are self-explanatory, clear and easy to follow both in content and in form for the benefit of both financiers and creative crew. Where the market is somewhat organized, however, and generous state grants, funds and subsidies sustain most aspects of filmmaking and protect the filmmakers, who benefit by being allowed to consider the script only as a basis of argument, from which the filmmakers, mostly the director, under inspiration can diverge at will. In these organized and subsidized markets there is a loose and casual approach to the script, and more generally, towards screenwriting both in terms of structure and form.

In filmic storytelling drive and source of inspiration vary widely. Stories can be told in countless different ways, according to well-established, millennia-long patterns and traditions or by the total denial of them. However there is one thing which is beyond cultural traditions, sizes of markets, and structures of financing: the universal need for the viewer, who thinks in character, plot, conflict and structure. If there is system in decoding and comprehension there must be another one in encoding in filmic storytelling, too, as well as an audience-centered method and technique in training storytellers and screenwriters to efficiently communicate to their audience. Artistic self expression or not, screenwriting is not a mystic and esoterical activity; it can be efficiently instructed and developed to the level of skill and craft.

The Hungarian writer or producer who plans to raise interest and financing beyond the confines of the traditional national or continental support system has to be not only aware but also knowledgeable of the existing strict approaches, practices and routines in screenwriting radically different from the one used in the old country. The industrial type norms and expectations are not an overseas phenomenon anymore but becoming the global standard.

*The Art and Craft of Screenwriting* Ph.D. thesis aims to divulge such complex and creative business experience to aspiring Hungarian and fellow European audiences in ten separate chapters in a comprehensive and genuine manner. As a principle, it prefers neither the auteur-driven arthouse filmmaking, nor the paradigm-driven approach but undertakes to synthesize all. The thesis pays equal attention to plot, character, conflict, structure, and mood or tone-driven script techniques as well as the linear and non-linear, dramatic and episodic approaches, and above all always considers the intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of the audience. It is written by an author knowledgeable and mindful of both the European and overseas mindsets and markets, and who, with a critical eye and approach, has been continuously present on both sides of the Atlantic both as a filmmaker and art educator for almost three decades.