STORY STRUCTURE IN FILM

The Multi-Level Model

(Excerpted From Lateral Screenwriting: Using the Power of Lateral Thinking to Write Great Movies)

By

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Books by Lee Matthias

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Preface

For new writers, an understanding of story structure is essential.

Yet, today, this is almost impossible due to the enormous variety of conflicting theories and views. The scene is filled with controversy and confusion. Three act, five act, nine act, *no* act… which is it? How does it matter? What will it get you? Writers need to get on with the important work of writing great stories.

This essay is intended to get a handle, *once and for all*, on story structure. So much has already been written on the subject that the new writer investigating her/his craft is confronted with literally hundreds of volumes of conflicting information and theory, ranging from authorities proclaiming structure as "God" to others arguing that structure is a myth. It is interesting how the subject has begun to take on the trappings of religion. The "guru" fervor has reached an all-time high.

In order to deal with all the confusion, we'll have to go to some effort to lay a foundation, before advancing an approach to story structure that applies to the length and breadth of storytelling. From there, the rest of the text is devoted to testing the idea against some of the most well-discussed, "structure-less" films in cinema history.

I recommend that readers make use of the footnotes, as they are full of interesting background. They use notation as follows: Part I, Footnote 1, is listed as I-1; Part II, Footnote 1, is listed as II-1. They go up from those as I-2, I-3, I-4, and II-2, II-3, II-4, etc.

Should you have any comments or questions, you can contact me (Lee Matthias) at LateralTao@gmail.com.

Structure: A Dissent – I

"Theory: when *you* have *ideas*. Ideology: when *ideas* have *you*."
---Unknown

"In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice; in practice, there is."
---Chuck Reid

"I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something."
---Richard Feynman

First, a definition (or, perhaps, "the *name* of something"):

"Structure: The way in which parts are arranged or put together to form a whole."
---*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th Edition.

"Grok"-ing Structure (I-1)

In this section and the next, we will examine the nature of structure. Structure has become such a thorny issue in screenwriting circles, however, that we need to demolish all of the mis-understanding and build a definition of structure *that actually works for writers*. First, we need a serviceable description of what true story structure is. Then we need to employ it in a model that encompasses *all of narrative film*. The truth is this has never been *adequately* done until now. I realize that may seem arrogant. So, let's test it. Let us see if, after I have put this claim up against every so-called "structure-less" movie I could find, it doesn't hold up. (See my analyses ahead in Structure: A Dissent - II) For the record, my definition of a "movie" is: all mass-audience, narrative fiction, feature-length, theatrical films exhibited to enlighten and/or entertain for profit.

There has been a great deal of confusion as to just what the term, "structure" refers to when it is applied to screenwriting. Many students of the form regard structure as merely the manner in which story plots are put together. This, as I will show, is due to widespread misunderstanding and multiple conflicting definitions of the term in several screenwriting books over the past 20+ years, and in numerous university curricula around the world, not to mention that dictionary definition.

Before we concern ourselves with structure, however, we must have a definition of story itself. And, in our case, the dictionary is not much help, because despite multiple attempts, it fails to offer anything specific enough to apply to screenwriting yet distinctive enough to exclude the typical newspaper article or child's bedtime tale. What we need is something that

fits good movies as we know them. While everyone knows a film story when they see one, in order to advance our arguments about the nature of structure we must establish as a platform, a defined and relevant narrative concept that story structure, then, supports. Consider:

> In an article entitled, *The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn (Our love for telling tales reveals the workings of the mind)*, Jeremy Hsu writes: "To study storytelling, scientists must first define what constitutes a story, and that can prove tricky. Because there are so many diverse forms, scholars often define story structure, known as narrative, by explaining what it is not. Exposition contrasts with narrative by being a simple, straightforward explanation, such as a list of facts or an encyclopedia entry. Another standard approach defines narrative as a series of causally linked events that unfold over time. A third definition hinges on the typical narrative's subject matter: the interactions of intentional agents—characters with minds—who possess various motivations." --- *Scientific American*, September, 2008.

For our purposes, the third definition is the most persuasive. We will consider or examine, in-depth, widely-accepted stories that challenge or even defy the first two definitions' listing of facts and requirement of causality: these might include such films as LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, MY DINNER WITH ANDRÉ, PULP FICTION, MEMENTO, and various films by David Lynch. But our concern is not merely conceiving stories. We need to conceive *good* stories. It is my contention that at least one essential characteristic of a good story is that it is *transformative*. In other words, through the transformation of one or more of its characters, it has the potential to transform us (our understanding). Therefore, let's consider a definition:

> **Story:** A narrative recounting of one or more events—usually causally-linked and in sequential order—unfolding over time, with at least one primary character, who, with an audience, through interaction with that narrative's world, experiences an internal transformation in understanding—or absent the character's transformation, the audience's alone—thereby achieving some measure of story value.

Admittedly long-winded and ponderous, I contend that it nonetheless accounts for the *wide* variation in the bulk of filmed narratives (thus far described as "story") *that matter*. And, more importantly, it paves the way for an understanding of a description of structure *that matters*.

Echoing others before her, author and screenwriting consultant, Dara Marks has pointed-out in her book, *Inside Story*, structure as applied to storytelling can be seen to function on both the plot level, and on a deeper emotional/intellectual level. Stories tell of events which their characters experience. This is the plot level. They also tell of the growth (or *non*-growth) of their characters as the result of experiencing these events. This is the emotional/intellectual level. A principle reason we continue to enjoy stories today, often watching the same film over and over, and despite the similarities one bears to another, is that we find things in successful stories which go beyond the surface events. These resonate within us, relate to our concerns, and inform us of truths which we can apply to our own lives. We can even evolve in our

understanding of the same film through successive viewings over time. So there are at least two structures: the plot structure, operating on the surface, among the events of the tale, and something operating on a deeper, interior level, within its characters' and audiences' heads, something I will call the story structure. This is because plots are essentially just narratives with beginnings, middles, and ends. Stories, on the other hand, are what narratives *mean* to us. And stories have structure, too... *meaning structure*, as embodied by the people in them.

A caveat: this discussion of structure applies to feature theatrical and television film stories only. I'm referring to single-sitting-viewing-experience films, NOT web-based short videos, or television series' meta-stories spanning multiple episodes, seasons, or entire series. While there can be structural similarities in these variants, they are not constrained by the same factors. In the case of television series' meta-stories, casts are often larger, events can span greater narrative real estate, and oftentimes, multiple stories are told simultaneously, each of which has its own structure operating: "wheels within wheels."

Screenwriting, perhaps to a greater extent than story-telling generally, depends upon surprise, the unexpected, unpredictability, to achieve its results. This is because, ideally, movies must run from beginning to end with no break. They must *hold* the audience, *compel* the viewer to stay to find out what comes next. It follows that the richer a story is, the more potential there is for such surprise elements to occur. Stories which function merely on the surface or plot level fail to take advantage of the emotional/intellectual potential found latently present within them. The lateral screenwriter can tap into this level and make use of it to parallel, echo, amplify, undercut, or even subvert the events ostensibly driving the tale up on the plot level.

Screenwriter, William Goldman has written that "screenplays *are* structure," (*italics*, mine). *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, Warner Books, 1983, p. 460. He has gone on to indicate that because of time constraints—movies often telling novel-size stories in 90 to 120 minutes of screen time—there is only room for material in a screenplay that directly advances the story through the essential story elements: theme, premise, plot, character, dialogue, and action. No elaborate descriptions, excessive multiple viewpoints, endless diary entries, internal monologues, etc. The art lies in telling your fiction in such a way as to create the illusion of reality through artifice and calculation. He's saying that there's room only for the essentials in telling your movie, and, to the extent you wrap your truths in lies *un-recognized* and in the guise of a fictive *reality*, the movie succeeds. He's right about keeping it lean and almost visibly structured. Interviewed in *Backstory 2*, p. 70, screenwriter/director, Richard Brooks (THE PROFESSIONALS, IN COLD BLOOD) echoed Goldman, saying, "...if the structure is not right, you can have forty great scenes in a movie and still have no movie. Structure is the beginning and end of a movie." And, in the same book (p. 20), screenwriter, Leigh Brackett (THE BIG SLEEP, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK) said, "…I don't think there's anything better than screenwriting to teach you the construction of a story." In a conversation with George Stevens, Jr. at the American Film Institute, director Elia Kazan goes deeper:

> Kazan - "One of the best laws of structure is 'unity from climax' from John Howard Lawson's book on screenwriting, which says that if you know what the climax is going to be, you know you've got to get there, and so everything is determined by the climax you're going to arrive at."
>
> *Stevens, Jr. - "Do you think in movements as opposed to acts?"*
>
> Kazan - "No, in inner acts that cause behavior as opposed to movements. If you think of people as changing things, as dynamic rather than static, you have to have structure. [French New Wave director, Jean Luc] Godard, for example, shows people in a static state. They are in conflict but in a static state. I don't see life that way." ---*Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age at the American Film Institute*, p. 405.

Perhaps one of the best, most concise, and, as I'll show, most *accurate* definitions of structure is from Walter Brown Newman:

> "It has to do with decisions on the part of your leading character. The beginning has to do with the first big decision he makes that starts the story going. And the middle has to do with some of the decisions he faces because of the initial decision he made. The end is the result of all those decisions."---*Zen and the Art of Screenwriting 2*, pp. 130-31.

Structure, however, is not the end-all, be-all of screenwriting. In the earlier volume, *Zen and the Art of Screenwriting*, 1996, Silman-James Press, p.15, author William Froug points out:

> "...we teachers and professional writers have emphasized structure so fervently and convincingly that structure has become the god of screenwriting. This fixation has led to a mound of look-alike screenplays that could reach to the top of Arnold Schwarzenegger's bank roll. This addiction to structure "*über alles*" puts aspiring writers into a mechanical mindset before they conceive the first idea..." and later, "It's all about structure, so they say. They're dead wrong. Structure (i.e., craft) follows art, not the other way around." (I-2)

So, while structure has become a kind of Holy Grail in screenwriting, it has its place in the form's hierarchy of importance. For audiences, it's nothing. It should not be seen or even sensed by them. But for writers, as Froug says, after the subject itself, it is paramount. This is because it can help them to *improve* the piece. For them, there are two reasons to gain an understanding of story structure: to both better write, and to write better; to improve the process, and to improve the product. If a structural model can be found that can apply to all or even most stories, it will benefit writers to know and apply it to their story ideas. I will show that, despite the myriad (and, ironically, mostly valid) story models out there muddying the waters and confusing new writers, there is, in fact, a single model that can be applied consistently across the length and breadth of storytelling. This is no small thing.

Sources of Structure

As we've said, there's a lot of confusion as to what screenplay structure really is. Just after sound established itself in films, in the 1930s, screenwriting was taken up by imported writers: playwrights, novelists, and news journalists. The playwrights brought with them a concept derived from the theater: act structure. Commonly, many full-length, modern plays contained three acts. These, in turn, were derived from Aristotle's, *The Poetics*, wherein he elucidated what made for a successful story. Essentially, he broke stories into three parts: beginning, middle, and end, and described what made them each separate and distinct. He stated:

> "A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned (i.e., beginning, middle, and conclusion)." ---*The Poetics*, Aristotle, Translation by Richard Janko, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1987, p.10.

While this seems both obvious and pedantic, it implies certain things which I will show fail to account for modern narrative unless one takes a different view than the leading and accepted structural models offered today. First, his use of the word, "whole" implies that a story must be seen as a unified thing, an interdependent organic corpus, rather than a mere collection of linked, or even related, parts. The parts require reason for their being linked, i.e., structural support. But while Aristotle's ideas are a starting point for structure, they have been superseded by the advancement of narrative. His notion of "The Three Unities," (time, place, and action) have long ago been abandoned. Stories extend over unlimited stretches of time and many, many locations. Perhaps only action continues to adhere by compelling story events to relate to one unifying plot. But, today, even this is up for debate.

Next, as used, the term, "naturally," in relation to following and preceding the three parts, implies causality of some kind, not necessarily limited to causal events in linear time. I submit that it can include causality of meaning even when causality of linear time is lacking. The last sentence supports this notion of causal meaning rather than just causal time, because, for example, any time preceding a meaningful one could apply if time was the only requirement. But, if meaning is a requirement, then, and only then, a random beginning is excluded, precisely what is called for by Aristotle.

By the thirties, screenplay structure was described, for example, as "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back." Writers like Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur used to say, "first, you get your character up a tree, then you throw rocks at him, then you get him down." So, classic

Aristotelian structure as adopted by Hollywood was a story unified by a protagonist, with a causality of meaning and time. As narrative film evolved, the causality of time became malleable and even optional in certain cases.

In the late 1970s, Syd Field, a reader and story analyst for an independent film producer, applied these ideas to modern screenwriting in his first book, *Screenplay*, Dell, 1st Ed., 1979, wherein he described a "paradigmatic" approach, refining the three-part, or, as it had become known since the 1930s, the "three-act structure." He stated that the parts broke down into a paradigm, a model with a consistent pattern of about 25% - 50% - 25%, proportionally, for each act in succession. And though he never said it, it had an obvious correspondence to Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. This was based on Field's analysis of several thousand screenplays. And Field's general definition of "screenplay structure" is: "A linear progression of related incidents, episodes, and events leading to a dramatic resolution." – *Screenplay*, MJF Books, 3rd Ed., pp. 14-15.

Field described items he called "plot points," the primary ones (I and II, though there can be many other "secondary" ones) of which always preceded a transition from act to act. His paradigm consisted of Act 1 (the set-up), running about a quarter of the story, Act 2 (the confrontation), running about half the story, and Act 3 (the resolution), running the last quarter of the story. Each act transition was preceded and precipitated by events (plot points) which happened to (or because of action by) the protagonist, thereby generating an urgency for resolution. The first transition (Act 1/Act 2) is the moment when the hero formally sets out to resolve the dilemma he has had thrust upon him. The second transition (Act 2/Act 3) is the moment when complications have reached their nadir for the hero, and decisive action is begun in order to force a successful resolution.

This structural notion has its supporters and its detractors (I-3), but there is no denying that it holds sway in a great many films. Consider these exchanges, however, from *Lynch on Lynch*, Edited by Chris Rodley, p. 62:

> *Rodley – "Is that (Lynch's preference for European films) something to do with the fact that they're not so driven by narrative as American films?"*
>
> Lynch – "Yes. Exactly. I think so"

And from *Gilliam on Gilliam*, Edited by Ian Christie, Faber and Faber, 1999, p. 255:

> *Christie – "You think today's audience is corrupted by simple storylines, structured in three acts with strong motivation, just like the screenwriting manuals teach?*
>
> Gilliam – "Exactly."
>
> *Christie – "Whereas your natural instinct is to construct a Chinese box of as much complexity as you can get away with..."*

> Gilliam – "I no longer know who does and doesn't like my work. I'm confused. I know almost everybody who loves movies loves (FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS). I know people on the technical side and musicians love it, and people from a generation that isn't in denial love it, and there are these fourteen year old kids from high school who love it. I'm trying to corrupt youth in my own way, not in Spielberg's: mine is a Socratic corruption. It's interesting to see kids write on the Web, 'This is the best movie I've ever seen.'"

His, "mine is a Socratic corruption" is worthy of note. By one definition, the *Socratic Method* is (my truncation):

> "—a form of philosophical inquiry in which the questioner explores the implications of others' positions, to stimulate rational thinking and illuminate ideas. It is a dialectical method that often involves an oppositional discussion in which the defense of one point of view is pitted against another; one participant may lead another to contradict himself in some way, strengthening the inquirer's own point."--- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method

And:

> "The term Socratic Questioning is used to describe a kind of questioning in which an original question is responded to as though it were an answer. This in turn forces the first questioner to reformulate a new question in light of the progress of the discourse."

Gilliam, and artists like him, above all, are trying to provoke thought, to confront questions, and through the process, yield *new and better* answers. One will find, however, that what I will be calling, the deep structure in such stories, is still classically present, and, in fact, remains unscathed.

Over time, various writers introduced concepts such as the "inciting incident," the "strange attractor," the "two goals with a reversal," various increases in the number of acts, and "whammos," or sequences of scenes which comprised a three act-like sub-unit within acts, a sequence of scenes built around an escalation of tension or comedy. STAR WARS and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, for example, were classic "whammo" pictures, as were the serials of the 1930s and 1940s like FLASH GORDON and BUCK ROGERS (I-4).

In his second book, Field identified something he called the "Mid-Point," (*The Screenwriter's Workbook*, p. 128), which fell approximately at the center of the story, and broke the middle and longest act into two roughly equal parts. This was supposed to signal an overall elevation of the stakes and a corresponding heightening of the tension, something that Field, himself, had earlier identified as functioning incrementally throughout the entire second act. I submit that this mid-point, as an identifiable moment at the heart of the story, is common but not necessarily always found in successful or produced screenplays. Its identification, along with his concept of what he calls, "Pinch I" and "Pinch II" coming, in turn, around the middle of each half of act two (pages 45 and 75 of his 120 page idealized model) (I-5), seems to be Field's response

to the difficulty he was encountering in his work with writers who were using his paradigm and becoming stalled in getting through their own second acts. He needed to find a way to break the second act into more manageable parts, as were the first and third, so he looked for and found a possibility in this "here today, gone tomorrow" notion of the mid-point. The elegance of finding films breaking down into equal quarters must have seemed irresistible to someone for whom mathematics suddenly describing art implied a formula for successful screenwriting.

Structure from Character

One insight Field had in formulating his paradigmatic approach to Aristotle's three parts, the element tying the structural components together, was mentioned in the first edition of his first book and, since then, has been almost forgotten (likely, even by Field, himself—he refers to it in print not at all since first identifying it). It was never, as it should have been, sufficiently stressed in his books, and it was almost universally missed by his students and members of the academic community, many of whom initially took up Field's paradigm with great enthusiasm, only to later reject it as too formulaic and restrictive (I-6).

But the insight Field had that has *never* been given its due was the profound observation that (his notion of):

> **The Plot Point is a *function* of the main character**.

Because *Plot Point I* and *Plot Point II are fundamental structural components of his paradigm signaling the transition to the succeeding acts*, this, then, means that:

> **A story's *structure*, itself, *is dependent upon*, and *a function of*, *the protagonist***
> (I-7).

When one examines the key implication of this (an implication that seems to have gone un-recognized even by its source (I–8), one realizes that the idea *requires* that:

> **She/he/it must *transform* (or *not*, despite the implicit and *apparent-to-its audience* need for it) as the result of contending with the story's dilemma.**

While this may sound like so much rhetoric of our own, it gets at the heart of structure like nothing before or since has managed. And Field's implied liberal definition of the protagonist (*Screenplay*, 3rd Ed., pp. 123-4) as any one of several possibilities including *a person, couple, group, city, country, species, idea, or even a metaphor* (also mostly ignored by his readers), paved the way for a structural model far more powerful than the one that has become identified with him. Field, while recognizing the possibility of the protagonist transforming, sees it as incidental, dependent on the particular story, and just as easily not present in serviceable stories (I-9). While this last point may be true, Field misses the notion that the vacuum created by such an absence is *filled within the mind of the audience*.

The importance and value to storytelling of our notion of the growing or changing hero is that the unity it supplies to stories is actually of concrete and profound use to its audience. It is of far more use, in fact, than the earlier unifying element according to the *structure-as-function-of-plot* advocates, i.e., *subject*. To wit: unity supplied by the structural presence of three parts about a common subject provides information, i.e., *data*, essentially resolving the mystery of the ending of the story. On the other hand, unity supplied by the structural presence of three parts about a common and growing hero provides *resonant illumination*, essentially insight into both the story's resolution, and potential insight into the individual audience-member's *own* human experience. "Resonant," because the audience is now experiencing the events in the story *in common* with the protagonist, and, "illumination," because *new truths* are emerging. In this second example, the potential exists, based on the quality of the story and its execution, not just for the story hero's growth, but for the audience's growth.

Improving **Structure**

Today, more than a quarter century since Field first refined what the original sound film writers had done with Aristotle and his *Poetics*, the three acts have been broken up, thrown out, and even forgotten for other models entirely (I-10).

Concurrent with Field, George Lucas mentioned that his structural model for STAR WARS was rooted in Joseph Campbell's insights into the structure of myth. Campbell, in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press, 1949, described a pattern he identified in virtually all mythic tales told world-wide since the dawn of storytelling. He described various motifs which he found to recur from culture to culture, such that they could be formalized and even identified in modern storytelling (I-11).

This was further refined by Christopher Vogler (first in a paper, later in a book, *The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Storytellers & Screenwriters*, Michael Wiese Productions, 1992) into a Field-like model, or paradigm, for screenwriting. A superb tool for the storyteller, the Campbell-Vogler model sees stories as heroic journeys, quests, involving 12 stages of the journey and 8 archetypal characters. Stages include, among others, "The call to adventure," "Meeting the mentor," and "The return with the elixer." Archetypes include "The Hero," "The Shapeshifter," "The Threshold Guardian," and "The Trickster," among others. This is an elegant and extremely useful model for story-construction, just as it has been throughout history, from the earliest Cro-Magnons gathered about the first fire, to George Lucas at his typewriter in the 1970s, and beyond.

But, do we really know much about Odysseus or Gilgamesh and what internal needs or convictions made them go on their heroic journeys? Even though the character of the hero is central to the Campbell-Vogler model, because there is never a requirement to the contrary, the hero can effectively make the journey in a superficial manner, i.e., attaining the goal of the quest, but without really growing in understanding. Let's be clear: despite the fact that elements within the screenwriting community have found a kind of equivalency by contrasting Vogler's approach with Field's, nowhere does Vogler claim his and Campbell's ideas encompass

all of story structure or supplant Field. Structurally-speaking, the Campbell-Vogler hero is effectively incidental, as its presence is not required to achieve a unified resonance of meaning within the audience. The model, in effect, does not recognize that potential in its stories. So, while it is a highly useful plot-construction tool, even superior, the stories it yields can lack the transformative and resonant illumination found in the best tales employing the transcendent hero of the Field paradigm.

In later years, the Campbell-Vogler model had replaced Field in the vogue of the moment. Disney studios went so far, prior to Vogler's publishing his book on the subject, as to make Vogler's seminar required attendance for its development executive corps. Many saw this model for storytelling, as I just indicated, superior to Field's, in that the thorny issue of how to write the second act was elegantly sidestepped by the multi-section approach with archetypes advocated by Vogler. The greater number of parts yielded smaller pieces, and writers who struggled to understand their stories had more sign-posts to work from. But where Field talked about screenplay structure, Vogler talked about story conception and assembly, primarily confining himself to the plot level. As I will show in the next section, if it is (erroneously) interpreted as a structural model, Campbell-Vogler fails to account for certain examples of contemporary narrative cinema.

Following Field and Vogler, from the late 1980s to the present, there came a series of screenwriting teachers offering seminars, articles, and books with their own variations on both the Field and Vogler paradigms, and offering their own tips and insights into the art. Collectively, however, they had the effect of *improving* that Aristotle-Field notion of structure *to death*. They all had useful things to contribute, but most suffered from a restrictive and biased *my-view-above-all* notion of structure.

They call to mind something the philosopher and psychologist, William James once said, "A great many people think they are thinking when they are really rearranging their prejudices." Also, not a one of them is, or has become, a successful screenwriter. Collectively, they became known informally as screenwriting "gurus," and their ardent followers functioned almost like a group of warring religions. Selling a script is difficult, and experts offering methodologies for success are always very popular.

Among the individuals who otherwise might be lumped into this group of gurus, are some (Linda Seger, Dara Marks, and Richard Walter, for example) who may not deserve such designation in any pejorative sense. Robert McKee (whose "guru" membership his supporters and detractors have fought over to a standstill), offers a well-known seminar that claims a vast pool of successful graduates. McKee's book, *Story*, however, establishes his considerable (though not preeminent) knowledge, of the art of screenwriting. His credentials include some (not vast) experience as a screenwriter and director along with his extensive credentials as a teacher (I-12).

McKee defines structure as would a classicist (as *might* Aristotle) using a generalized, non-story-specific, *universalist's* terminology: "A selection of events from the characters' life stories

that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life" – *Story*, Regan Books, 1998, p.33. For him it is closer to an arrangement of the classic drama's pre-defined parts (acts, scenes, beats, etc.) for story advancement, emotional change, and statement of point-of-view. While I don't *dis*agree, I find that aspect of structure that really matters missing from his definition: *transformation* (I-13). Transformation amounts to the element that structure serves, i.e., *the protagonist in flux*. An expression of a "specific point-of-view," is not sufficient to embody our concept of transformation as it progresses within a story in what we will risk (I-14) referring to, ahead, as the protagonist's *Arc of Transformation*.

Architects don't merely design rooms and floors and elevator shafts. They design buildings with lifetimes of transformative usage for which those components must serve. While McKee is obviously aware of the films his structural "events" are part of, he fails to make the connection. His reference to "life stories" refers to what is our "story universe," something greater than the whole, or what represents our concept of transformation. He does reference a story's "spine," in places, and that, for me, is closer to what matters about structure than any arrangement of parts, emotional content and viewpoint notwithstanding, because it implies an *organic unity* (the *protagonist's spine of transformation*). Ultimately, for McKee, structure, it appears, is merely an explication of plot conditioned by a character's emotion and view. For myself and others (such as Dara Marks), it is an explication of character in transformation, i.e., the element the plot, conditioned or not, is itself about.

Screenwriting as Religion

Following the lead of the gurus, a new ad hoc group emerged on the scene populated by disaffected screenwriters, frustrated story analysts, and writer wannabes. Mostly, they operate on the internet, appear at screenwriting conferences, or consult to writers for heavy fees. As the difficulty in selling scripts left the possibility that certain secrets lay between writers and success, customary practices by the film industry became codified into sets of rules which some of these self-appointed screenwriting authorities maintained writers broke *at their peril*. These pseudo-experts, heavily invested, as they are, into the minutia of screenwriting practice have now become, as we've argued, a kind of *screenwriting priesthood*. These *clerics* accept no nonsense from writers who don't use the precisely correct font (Courier 12 pt., NOT [until recently] Courier New 12 pt., to name one anal-retentive bit of screenwriting fundamentalism), or fasten scripts with two (not three, despite the three holes) brads. They demand that screenwriters keep description, indeed page count (to the exclusion, at times, of dramatic clarity), to a minimum, and keep all references to or even implications of the presence of the camera and the editor out of their works. White space on the page (i.e., text-free) became a kind of "Holy Grail," rationalized as taking the "pain" out of script-reading for overworked executives. No one seemed to notice that this dubious goal (literally toward *nothing*), amounts to the triumph of a screenwriting version of the modern dumbing-down movement: take the substance out, and sell the sizzle rather than the steak. This, all in the service (read that, *kissing-up*) to heavy-lidded "creative" executives. This, to prevent stepping on the jobs of the other

"authors" of the piece (actors, directors, editors, costume designers, development executives, girlfriends, etc.), whose jobs would not exist, were it not for the presence, already, of the story to which they then graciously *bestow* their authorship.

These and other rules amounted to excessively analytic practices reputedly rooted in tired industry executives with a need to get to bed on time, or story analysts with severe *Napoleon Complexes*, subordinating, as they do, the story at hand for the deal ahead. These *experts* apparently assumed that someone with one or two screenwriting seminars under his belt and an hour skimming through a script knows more about the writer's story than that writer, himself. The rules extended so far as to include a set of "anti-rules," in which Fieldian structure and other models were to be shunned as overly simplistic, or too regimented—as though counting your brads was not! Jonathan Swift's small-end egg-openers have nothing on these folks. Demystification, of course, always threatens a priesthood. But thanks to the hegemony of this self-appointed standards group, the rules, when broken, were easy to spot, unlike the causes of a failing story. They yielded the needed results: the flow of fees continued, jobs were not at risk, innovation and individuality were squashed, priesthood power was maintained.

Has anyone noticed how often the movies we hold up as leaders and innovators break these same rules? Has anyone noticed how few credits their innovating writers often have when said rules were broken? The priesthood's *party-line* that rules may be broken only when the writer's track record is firmly in place (i.e., when the priesthood's own influence is firmly trumped anyway) has no basis in the marketplace. David Lynch's first feature, ERASERHEAD, didn't just break the rules, it was unaware of them. It would've been turned into the cinematic equivalent of processed cheese had it conformed to them. Because of the flashbacks alone, Christopher McQuarrie's script, THE USUAL SUSPECTS, couldn't have been written had it been forced to follow the priesthood's rules. Joel and Ethan Coen's script, RAISING ARIZONA, would have been scorned merely on the basis of its excessive narration. And Quentin Tarantino's third produced film script, PULP FICTION, thanks just to the length of its dialogue scenes, would have resulted in his being sent to a series of guru seminars for *re-education* (never mind its perceived structure, a subject I will discuss in some detail in the next section). Ultimately, the Priesthood demonstrates the fallacy of its own dictums when it lauds screenwriters and filmmakers like David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, Christopher McQuarrie, the Coens, and Charlie Kaufman, yet derides new screenwriters who practice similar techniques, all on the grounds they have no track record. What was Kaufman's track record before BEING JOHN MALKOVICH? It was a lot of television, and not of the incredibly ground-breaking kind, either.

On the question of structure, in fact, the most zealous among the priesthood reserves its most severe penalty: denial. For them, as some have stated on the web, Field's 3-Act structure is essentially a myth. When forced to acknowledge it exists, the priesthood points to its own *patented* list of successful films (some of which we'll be examining in the next section) which are, according to them, "structure-less." For the gurus, the film industry could not exist without such rigid control of the rules of screenwriting, for every rule is accompanied by a rationalization designed to support it: speed, simplicity, visual-only writing, respect for the other artists, etc. But one only has to go back to scripts of forty or more years ago to find

lengths in the 150-page range, extensive setting description, camera direction, actor instructions above and within the dialogue, and directions for the editing process (I-15). I'm not arguing for a return to those far less readable and pedantic times. But such practices attest to the earliest intent of screenwriters to communicate a *vision* rather than just the dialogue and action. The fact that such practices have disappeared demonstrates the erosion of such an original vision, and, not coincidentally, it was concurrent with the ascendance of the director as *auteur*.

Still, up on the *official* level, in print and in consultation, each of the gurus, the *experts*, had valuable insights into screenwriting. And they accomplished this, despite often disagreeing violently with one another in competition for their flock's money and loyalty. As may be all too familiar to some people of faith, there were advocates of the two-act, the four-act, the five-act, the seven-act, and the nine- act structures. There were advocates of musical approaches (I-16). Even no-act structure was proposed. Perhaps the most useful approach for writers, and one I would certainly endorse as a practical method of dealing with the surface-level structure of the long-story form in screenplays is an approach used since the early days of narrative film, called by some, "The Sequence Approach." (I-17) As a method of taming the enormity of the long-story form, this approach has no peer, for it manages to break the story down into manageable units that each have their own unique goals and characteristics. Because of its value, we will summarize it here.

Building screen stories from individual sequences is one of the original methods used by screenwriters who began taking stories from single-reel shorts to the feature-lengths we know today. Rooted in the thousand foot reel lengths of the silent shorts Hollywood produced in the tens of thousands, sequences running no more than ten to twelve minutes were the original screen stories (I-18). Then, as stories grew, film-makers simply added sequences. Eventually they reached what amounted to an average of eight sequences (sometimes more, but more often, one or two less), for a full-length feature. Up to about the late 1940s-early 1950s, screenwriters identified their sequences in the typed script by letter. They would generally structure out with Sequences A and B comprising the "Field-ian" Act One, Sequences C, D, E, and F, comprising Act Two, and Sequences G and H comprising Act Three. There often would be a culminating moment in the story at the end of Sequence D (this is Field's Mid-Point), and another at the end of Sequence F (this is Field's Plot Point II). Of course, all of this, has the effect of essentially ratifying Field's original paradigm: "A rose by any other name..."---*Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare, Act II, Scene 2, 1594.

The screenwriter, then, could focus his thinking down to accomplishing specific general story goals in each sequence. And here is where the sequence method achieves its benefits: *it breaks down the primary tasks for each sequence. So, having broken the story into 8 parts, it now breaks these into potential functional components, enabling us to conceive, develop, and manage our story on the scene and even page levels*. For example (and here, we will "**bold**" the **key words** or **concepts** for each), in **Sequence A** (Field's **Act 1**) the screenwriter would be concerned with **setting up** the story: the **setting**, the **people**, the **arena or milieu**, etc. Often it would establish the **hero in his normal world** so that when the **problem** of the **story** arrived, it

would contrast significantly, establishing a measure of the primary **dramatic tension**. It would establish **the story's tone or mood**, often beginning with a **defining image**. So, with the arrival of the **story problem** (often called the **Inciting Incident**), **Sequence B** would then **set up** the **playing field** for the story's primary **dramatic tension**. It would **deepen the tone or mood**. This all would culminate at the end of **Sequence B** in the **hero** being formally **set on a path** toward **taking on the job of resolving** it (Field's **Plot Point I**).

Act Two-proper (Field's), in the form of **Sequence C**, would begin the hero's effort at resolution. This would often be a **weak** or **half-hearted first-effort**, or it would be a **valiant one** that, in any case, **is met in failure**. But **information is gathered**, **characters are introduced**, **threats loom**, and **mysteries appear**. **Complications** therefore **ensue** as **Sequence D** confronts the hero with **surprising new difficulties**, **plot developments**, and **people.** (In Field's model, this is "**Pinch I**," a moment or scene at the end of Sequence C or the beginning of Sequence D that "pinches" the narrative to the *through-line* or *spine* of the story, keeping it on track.) There are **unknowns** as the **tension escalates**, ending in a possible **culmination** (the **Mid-Point**), where the **scope of the dilemma is** finally **seen** for the difficult thing it is. **Sequence E** escalates things further, possibly with **new characters**, **sub-plots**, **reversals** and/or **twists** for the hero to struggle against. There are **more surprises**, and the tension continues to **escalate**. (We are, here, at Field's "**Pinch II**," again serving to re-connect with the narrative's through-line or spine.) In **Sequence F**, the hero is definitely **on the main track toward resolution**, though the **outcome** is certainly **still in doubt**. The sequence ends in a **second Culminating** moment (**Plot Point II**) wherein the **dilemma is understood**, or the **truth is revealed**, posing the hero with the story-altering task of doing something about it. In effect, the hero **achieves a measure of success**, because the full scope of the story's **problem is** now **grasped**. Nonetheless, the **antagonist remains**, and the **resolution must still be achieved**.

Sequence G (Field's **Act Three**) begins the **final** or **true process of resolution** undertaken by the hero. Here there will still be **unexpected events** and **consequences** as **things unfold** out of the **action of the hero**. Here the **tone of resolution** is made palpable. Here we enter the **arena of climax**. The **stakes** can still **rise**. There can be additional **twists**. But the **hero is resolute**, **undaunted**. **Sequence H**, the **final** sequence in the sequence model, formally **resolves the dilemma** of the story. It may have **surprises** and/or **stages**, as the **antagonist** and the **story's problem** are both **overcome** and **defeated** (**or not**). The **major tension** of the story is **relieved**. In a **final tag** or **coda**, **story threads** are often **tied up** and any remaining **plot holes** are **closed**. The sequence approach, then, is a most (perhaps *the* most) useful method of putting the words on the page.

So the approaches to screenwriting have become legion, with many being just new patterns of arranging what amounts to the lasting and key, fixed, attributes of storytelling. Through it all, though, like the most enduring faiths, three-act structure, though diminished, held a core group of proponents. It still does, today. I believe that the reason for this isn't so much a loyalty to Field or Aristotle, but to a non-articulated, undeveloped, but nonetheless intuitive affinity for the accuracy of the three part paradigm. Why?

The Arc of Transformation

First, the reason traces to this remarkable recurrence of threes: sometimes called the *ternary unit* (a model composed of three parts). We've seen (and will continue to see) the number three appear throughout our discussion of storytelling. We'll call it the *Three-Component Model*. It might be seen as the minimum unit to result in a conclusion of meaning. One can have a single element in isolation yet conclude nothing definite about it. This is, perhaps, why the Central American natives, when seeing the Spaniards for the first time, could not describe the ships. They literally could not see them as anything apart from the horizon. They had no reference for them, so the ships had no meaning. Only by the presence of an additional *conditioning* element can meaning be assigned. *This*, conditioned by *that*, means *thus*.

But the real answer to why the three-act paradigm survives, I believe, is Field's original insight that *the Plot Point is a function of the protagonist*, and our addendums that this means *structure itself* is a function of the protagonist, and usually one *in change*. While the Aristotelian model required three parts with causality of meaning, this model requires the structural presence of an *evolving* protagonist (or evolving audience instead) to support, define, and apply Aristotle's meaning. These insights are an *improvement* on Aristotle's foundation. With such contributions in place, story structure emerges as:

> **Story Structure:** *The change in understanding that the protagonist undergoes through contention with the central dilemma within the story.*

This is the *deep structure*, the *true* structure of storytelling, here called—forgive the "highfalutin" term--the protagonist's *Arc of Transformation*. I am not alone in recognizing this. It is also the basis of Dara Marks' recent book, *Inside Story*, and it was observed by Linda Seger in her first book (I-19). But it emerges again and again, directly and by inference, in the words of screenwriters interviewed all the way back to Hollywood's golden age, script gurus notwithstanding (I-20). So, while the sequence approach is an eminently practical *method* for writing screenplays, it is not the entire solution. Writers need to be able to not only produce completed drafts, but also *understand what they are completing*. Our approach to the familiar three-part "paradigm" achieves this, allowing writers to quickly evaluate concepts, ideas, even proto-ideas for value as eventual feature films. It allows the writer to, in effect, *see* the movie in the mind's eye.

Aristotle's and Field's three parts are an elegant concept with parallels in joke structure (*set-up, delivery, and punch-line*), the Hegelian Dialectic (*thesis + antithesis = synthesis*), and Aristotle's own logic paradigm, the Syllogism (*major premise + minor premise = conclusion*). These comparisons support and ratify the validity of the Aristotle-Field paradigm, as, in concert, they also ratify our observation that through that three-component model, this is how meaning and logic function at the deepest levels.

But the truly sublime ingredient in this tripartite concept is the unifying element of the protagonist as the key to a rigorous structure. It alone connects the three otherwise distinct

parts, making it all a single consistent whole. The three parts by themselves are structure-like, even causal, but irrelevant. If the events need be merely causal, any group of connected events would qualify as a story. Only by the connective tissue of meaning through the experience of the protagonist does the model find unity and transformative potential, and only with a hero in ascending (or descending) flux does the paradigm find true resonance within its audience. Only then is the story dynamic, only then of real use to its consumer. This insight is so powerful, in fact, that it finds support even when not consciously understood. In effect, even though there is a logical explanation readily available, for many writers, it just *feels* right. To illustrate our portrait of the various story structures briefly, then:

- Aristotle's Structural Model:

  Three parts linked by *causal meaning (through unity of subject, time, and place)* = structural whole.

- Field's Structural Model:

  Three *proportioned parts*, *linked by subject and causal (or related) meaning* = structural whole.

- Current Structural Models (including, Hollywood's 3-Act Structure, the Campbell-Vogler, and the Sequence model):

  Multiple parts *linked by subject*, *causal meaning*, and a (*potentially static*) hero = structural whole.

- Our Structural Model (*to this point*):

  Three *usually proportioned parts*, *linked by subject, causal (or related) meaning*, and a *transforming protagonist/audience* = structural whole.

Thanks to the insights of Aristotle, Field, and others, the structural model had advanced beyond mere parts linked by subject. And yet, contemporary understanding of this ignored the advance in favor of a simplified and sometimes inadequate model of surface-level parts linked only by subject with an incidental hero, i.e., one with no requirement of a unifying transformation.

So, what of the myriad models which have come along since Field? Well, there's money at stake. With the opening of the weakness which the three act paradigm had in its definition of a long second act, those entrepreneurs, many well-intentioned, arose to supply the answer. Not 3 parts, but 5 or 6 or 12, or as many as your story needs, provided you use their methods. The funny thing is, *they are all partly right*, a fact many don't even realize (I-21). Structure, according to that dictionary definition at the beginning, is defined as parts linked to make a

whole. Aristotle and Field have contributed subtle enhancements which effectively make for improved stories. Campbell-Vogler contributed enhancements which aid story conception and assembly, but sometimes at the expense of both the Aristotle and Field improvements, and the contribution of the evolving hero. Campbell-Vogler resonates thanks to its rich pedigree spanning all of human story-telling and myth. But, even as it draws from all of human myth, it fails to recognize the element of the transforming hero or audience that, of course, has been present as a part of mythic oral tradition all along. Its archetypes offer invaluable insights for screenwriting. Its structure, however, as reduced and described by Vogler, is plot-based, not character-based. It contributes mightily to the narrative, making for a strong tale, while, unlike its source, myth, often failing to yield the deeper truths within the characters or the meaning they've implied. Virtually all the post-Field models offer positives which can aid in writing screenplays. Only the concept of *the evolving hero* (*and/or audience*), however, allows for a universally applicable structural model of use to writers and audiences, one that provides both story meaning, and audience resonance.

Conventional screenwriting is often limited or constrained by its own narrow notions of its world, its people, and its narrative possibilities. Lateral screenwriting, by contrast, is open to a wider universe of possibilities, both within its world, and within its narrative potential. Being inclusive of all of the possibilities is what lateral screenwriting is all about. It brings to mind the story of the blind men all describing an elephant by feeling parts within their reach. One describes the trunk, a different fellow the ear, and another the tail. None can get it truly right. If there was a way to take the best of each description of the "story structure elephant," what might it be? As it happens, there is a way of looking at structure which allows this, and we will examine it in the next section.

"A careless speech writer includes the word 'paradigm' in President Reagan's speech on superconductivity. Yes, he pronounces it 'paradijum.'"
---Paul Slansky, *The Clothes Have No Emperor*

Structure: A Dissent – II

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."
---Steve Jobs

"Because we do not understand the brain very well we are constantly tempted to use the latest technology as a model for trying to understand it. In my childhood we were always assured that the brain was a telephone switchboard. ('What else could it be?') I was amused to see that Sherrington, the great British neuroscientist, thought that the brain worked like a telegraph system. Freud often compared the brain to hydraulic and electro-magnetic systems. Leibniz compared it to a mill, and I am told some of the ancient Greeks thought the brain functions like a catapult. At present, obviously, the metaphor is the digital computer."
---John R. Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science*

"Computers are useless. They can only give you answers."
---*Pablo Picasso*

Structure: Elephant In The Room

As we have said, story structure has become a riddle. We have bona fide experts, people with solid credentials, telling us story structure is critical. Many argue that story structure comes in 3 or 4 or 5 or 7 or even 9 acts! Others proclaim story structure to be a myth.

Set-Up: Blind Man's Bluff

They say that we shouldn't care about the structure in our stories.

New writers go from expert to expert, book to book, screenwriting boot-camp to guru seminar, never getting to a truth they can use. The answer eludes them.

So what is going on? Who is right? The answer, I will show, is everyone. Everyone is right. And, no one. No one is right. First, structure is a riddle, now it's a paradox. Or… maybe not.

In the modern age, as we have established, Hollywood story analyst Syd Field identified, and, in a series of books, laid the ground-work for a structural model of screen stories. Field referred to it as a "paradigm," three connected parts, proportioned approximately in a 25/50/25% relationship. Borrowing from the first wave of screenwriters (who, in turn, had borrowed from classic drama and Aristotle), he called them "acts," functioning in the story as "set-up, confrontation, and resolution." He numbered these acts 1, 2, and 3, and he separated them with "plot points," 1 and 2. He said that they were story events on which the story pivots as it plunges forward into each successive act. Later, he identified a "mid-point" that had the effect of amplifying the story's momentum toward resolution. He found all movies had this arrangement. And he saw that it was good.

But then, others saw movies that didn't seem to fit. The acts proportioned differently, and worse, sometimes there seemed to be more than three of them. Some among the new experts identified a transformational "character arc" for the protagonist that, they said, was utterly necessary for a successful story. Then others found successful stories with non-transforming protagonists. What was this thing called story structure, anyway?

New "paradigms" were developed. Some looked to classic music, some to classic myth. Others found eight or even more components. Many theorists built flocks of followers who, in turn, duly considered any theory but theirs heretical. The world was thrown into chaos. Screenwriting anarchy ruled. Syd Field's books were proclaimed EVIL!

There is a classic book, FLATLAND, by Edwin A. Abbot, published in 1880, that tells the story of a two-dimensional being, a square, living in a two-dimensional world, who discovers he actually inhabits three dimensions, and that he is really a cube. It has a profound effect on his understanding of his world and his view of his own potential. It is required reading for many math and physics students.

Screenwriters, take heed: many of you are flatlanders. But know that you and your stories live in a multi-dimensional, multi-level world.

One is reminded of the story of the blind men all describing an elephant by feeling parts within their reach. One describes the trunk, a different fellow the ear, and another the tail. None can get it truly right. If there was a way to take the best of each description of the "story structure elephant," what might it be?

As it happens, there is a way of looking at structure which allows this, and we will examine it in the next section.

On The Levels

Computer networks are designed according to topologies: notions of the layout of the computers on the network in relation to one another. Since they are connected by wires and components which channel the wires in occasionally deceptive or unexpected ways, networks

are said to have topologies which are both physical and logical. The physical corresponds to the layout as it looks, while the logical is the layout as it functions on the wire. A network can look like a ring, but function like a star, for example, where a managing "central point" on the ring interacts (to and from) with each of other managed "end-points" on the ring. The essence of it is that the logical is the topology which matters in analyzing the success or non-success of the network, but that the physical is important and necessary due to the environment in which the network must function. The logical, then, is concerned with the data (or meaning), that which is carried; and the physical is concerned with the carrying of that meaning.

This amounts to a *multi-dimensional model*, with the hardware effectively living in the first and second dimensions, and the software living in the first, second, third, and fourth (time) dimensions. One can adequately describe the hardware portion of the network in only two dimensions. But to understand how it works, one must add two more dimensions: depth, to separate it from the 2nd dimension; and time, to extend the first three dimensions and allow for evolving data (or meaning).

The parallel of computer network topologies to screenplay structure as it is argued today, while not a precise analog, is, nonetheless, startling. Structure can wear a jumpsuit (no act/1 act), slacks and a shirt (2 act), a three-piece suit (3 act), or, like Diane Keaton in ANNIE HALL, a free-form, layered/accessoried look (4 - 9 act and beyond), but, deep down inside, it still needs to be a single, unified, transforming story. Skeletons all look pretty much the same, after the clothes and the skin are removed, but inside the bones, the DNA tells a different story, and each skeleton is unique.

So, the physical structure of screenplays can do "the carrying" up on the surface level in any grouping of components which the writer deems necessary and which allows the story to succeed (always a subjective issue, but, for our purposes, success is defined as when a significant consensus agrees on its success or failure in the marketplace, the combination of box-office receipts and favorable opinion, taken together, or in lieu of one another). The logical structure of screenplays, on the other hand, succeeds at a level below the surface, i.e., in three parts, where the *meaning* is found (II-1).

Screenplays can be further broken into (and I am not making any of these up, they are all in various "paradigms" offered by "my way or the highway" theorists, gurus, and otherwise serious screenwriting writers, including me):

> *Plot Points, Mid-Points, Pinches, The Inciting Incident, The Call to Action, Defining Moments, The Moment of Enlightenment, The Awakening, Movements, Complications, Reversals, Arrivals of the First or Second Goals, The First or Second Turning Points, Crescendos, Sequences, Scenes, The Resistance portion, The Release portion, The Unknown section, The Exhaustion section, The Known section, The Push to Breaking Point, Grace, Fall, Descent, The Transformational Moment, The Climax, The Resolution, The Renewal section, Beats, and Dramatic Exchanges...*

...among a host of others, but its primary and universal structure remains the three parts, Field's acts, and Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. And the value of this is two-fold: it offers writers the ability for quick analysis of both existing stories (for study) and their own story ideas; and it offers the potential for audience illumination and growth.

Make no mistake, the physical and logical structures are always both present in serviceable works. Sometimes the logical exactly corresponds with the physical. In the worst examples of these cases, the skeleton is effectively on the outside, plainly in evidence. This is akin to those tall buildings of the "form is function" Le Corbusier school of architecture epitomized by such buildings as the John Hancock Center in Chicago (with the girders themselves seeming to form the design of the surface skin of the building). And as the Le Corbusier school has now been abandoned by modern architecture due to, among other reasons, what is seen as a stark and barren *soul-less-ness*, so, too, are the films which epitomized the worst *structure-on-the-surface* school of screenwriting, those forgettable films of the past 30 years, the ones written just after all those surface-level only screenwriting theories became required study.

I refer, of course to the plethora of films (many from the 1980s and '90s but some still emerging as this is written) built around contrived and superficial situations and characters, often involving beer-drinking slackers, body-switching, gender-switching, talking or adult-behaving babies, ghosts with unfinished business, gross-out movies, and the many preposterous fantasy-based tales, often involving a magical charm, talisman, or spell, and set in contemporary California-styled suburbia. While some of these worked (BIG, SPLASH, GHOST, and THE HANGOVER, for example) and blazed the way for those that followed, the imitators were usually poorly thought-out variations with otherwise excellent *physical* structural appearance, but having little or no transforming and illuminating *logical* structure.

I submit that when the deeper logical structure (three parts functioning about the growth of a protagonist), is missing altogether, the story, despite a perfectly executed physical structure (complete with multiple acts, movements, and plot points, but not functioning as the result of a protagonist in ascendant or descendant flux)... *that* story... effectively fails.

Yes, But Does the Arc Float?

The way to test the notion that a story's structure is tied to the protagonist is to:

> **Pick a successful story, *ask oneself whose story it is* (and *what,* in a few words, *that story is*), and then chart the arc of transformation which that character, the protagonist, undergoes.**

This is the most important question to ask in determining a potential story's structure. The question of "whose" story identifies the deeper logical level structure, and the question of "what" story it is, identifies the surface-level, physical structure. **In order of importance, I place the deeper level first, and the surface level second (and in parentheses) i.e.:**

"*Whose* (and *what*) story *is* it?"

In this way we embody what I call *Multi-Level Structure*: one question of six words describing *at least* two levels: the *deeper*-first, strategic, big-picture, the meaning (seeing "the forest"), *always* in three parts; the *surface*-second, tactical, the detail (seeing "the trees"), *usually* in three parts.

The goal is to see how it assembles. When this is done, invariably one finds the *deeper* structure assembles into *three primary parts*, three stages of the growth of the hero (or non-growth of the hero in spite of the need for it—in such a case, the growth is present, but it is solely in the audience's understanding at the hero's expense). These three parts are:

1. The burdening of a hero with an all-important, potentially transformational, dilemma.

2. The now-burdened hero's escalating contention with and struggle to resolve the dilemma.

3. The hero's resolution of the dilemma, throwing-off the burden, thereby gaining illumination and growth.

Three parts, then, each dependent on a changing, growing, hero or audience.

These correspond, of course, to Field's 3 acts (*set-up, confrontation, and resolution*), and so to Aristotle's *beginning, middle, and end*. I would put the part 1/part 2 transition at a point after what Field identifies as "Plot Point I," This can sometimes come a bit earlier than Field's act 1/act 2 transition, (page 30 of his *idealized* 120 page paradigm—these hard page counts seem to have been discarded by the 2006 edition of *Screenplay*). But it is instantly recognizable once one filters it through the criterion of *whose story it is*. Lew Hunter, despite being a past Co-Chair of UCLA's MFA in screenwriting, in his, *Lew Hunter's Screenwriting 434*, Perigee, 1993, p. 20, nevertheless *puts the transition on page 17 of nearly all scripts (which he says should all number 100 to 110 pages)!* To be fair, he qualifies it with "approximately." While he identifies this as the Act 1/Act 2 transition, it is clear that what he is actually referring to is the so-called "Inciting Incident" that appears somewhere in Act 1 of most well told screen stories, and precedes the actual Act 1/Act 2 transition. So, he is far more rigid about page numbering than Field, calling any script over 110 pages "excessive," anything over 130 "obscene." For me, this is emotion getting in the way of objective evaluation (executive bedtimes, script guru turf protection—the author's friends, perhaps?), though Hunter's book is otherwise quite useful. Whatever page it falls on, however, this (in Field's definition, following Plot Point I) is the moment when the hero takes on the dilemma and is set upon the course of change.

The value to writers of this insight of the 3 parts tied to the hero's growth goes beyond the very useful fact that writers can examine their formative ideas and see whether the potential for the transformational growth of a protagonist is present. Additionally, the knowledge that the structure must develop, support, and never stray from the dramatic elucidation of this

hero's transformation will aid writers in staying on course, centered, and progressing toward the satisfactory resolution of their stories. Still, the prospect of a story idea which promises resonance can point writers to only their best ideas. Armed, then, with an accurate understanding of the story's deep structure, the application of a surface-level physical methodology suited to the writer and the work can then serve its own useful purpose: aiding in the actual writing of the now conceptually-unified story.

Let's Test It

Is this notion of structure valid? I can only suggest that it be tested against successful films. It should be done, however, with the reminder and caveat that the protagonist can be a person, a couple, a group, a location, even an ideal of sorts in the guise of a metaphor. One screenwriting "authority" has a book and a well-frequented website where he writes about "The Myth of Three-Act Structure." He calls it a "myth" because of his failure to recognize any notion of structure as a function of character. As do many of the gurus and the rest of the screenwriting priesthood, he sees only the physical level, and when he tests certain films against this, for him, some films seem to come up short. He lists various successful pictures which he says fail to exhibit "three-act structure" (thereby, presumably, invalidating the model), including ALL THAT JAZZ, SPARTACUS, FORREST GUMP, APOLLO 13, THE WIZARD OF OZ, WILD THINGS, ANNIE HALL, and A HARD DAY'S NIGHT (II-2).

I submit that if one considers each of these films from the standpoint of the growth of the protagonist, and one accepts that the protagonist may be a person, a couple, a group, a town, or a metaphor, among others, one can find three parts, unified by a transforming protagonist (or a transformation of audience understanding at the hero's unchanging expense), in each of them. His larger point is, "So what?" In effect, what does an understanding of story structure do for us as writers? The answer is that it helps us to understand whether in the conceptual stage *we have a viable story at all*. And, later, it helps us to *keep our story on track and unified* as it progresses toward resolution. These aren't trivial. An understanding of our concept of *deeper, logical-level structure* helps us to avoid *lots* of unnecessary effort, and it enables us to better understand story itself as our medium of expression. Finally, it helps us fashion stories into the best expressions of their central ideas possible. Let's consider a couple of the films he mentions:

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

I'll venture the growth of the protagonist, the Beatles as a band, was from a kind of innocent exuberance to a kind of road-savvy and frustration with the imprisoning effects of fame. That's the band's story in the film. This is articulated by their journey to a concert in another city and their contention with Beatle, Paul's slippery grandfather. At about the 21 minute mark in the 84 minute story, Paul's grandfather points the way to freedom for the band by slipping away from them and uses Ringo's invitation to *Le Cirque*, a gambling club. This could be interpreted as the transition to Part Two. The band, then, continues its chaotic contention with the demands of their tour, wrestling with things like screaming fans, no privacy, fan letters, etc. Throughout,

they are constantly contending with their responsibilities with the tour running up against the temptation of just running away like Paul's grandfather. By the end of this middle section, Ringo has had enough, and, following the old man's latest anarchic suggestion, he goes on "parade," (plays hooky) just before the run-through for their next big show. Without Ringo they can't play, so this is tantamount to the band itself "playing hooky." This is at the 60 minute point in the story. The Third Part, then, has the band searching and finding Ringo and Paul's grandfather, and getting them back just in time to do the show. The structural break-down is almost precisely in the 25%-50%-25% proportion of Field: 25%-46%-29%.

It was a *coming-of-age*, if you'll accept the allusion, of The Beatles. While the transformation about the principle of the frustrations and contention with fame are rather trivially-handled, the film as a whole, is nothing more than a trifle, itself. It was more a vehicle to showcase their music and feed the machine of their incredible fame than any sort of story worth telling—and this is borne out by director, Richard Lester's commentary on the DVD for the film. But, even were there not a transformational arc to the film, the fact that there might have been no true story in a film made about the most popular musical group at that moment in the world does not invalidate Aristotle, Field, or this writer's analysis. The Beatles could have filmed themselves sleeping for eight hours and, unlike Andy Warhol's similar effort (SLEEP), it would have sold out, too.

ANNIE HALL

Another, better example, is ANNIE HALL. The film's inclusion in that structure-less film list is a remarkable but predictable lapse by the writer on the web. A surface view of the film *seems* to yield no clear pin-point-able "act" transitions. The film seems almost arbitrary in the scenes chosen for inclusion, and, in fact, was assembled as it finally was in editing, after production. In fact, however, once one accepts the protagonist as the couple itself, the arc of transformation becomes clear. The film is an obvious variation on the granddaddy of all 3 act stories: *boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back*. In this case, it is: *boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses girl (but learns something about himself)*. Using that as a guide, one can see the transitions emerge: the film's story is 94 minutes long. The story structures out according to the milestones in the relationship: meeting, ups and downs of the relationship, and finally break-up. So the transition from part one to part two occurs at the point when Alvy and Annie first meet at the 24 minute point. The transition to part three occurs at the 78 minute point when they decide to split up. Because the film has gone through a chaotic mish-mash of on-again/off-again scenes, jumps in time, with character back-story added along the way, it is hard to see the sign-posts. But given the fact that we see only one "meeting," and one "break-up," the stages of the relationship are articulated by these essential and significant moments. The break-down is 26%-57%-17%. While this may challenge any strict interpretation of Field's three-*act* paradigm (25%-50%-25%), our notion of the three parts articulating the central character of the story are certainly present.

Alvy's joke about his and Annie's relationship at the end, however, signals that he does, indeed, *get* it, the transformation is complete. He describes a guy who goes to a psychiatrist and says, "Doc, my brother thinks he's a chicken." The psychiatrist says, "Well, why don't you turn him in?" and the guy replies, "I would, but I need the eggs." So, Alvy knows his pursuit of Annie was irrational, as they weren't right for each other, but he sees that it was inevitable anyway, because he needed "the eggs," he needed to *try*. So do we all.

The joke, itself, is a wonderful metaphor for structure, because the hero, the guy who visits the "shrink," effectively transforms from a rational human being in the set-up, to a nut-case who believes his brother is a chicken, too, in the punch-line. Perfect "logical-level" structure dressed in a classic "physical-level" 3-piece suit (II-3).

Allen, himself, *unlike* our list-maker, considers ANNIE HALL to be formally structured. He even cautions us against structuring exotically merely to structure "exotically":

> *Eric Lax – "But as you said about people who saw the early version of ANNIE HALL and always wanted to know more about the story between Alvy and Annie, it's the relationships between those characters that drive the picture."*
>
> Woody Allen – "Yes, there is a relentless drive, like a Pac-Man [an old video game] that's eating you all the time, of what happens next… No matter how abstract you make the picture, no matter how you disguise it and modernize it, it's like jazz. In jazz there's a melody and you want to come back to it. Even people who did modern jazz, like Charlie Parker, had a great respect for melody. They'd go wild, but they got the melody in there. And when eventually players abstracted so much that they didn't get the melody, people lost interest in jazz to a huge degree.
>
> "The same is true in movies or the theater. It's fine to be very fresh and original in structure, but you've got to always come back to what happens next because that's what the viewers want to know."---*Conversations with Woody Allen*, p. 291.

We discuss *each and every one* of the other "structure-less" films in that list of *films without three-act structure* in the Appendix. Meanwhile, let's look at a few titles *not* on that writer's list:

NASHVILLE

Robert Altman's and Joan Tewksbury's NASHVILLE, with its ensemble cast and numerous and conflicting character goals throughout, has been held up as a structure-less film. But, Field, himself, (and screenwriter, Joan Tewksbury [II-4]) believes, the city is the protagonist. His analysis of the "acts," however, results in an unconvincing delineation of weakly linked events, doing more to show the limitations of his model than it does its potential. What's lacking is any unifying link between the events of the film and the central character, the city itself. The events merely happen to the various characters and the city contains them, providing, as he says,

"context." For Field, that view suffices, supporting the argument that he fails to understand his own *character-as-dependent-upon-plot-point-I* insight (which, in turn, implies our own *structure-as-dependent-upon-character* inference)—for, where is the "character" he implies, of which the structure is a function? And what is its function about? (All is not lost, however, as we shall see in a few moments.) To be fair, with the exception, perhaps, of GRAND HOTEL and THE BIG CHILL, NASHVILLE is one of the few films of its kind (a *collective protagonist*) to appear in popular Hollywood cinema. Field's insight that the protagonist is not limited to a single individual, indeed, even a person, amplifies his earlier contribution of the structural need for a protagonist in the first place, and remains a quantum leap forward in our understanding of story structure. Despite this, virtually every one of his readers (including, as we saw here, Field, himself) ignored these crucial insights. Instead, they maintained their understanding of structure as one exclusively on the surface level, the part-linking physical plane, with required moments on key page numbers, with or without a hero.

Interestingly, when forced to serve as a model of story structure—something it has never tried to be—the Campbell-Vogler model suffers NASHVILLE even more so. Without a hero present as an actual flesh-and-blood character, as a model of story structure, Campbell-Vogler breaks down. The city may be seen to be on a journey, but the required motifs are missing. And unless one switches from cities and metaphoric journeys to characters directly interacting with the city-unit itself, there is no ability to include archetypes in any Campbell-Vogler analysis of the film.

But, then, NASHVILLE just serves to point up the general failure of nearly all of these theoretical models as successful structural paradigms encompassing the length and breadth of stories. Even had a character been found to become the hero, the Campbell-Vogler model doesn't proportion its assignation of importance any greater to any of the key motifs: "The call to adventure," "Seizing the sword," or "The return with the elixer," for example, and so it fails to allow these stages of protagonist growth to stand out in relief against other, lesser elements. So, even though it is a powerful model to construct the physical level of stories, it fails to support such construction with the necessary unity and transformation. It needs logical level support. It needs our notion of the deep structure.

NASHVILLE, ultimately, does not work if viewed as a series of events which happen to an ensemble of people in a causally-linked order. Not much of anything significant happens to any one person (except the person who gets shot). In such a view the film looks more like a documentary of the making of an unconsciously trendy, very bad soap opera. Paul Schrader, who, on another film, worked with NASHVILLE screenwriter Joan Tewksbury, has called the film, "...the largest wading pool constructed by mankind. I mean, just because you cover twenty-five characters superficially doesn't mean that it's a greater accomplishment than covering one character superficially. It's like multiplying by zero."---*The Craft of the Screenwriter*, p. 287.

Schrader's assessment, not withstanding, in order to demonstrate the broad ability of our own structural view to encompass disparate filmic approaches, and risking a charge of over-thinking it, I'll take Syd Field's weak NASHVILLE analysis one step further. NASHVILLE's "hero" is

neither a person nor even the city, itself, except by association. It is an abstraction, an *idea*. The city of Nashville is, in fact, a *metaphor*. Taking our model to its most outré, one could say that the "city-hero" is actually a metaphor for America as it grew from the 1950s through the 1960s, and into the 1970s. Part 1 demonstrates innocence, as America was, in the 1950s, suddenly facing its own darker side (McCarthyism, militarism, racism, etc.). This is seen in the transition from the airport scenes to the freeway traffic jam. Part 2 represents a coming of age, as the country experienced in the 1960s, trying to free itself from its own self-repression. This is the country's progression through various obstacles and toward a kind of freedom for people to freely interact with one another. And Part 3, with the assassination attempt, represents a kind of bittersweet illumination, as, in the aftermaths of the Kennedy and King assassinations, the country realized it had to endure, to live with itself, warts and all, forever struggling with its limitations. Seen this way, and *only* this way, NASHVILLE becomes a unified, if much too 1970s-hip, whole. Seen any other, surface-level way, it seems a fragmented and self-indulgent mess. And perhaps that's all it ever was. But if a unity *is* there, it is in the *meaning* of the *collective whole*, the *city-as-America* metaphor, itself. And so, the lesson is clear: *find the protagonist, and the structure emerges from the shadows*.

PULP FICTION

PULP FICTION is a film held up by many as, effectively, destroying structure because of its re-ordering and scrambling of the traditional three acts. From an examination of the linear progression of the scenes through time, it seems to have the beginning partly at the beginning, and partly at the end, the end mostly in the middle, and the middle mostly near the real-time beginning. The film seems to succeed despite this scrambling on sheer chutzpah and Quentin Tarantino's and Roger Avary's amazingly baroque dialogue riffs (II-5). The structure may have taken its cue from director Jean Luc Godard, who, when asked if films need to have beginnings, middles, and ends, famously replied, "Yes, but not necessarily in that order." While this seems overly coy, in the case of PULP FICTION, it applies.

I submit that the film does, indeed, succeed due to its classic Aristotelian and Fieldian 3-part structure. If one examines the deeper, logical-level of the film, the true structure, as always, emerges. The protagonist is effectively the criminal gang headed by Marsellus (sic) Wallace. Its *cohesion* (and, therefore its *existence*) is threatened by a series of events: Vincent's near losing of Marsellus's wife, Mia, to a heroin overdose; Butch's betrayal of Marsellus; and Jules and Vincent's accidental killing of one of Marsellus's hench-men. As each of these obstacles is overcome, the group grows in illumination: Vincent, as it pertains to his calling to the gang and his precarious relationship to his employer; Butch, in his rescue of Marsellus despite his earlier betrayal; and Jules as his estimation of his own odds of survival has determined they've bottomed out. Marsellus, himself, grows in releasing Butch in thanks for his rescue, after having planned to kill him upon discovering the betrayal.

For each of these examples of growth to work in concert, the film requires assembly as it, in fact, was assembled. The true structure emerges from this assembly, and *only* this assembly. Linda Seger and Carolyn Miller, in an essay on unconventional narrative forms for *Creative*

Screenwriting magazine (March/April, 2001), identified a variety of new structural forms appearing in films today. Concerning PULP FICTION, they said:

> "PULP FICTION...employs a curved structure, a Loop, since it starts with the beginning, but the ending loops back and is played in the middle of the story. The structure helped solve the essential challenge of the piece: how does one create a form to unite several disparate parts? If the film had not used this looping structure, characters would have dropped out of the story part way through--either because of death, escape, or simply by choosing to get out of the killing business. *This would have given the story a lack of cohesiveness* (*italic*s, mine), and robbed it of a transformational arc that started in the second scene of the film and ended in the last scene of the film."

And later, they say:

> "For the Loop, writers Tarantino and Avary had to continually weave connecting threads between the multiple, seemingly disconnected story-lines, as well as the various scenes that take place out of chronological order... they created an overall umbrella to the story through all the characters' fear of the villain, the evil and powerful Marsellus (sic)."

Apply the Aristotle-Field paradigm to PULP FICTION and it breaks down *unless the protagonist is seen as the criminal gang as a whole*, joined by, among other things, that "umbrella" of fear identified by Seger and Miller. The time juxtaposition, with Vincent Vega dying in the middle, but being present when Jules decides to quit the gang at the end, among other juxtapositions, effectively destroys a time-only causality requirement implied by a superficial reading of Aristotle and Field.

This is even clearer with the Campbell-Vogler model. Who is the journeying hero? Vincent? Jules? Butch? None of the others has enough screen time. But none of the first three fills the bill sufficiently, either. Which archetypes are present? Is there a mentor? (Mr. Wolf, perhaps?) Some have said that the protagonist is, indeed, Jules, as he exhibits the true transformational epiphany at the end, and his gradually deeper understanding of the Ezekiel verses which he recites during the film seems to articulate an arc of transformation. But Jules is wholly missing from Butch's story and much of Vincent's story, so the reasoning, once again, breaks down.

If structure is mere connection of parts, then PULP FICTION is, while a structured assembly, to understate it greatly, a *unique* example. If structure is connection *and support* of parts, then, an *only-the-gang-as-protagonist* view achieves it. Tarantino, himself, signals this when he states at the outset, PULP FICTION is "*Three* stories about one story." (*italics,* mine) There's only a single candidate for the "one story" in the film, and *it's the gang's story*.

Variants

To re-examine, then, the current views (Campbell-Vogler; a superficial reading of Aristotle-Field) argue that three or more causally linked parts are a structure, so, why must structure

incorporate, indeed *require* unity? Well a building is made of parts which may well fit together, but if the whole is not unified by the structural support extending to all those parts, the building falls down. So, too, do stories. If not, any group of characters occupied at any causal action, i.e., random chunks of everyday life, would qualify as stories. *Mere parts do not a story structure make*. A *unifying*, *transformative* element is required. In screenplays, that is the protagonist. Since movies are dynamic, i.e., they're *meaningfully different* at the end than they were at the beginning, *the unifying element must alter over story time*. And, usually, *he must grow*.

As I mentioned earlier, the only exception to this is if the protagonist fails to grow in the face of the need for it. In that case, the growth is still present, but it is solely in the understanding of the audience at the expense of the protagonist. FORREST GUMP is an example of a protagonist's failure-to-grow. The audience, by the end, learns to accept an unchanging, though enduring, Forrest, with the world changing around him. In either example: growth, or non-growth in spite of a need for it, a transforming illumination is achieved within the audience, and the story's structure emerges (see my analysis in the Appendix). The key to great story structure, then, is not *merely* what happens to the protagonist. Rather, it is that something transformational, from *darkness* to *illumination*, happens within the *audience*. This is true *whether or not* the protagonist transforms. For, as we have shown and must stress, *story meaning lies within the audience*.

Other examples of the unchanging hero range from pure action films like the James Bond movies to more serious works like DEATH OF A SALESMAN. In such a view, the *Bond-ian* hero stays intact, gets the girl, and defeats the evil-doers. The change occurs, as I have stated, in the audience, and in the case of this kind of action picture, the change is almost all on the plot level: the audience learns how Bond defeats the baddies. Instead of a transformation of meaning within the hero and/or the audience, it may only be a catharsis, a culmination of the emotion and tension built over the course of the story. On the other hand, it may be a transformation within the audience of new insight into the protagonist and his indomitable ability to endure. It has a power, when handled well, which can rival and even, at times, exceed the impact of a serviceable meaning transformation in a typical story providing our transformational arc of character. In the case of the catharsis, it is not often deep, but it is a fun ride when done well. But some "unchanging" protagonists actually do change in the better examples of the action film. The transformation is only hinted at, but it is, nonetheless, solidly present, appearing in otherwise little moments within the story wherein the character opens up and exposes his vulnerability (II-6). With DEATH OF A SALESMAN, on the other hand, the point of the story is, among other things, Willy's inability to change. Our recognition of it is the transformation in action. So, profound truths are just as available to the writer, when working with the unchanging hero, as are pure escapist "entertainments" (in the Graham Greene sense).

THE SIXTH SENSE

In character-dominant (as opposed to action-dominant or a balance of both) stories, the structural changes can actually occur off-screen. A comparison of an earlier draft of M. Night

Shyamalan's screenplay for his film, THE SIXTH SENSE, with the finished film, demonstrates just how elegantly this can work. The changes within the hero from the start to the inciting incident, and then to the part 1/part 2 transition all happen inside the hero's head. In the script, the part 1/part 2 transition happens *in a scene cut from the film*. But the transformation is articulated, by the words and behavior of the protagonist anyway. The movie's story is Malcolm's (Bruce Willis). It's about his need for redemption after failing a patient. The transitions are: Malcolm is shot by a former patient, Vincent, whom he realizes, afterward, he failed to help (and for whose suicide he blames himself). Malcolm sets out to right that wrong, finds a boy in similar need, Cole, and begins to investigate his case. The transition to the second act comes when Malcolm realizes Cole is, indeed, like his former patient, Vincent. Cole tells Malcolm he can't be helped by him. Then, Malcolm meets his wife at a restaurant and explains his need to help Cole because "they're so much alike" (Cole and Vincent). In this way, Malcolm confirms his transformation from looking for redemption, to finding the path toward getting it. Then, having committed to Cole, he embarks on the main action of the story, gaining his redemption by helping Cole where he had not helped Vincent.

Later, when he realizes he isn't helping Cole (in fact, Cole has begun to help *him*—so, now, *who* is the doctor?), we find ourselves at the mid-point of the script and movie. Unlike the first transition, the transition to part 3 is actually in the movie. It's at the point when Malcolm tells Cole to listen to the dead people he sees, that he may be able to help them. Cole takes the advice, and exorcises his demons as a result. Cole, in turn, helps Malcolm by telling him how the dead talk to the living—while they sleep. When Malcolm goes home, his wife is asleep. After he discovers that he, in fact, is, himself, dead, he talks to his sleeping wife, and says goodbye. His redemption is complete, and he is at peace. Unlike an action film, all of the transitions are in Malcolm rather than in the plot. They are internal ones, in his mind, and the 1st part/2nd part transition even happens off-screen! Nonetheless, he (and the audience) grows as a result of the experience of the story.

MEMENTO

Christopher Nolan's remarkable film, MEMENTO, is perhaps the ideal example of how structure is a function of character. Why? If story structure is linked parts in causal progression, MEMENTO is backwards. But, if story structure is three proportioned parts linked by causal meaning to a growing hero/viewer, then MEMENTO is the example that "proves the rule."

This is because the conventional plot-based view of structure fails to account for MEMENTO. As I said, it's backwards. And a plot that is structured backwards is not merely a film *backwardly structured*. One can't just pick up the film, turn it around, and plop it down, back-to-front and front-to-back. This is because a story is a *construct* one enters with little or no understanding, gaining it as one goes along. If it were akin to a building one entered from the rear rather than from the front, one would enter the rooms from the wrong way, not knowing where for certain one was, seeing people in relationships and activities one might not understand. Meaning would, if ever, be achieved at a greater cost in time, and then, probably only a part of what is required. Then there's the issue of time. It, too, would have to run backwards. In MEMENTO,

except at the outset, it doesn't. But a growth in illumination occurs as the film progresses. It's just that while the growth is about the protagonist, it isn't only within the protagonist. Additionally it is in the mind of the audience.

The film tells the story of Leonard Shelby, a former insurance investigator whom we are told was injured when an intruder broke into his home and murdered his wife. Shelby suffered a brain injury, specifically to his hippocampus, and this has resulted in Shelby's inability to make new memories. Known as *Korsokoff's Syndrome*, the condition leaves him with no short-term memory retention beyond the first few minutes. As a result, Leonard has been plunged into a world in which he is constantly at sea, unable to know for certain where he is, or what he is doing. His last memories, in fact, are of the events of his injury, and the rape and murder of his wife. Because of his plight and his final memories, he is determined to have vengeance, both for his wife, and the bleak and empty life with which he is left. He has single-mindedly set about that process, finding all sorts of ways to create alternative sources of memory. He uses a Polaroid camera to photograph key details leading him on his path. He writes notes to himself, incessantly. And, most bizarrely, he has had established facts tattooed on his body so that he can't lose them.

Writer/director Nolan then sets out to tell Leonard's story in such a way as to put the audience into Leonard's own predicament. He re-orders his script and film so that the major sequences each run forward in time, but are assembled in chronologically-reversed order. The film opens with the final moments of the final scene—Leonard's killing of Teddy (this part even plays onscreen backwards, signaling what lies ahead). Each reverse-ordered sequence begins with the very moment at which the next reverse-ordered sequence ends. This effectively keeps the audience from total confusion. And yet it also keeps the viewer off-center, uncertain what could be coming next, despite the fact that they are the very moments which got them there. It's like a cinematic version of the game show, "Jeopardy," where one hears the answer, and then must divine the question that yielded it.

Amazingly enough, on a meaning level, the story assembles itself correctly in its audience members' heads, even as it goes along, yet unfinished. Nolan gives the audience needed mental breaks between each reverse-ordered sequence. He does this with recurring black-and-white scenes, shot mostly in Leonard's motel bedroom as he talks to someone—eventually we learn the caller is a cop, the character of Teddy, in fact—on the phone. In this manner, Nolan gets out important back-story, even as the audience, reeling, rights itself and readies for the next reverse-ordered sequence in this bizarre narrative barrage.

If one applies the Fieldian and our own notion of structure to MEMENTO, reverse-ordered and all, the structure that emerges is nonetheless front-ordered, and a function of the hero, Leonard Shelby. This is because, when all is said and done, *structure is not in the film so much as it is in the mind of the audience*, assembling, as the mind does, disparate facts, and attempting to make sense of them, no matter what order it receives them (II-7).

The thing to remember, in this case, is, *it may be a movie on the screen, but it's a story in your head!* To illustrate this, imagine looking at a movie unspooled across a long corridor floor. You can't see the story even by looking at all of the shots of the film unrolled before you on that floor. It only becomes a story when the mind relates the scene or idea presently before it to ideas or scenes from the past, or, anticipated scenes or ideas from the future. The connection happens entirely in the mind. So, in effect, there is no *meaningful* story structure in any film. Story structure, in fact, is only a construct of the mind, the mind of the audience (II-8).

For the audience, the story structure of MEMENTO assembles as follows: Leonard executes Teddy in the abandoned building. We want to know why. As the first quarter of the film progresses, we learn Leonard's amazing plight, how he deals with it through notes, photos, and tattoos. We learn that he can trust no one, not even his motel desk-clerk. Everyone takes advantage of Leonard's disability. We learn that Leonard has managed to connect Teddy to the mysterious "John G.," the person his notes tell him killed his wife.

So, how is the connection made? Precisely at the Fieldian 25% mark, just under half an hour into this nearly two hour movie, Leonard receives a copy of Teddy's driver's license, identifying him as John Gammell—"John G."—complete with photo, from the bartender, Natalie. This is the part two/part three transition, and we assemble it in our mind that way because we know that we are seeing the story from end to beginning. We trust the story to tell us its secrets in its own manner, and accept the reverse-ordered dénouement because we can order it correctly in our heads even as we assemble it in the reverse, as it is given to us.

The film continues to unfold, and we *re*-gress (*chronologically* (in scene order) backward; *meaningfully* forward) from part three into part two, getting to better-know Natalie, the woman Leonard tries to help, but whom we discover is using him just like everybody else. We learn the details of the case which serves as a model for Leonard's memory-loss problem, the Sammy Jankis sub-plot. And we encounter the man Leonard must confront for Natalie, possibly a dangerous drug dealer named, Dodd. Eventually, this is confirmed, and Leonard's rough treatment of him is justified, as we watch Dodd try to kill Leonard on their initial meeting.

Regressing deeper into part two, after we watch him destroy the few possessions left to him of his wife's, we watch Leonard cope with his condition by trying to fool himself into believing his wife is still alive. With the help of a prostitute, he creates a warm bed and the fleeting scent and presence of a just-departed woman to which he can awaken. Later, we watch as Natalie's true colors emerge, and she is seen to be manipulating him for her own purposes.

We learn that Sammy Jankis's wife, not believing that his condition was genuine, had gone to Leonard when he was the insurance investigator on Sammy's case, and begged him to tell her what he really believed: was Sammy faking it, or is it a real condition? Leonard confides that he, in fact, doesn't believe it. Sammy's wife, a diabetic who receives daily injections of insulin from Sammy, then sets out to test her husband to expose his charade of memory loss. She has him repeatedly inject her every fifteen minutes, expecting that if he has lied, he will come clean, and if he has not, she will let him kill her because she can't face life with him in such a state. Her

test succeeds, Sammy isn't lying, and she goes into an irreversible diabetic coma convinced that their life together is, indeed, over. This gives us a clear sense of the hopelessness of Leonard's condition. It effectively exonerates Leonard from the evil act we've seen him commit. Or, so it seems.

Then, just past the 75% mark, ninety minutes into the film, from within part two, we reach the part one/part two transition. Teddy—here revealed as the cop Leonard talks to on the phone in the black and white scenes between time changes—gives Leonard the initial information on John G. This will send him on his quest toward eventually deciding Teddy, himself, is his wife's killer. Acting on Teddy's information, Leonard lures Natalie's boyfriend, Jimmy Grantz, the drug dealer working with Dodd, to an abandoned building. Believing him to be John G., Leonard kills him, strips him, puts on Jimmy's clothes, and takes his wallet and car keys. Then his memory fades. Running outside, Leonard encounters Teddy—a stranger, once again—and now, having forgotten what he's just done, and believing he's found someone who may be hurt, he asks for help.

Inside, Teddy identifies himself as a cop. Suspicious of Teddy, because of his memory problem, Leonard knocks him over the head, takes his keys and gun. Stunned, Teddy gives himself away by calling the so-far unidentified (to Teddy) Leonard, "Lenny." So, Teddy's forced to come clean to Leonard: he's a cop who set Leonard up to kill Jimmy, a drug dealer working with Dodd. Jimmy was someone he wanted to rip off and then kill. Teddy tells Leonard that the Sammy story is a lie Leonard's told himself and others to cover up the truth: that his wife survived the attack, was, herself, a diabetic, and that Leonard, suffering just like his "Sammy," actually (and unwittingly) killed his wife with an insulin overdose. She had descended into depression and couldn't face the memories of the attack and rape, nor the prospect of life with her "new" memory-less Leonard.

Teddy explains that he helped Leonard kill his man—"the REAL John G."—a year ago, but that Leonard forgot, and continues to look for him incessantly. The guy he killed a year ago was only a rapist, not his wife's killer. Leonard was. Leonard has a memory flashback of himself injecting his wife, and realizes Teddy is telling the truth. Finally, Teddy tells Leonard that his own real name is John Gammell—my mother calls me Teddy"—and that there are lots of John G.'s in the world "for us to find."

Leonard can't deal with this. He does the only thing he can: he throws Teddy's car keys into the brush and runs. But as he flees, with Teddy behind him, scrambling about, trying to find his keys, Leonard realizes the way to free himself. It won't give him his memory back, but it will free him from Teddy's manipulations forever. Tearing up a note he's just written to himself that he's "done it," he's avenged the death of his wife, he writes a new one, deliberately identifying Teddy's license plate as his wife's killer's. Teddy's fate is sealed. And Leonard will finally get some measure of revenge, even if it can't be against his wife's killer.

So the arc of transformation hinges on Leonard's quest to find the murderer of his wife. In MEMENTO-time, he links the photo of Teddy to the name John Edward Gammell, or his quarry,

"John G." Further on in MEMENTO-time (but earlier in real time), he learns from Teddy that the killer is a "John G." But we are filtering all this through our increasing body of memories informed by our knowledge that Leonard kills Teddy. We are seeing Leonard being set up, time after time, and suspect "Teddy," already a manipulator, to be a liar. So, we watch, gripped, waiting to learn the truth. And, when Teddy comes clean late in the film, and Leonard is told he killed his own wife, we are tempted to disbelieve. The conspiracy theorists among us probably still do.

But, if we do, if we disbelieve Teddy at this crucial point in the film, we have nothing left to us toward understanding MEMENTO's story. It becomes a meaningless exercise in which Leonard merely goes through his motions, forever unaware. And since he *is* unaware, is he a murderer, or merely a force of unbridled nature, run amok? But Leonard doesn't disbelieve. He realizes Teddy is telling the truth because of his flashback. And in that single realization, Leonard creates for us the needed final "act" crescendo: he sees a way to achieve some level of success, not revenge for his wife, but freedom from Teddy and his manipulations.

For Leonard, the film of MEMENTO, re-edited into chronological order, is a kind of *third act* in a larger story, the *first two acts* of which extend backward into the period before the start of the film. These, perhaps, consist of an *act one*, which includes the rape (actually Leonard's sub-consciously self-protective fantasy to justify his searching-out a "rapist-killer") and death of his wife, with Leonard's actual killing of her concealed in his memory loss. And an *act two*, introducing Teddy helping Leonard find and kill the real John G., followed by Leonard being unable to remember it, and Teddy taking advantage of this to have Leonard do his own dirty work. All of this comes to Leonard (and us, if we're processing it all) in a rush in the final minutes of the film.

As such, the information at the end of MEMENTO in which Leonard remembers his own killing of his wife, and his determination to end Teddy's manipulations, is a *third act crescendo* both for our larger *Leonard movie* and for our own understanding of MEMENTO's story as we assemble it in our heads. This, then, is how the *film's* "act one" (edited to be at the end) is *our story's* "act three." And that, in turn, is how MEMENTO structures around its transforming hero.

In this way, the three parts about-a-transformation, have fallen into place, and the structure—a *hero-in-transformation* structure—emerges. The transformation only happens given all of the information we've gained over the entire film, information we've re-assembled into coherent meaning despite the assembly of the film. Effectively, then, the only valid or useful structure MEMENTO has is *Fieldian* and *Transformational*. The Campbell-Vogler model, however, seen in reverse, is present. Interestingly, the archetypes all alter as the film progresses, but the patterns are present. Teddy is, in MEMENTO-time, initially the Mentor, later the Trickster. So, too, are the others. The elixer is the connective information of John G. eventually linking back to Teddy. A conventional, plot-based view of structure, also works. But, like Campbell-Vogler, it only works backwards.

The really delicious irony of MEMENTO is that we believe Teddy's ultimate story at the film's end because we see the flashback of Leonard and his wife with the insulin. It must be true because Leonard *remembers* it after Teddy reminds him. But Leonard also *remembers* the entire Sammy Jankis story in flashback earlier in the film. Both flashbacks were equally real, but at least one is false. Which one? It is left to us to decide, and, for my money, I'll take the far more plausible latter one. Besides, only then does MEMENTO make sense structurally.

The Man Behind the Curtain

So, just like THE WIZARD OF OZ, structure is kind of a "man behind the curtain." It is there, but disguised. One day it looks like a bum with rags and no shoes; and on another it's Sir Walter Raleigh, wearing a gigantic plumed hat. Yet underneath it all, it's just a man. Comedian George Gobel, when asked by talk-show host, Johnny Carson, how he was doing, said, "D'ja ever feel like the whole world was a tuxedo, and you were a pair of brown shoes?" Writers on screenwriting have, now, for decades been failing to see structure even as it stood before them. Every once in a while, "a pair of brown shoes" would come along and point it out: Linda Seger (though seemingly unaware of its importance) in the '80s, and Dara Marks more recently. But few ever seem to get it. Even in the 4th edition of their excellent book, *Alternative Scriptwriting*, p. 307, authors Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, miss it *even as they see it*:

> "A number of writers have experimented successfully with structure. The most commercially successful experiment is Richard Curtis's FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL [1994]. An argument can be made that this film actually follows three-act form—boy meets girl, boy doesn't want girl, boy finally decides he really does want girl. But we would like to suggest that, on another narrative level, Curtis does organize the entire story around a series of special events—weddings, proposed weddings, and a funeral. By doing so, he has contextualized the personal issue (commitment to a relationship) into a social context—that is, the weddings and the funeral..." And later, "The challenge to storytelling conventions of structure comes from the theatrical device of organizing the entire story around five social events. Superficially, the implication is five acts, but actually, the film neatly divides into three acts, with the turning points just after the two characters have slept together for the first time: the female lead, Carrie (Andie McDowell), poses the issue of commitment, and Charles rejects it. The next turning point occurs after Carrie's marriage: Charles confesses his love for her, but now she is married and the possibility of a relationship has never seemed more distant. The dissonance between the formal structure of the film (five acts) and the dramatic structure (three acts) makes the film seem novel and inventive."

They get it, and yet... *they don't!* As can be seen by my underlined sections, they can see what we here call the physical and logical levels, even dichotomize them, naming them "formal" and "dramatic," respectively, but they reject the legitimacy of the multi-level concept by dismissing the physical level (their "formal" level) as "superficial." Instead they over-intellectualize the dichotomy by pronouncing it as "contextualized," and "dissonant," and therefore, "more powerful," whatever that all means. As can be seen in the analysis of ALL THAT JAZZ in the

Appendix (not to mention, *the works of William Shakespeare!*), organizing a story around five physical-level structural components is hardly groundbreaking or "experimental."

Perhaps William Froug said it best when he wrote:

> "The best structure is whatever you decide it is for whatever story you happen to be telling at the moment. Your structure should vary to fit each story. One size does not fit all."---Zen and the Art of Screenwriting 2, p. 154.

I will continue my analyses of so-called "structure-less" films in the Appendix. Should the reader want to nominate a film that manages to meet my definition of a "movie" (*all mass-audience, narrative fiction, feature-length, theatrical films exhibited to enlighten and/or entertain for profit*), and, yet, does *not* fit my multi-level structural model as outlined in the previous pages, please contact me at the address listed at the end of the Appendix. I would love to put it to the test, and should I agree with the reader, I will include an analysis of the film(s) in a future edition of this book with credit to the reader(s).

So What?

Controversies aside, an awareness of structure is good only to writers. As long as it *works*, audiences don't care. To be sure, audiences would rather not know the structure of a beloved story, because it takes away the magic created by the piece and kills it. So, structure is for writers. It is useful, as we've pointed out, for conception, for efficiency, and later as the story is written, for unity, and for focus. For audiences, then, it is valuable to the extent it works to yield its magical results. It is important not just to help writers work their way through huge blocks of narrative plot-line as the screenwriting priesthood's *surfacists* (*sure-fascists*?) are content to believe. It is valuable because it explains its subject to its creators. And, thanks to such functioning on the deeper level of meaning, it helps audiences in understanding their own lives. So, both surface, physical-level structure, and deeper, logical-level structure are useful. One helps writers find a way to tell the *story*, and the other helps writers find a way to tell the *truth* (II-9).

The test of a theoretical model, a *paradigm*, is the extent to which it covers the wild variation found within the phenomenon it is meant to explain. Seen without the crucial elements of the unifying, broadly-defined, transforming protagonist, and a temporal environment which allows for non-linear time and meaning-only causality, the Aristotle-Field and the Campbell-Vogler models fail to explain films like ANNIE HALL, NASHVILLE, PULP FICTION, and MEMENTO.

My goal with all this is not to replace some earlier writer's "guru-status" with my own. In fact, *I've found merits in virtually all of the many books advocating a particular screenwriting method*. Instead, I've tried to show why each of them has points and insights about screenwriting that work, while, at the same time, failing to explain the broad variety of screen stories encompassing the length and breadth of the subject. It shouldn't need to be stated that

only a view which can make sense of all (or most all) of them has the power to contribute to the subject as a whole. The notion of the surface and deep structures, that is, the physical and logical structures, succeeds at this as only it could. So, I advocate a view which uses *what works for me* concerning notions of screenwriting, and I discard what doesn't. But, similarly, I am interested in discovering a model which best explains its subject. Just as atoms were once thought to be the fundamental building-blocks of matter, and have since been replaced by sub-atomic particles (II-10), the major screenwriting paradigms are, in this view, seen as components of a larger model, one which has the power to spread out widely and contain the wild variance among successful screen stories as have emerged thus far in world cinema.

> **If writers are confused as to which structural approach is correct for their stories, *they need only remember to ask themselves <u>whose (and what) story their tale <u>is</u>, and how that character must grow</u>***.

With those questions answered, the structural signposts of the story are either in place, or can be determined. And then they have the one structure which matters most for the success of their work, the deep or logical structure. From there, they can examine their narrative and begin the process of building its parts toward its eventual visible structure, the surface-level physical structure, be it David Siegel's nine-act model with two goals and a reversal, the musically-inclined sonata-allegro form found in the work of Stanley Kubrick and others, the archetypal story assemblies of George Lucas ala Campbell-Vogler, or the three acts of Aristotle-Field functioning about the transforming hero.

So, is there a model from among all the variations which is best? I submit that there is no correct structure when one is on the physical level, unless it is the correct one for that writer, with that story, on that day. On the other hand, when on the deeper, logical level, there is only *one* correct structure. It is the three part model, embodying a transformation of meaning through its hero, and within the minds of its audience, supporting and unifying the story as the surface-level physical structure can only mirror or take its own path. It's the one we've practiced all along, ever since those cave walls, so very long ago.#

"Anyone who isn't confused really doesn't understand the situation."
---Edward R. Murrow

AFTERWORD

Additional Levels in the Multi-Level Model

"You can never solve a problem on the level on which it was created."
---Albert Einstein

There is no denying the wide variance in structural assembly of story plots. And there is no denying the three-part arc of transformation of the protagonist. So this means they are both present and *must be considered as present upon separate story levels*. Once this is appreciated, it allows the entire spectrum of narrative story to fit a multi-level structural model. It also avoids making that structural model unwieldy. It is still controllable, still able to give up its insights into story development. So, let's examine it up close:

This multi-level, *multi-dimensional* approach to structure allows for at least two, and sometimes many, levels from which structure springs. It assumes there is the dimensional level of time within which the other levels operate. First, as I've shown, there's the surface level, where the plot is found, and then a deeper level, where what the plot *means* is found. I've referred to these as the *Physical Level* (surface-or-*plot* level) and the *Logical Level* (interior-or-*meaning* level). On occasion, though, there can be several additional, *deeper* levels *below* the Logical Level and subordinate to it, provided their content has an impact on the meaning-level. These deepest-level *content planes* are concerned with *protagonist-transforming sub-text and/or cinematic content*. I note that they must be more than being *merely* transitory or limited in their impact. They must have *system-wide effect*, as signified by their effect on the transformation of the protagonist (or the transformation of the *audience's understanding* of the need for transformation even at the film-story's *un*-changing protagonist's expense). We can call the deepest levels as a group, the *Sub-Logical-Levels*, because, as they concern transformational content, they have meaning-attributes similar to those above on the primary meaning-level (the Logical Level). Examples of films containing an additional Sub-Logical level based on sub-text include:

- *CITIZEN KANE* - wherein the sub-text of the metaphor of Rosebud over-arches Kane's entire character transformation;
- *CASABLANCA* – wherein the sub-text of the song, *As Time Goes By*, as a metaphor, serves to counterpoint Rick's transformation;
- *CHINATOWN* - wherein the sub-text of the metaphor learned in CHINATOWN – "do as little as possible" – over-arches Gittes's transformation; and, proving that they don't have to start with "C"…

- *FORREST GUMP* - wherein the metaphor "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get" over-arches the transformation of the audience's understanding of Forrest's indomitable spirit, enduring all that is thrown at him without changing one iota. So while Forrest never transforms, we, in our understanding, do.

- *BLOW-UP* - wherein the use of photography as a metaphor of truth, itself, can conceal hidden "realities";

- *RASHOMON* – wherein the use of subjective "truths" are shown in sub-textual concert to dispute an otherwise unassailable objective reality;

I leave room for additional, deeper, sub-logical levels of structure, though I believe that they must, of necessity, be subordinate to the Logical Level. Why subordinate? Because they must support the meaning established on the Logical Level, and not provide unrelated meaning that is not part of a single, unified whole. One that comes to mind is the *Image-Level*, in which the imagery and/or the image system used in the story and resulting film contribute to a transformational system-wide effect (water-as-evil, for example, in Clouzot's *LES DIABOLIQUES*). Another could be its sound counterpart, the *Aural-Level*. This might include sound effects (the *M*A*S*H* film's use of Radar and the Commanding Officer's simultaneous line-delivery as metaphor ratifying the increasingly inescapable notion of the insanity of war; or the use of recorded sounds and their evolution from objective to subjective through the film in *THE CONVERSATION*), sound editing stylistics, and especially pertinent music (*PSYCHO*'s violin "screams" during the murder, for example, followed by the "breaths-taken" by the oboes, immediately afterward, and the "inquisitive" phrases during the house explorations). Still another might be the *Montage-Level*, in which image assembly and editing rhythms have a contributory effect to the transformation of the protagonist (e.g., any number of films that begin languidly and gradually pick up the editing pace as the tension level and the stakes rise toward the climax). Another might be a level for *Production Design* (e.g. the dreamscape of *THE 5,000 FINGERS OF DR. T*). Finally, one last level that may be included is a *Symbolic-Level*. *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*, with its vulva-like doorways, its penile-like spaceship, its vagina-like stargate passage, and its orbiting baby at the end, all symbolizing the transformation of humanity, comes immediately to mind.

The presence of these levels is evidence of, perhaps, the highest quality of screenwriting, the finest film stories, as the writer is using all (or most) of her/his available tools in a sufficiently elegant way to render the story's meaning in the fullest, most rewarding and enlightening manner. So, to summarize our **Multi-Level Model of Structure**, with a progression of *time* as a *context* and *continuum* within which the following function, we can illustrate it as follows:

The Multi-Level Structural Model

Physical Level – The surface level on which the story's plot functions; in any number of parts (*acts*), but generally, 3 to 7, in almost any proportion, but, if not 25/50/25%, then, often, closer to equal (such as 20/20/20/20/20% for a 5-part story).

Logical Level – A deeper level on which the story's meaning functions, signified by the change (transformation) or non-change of the protagonist; always in three parts, running in the rough proportion of 25/50/25%.

Sub-Logical Levels (concurrent) including, but not limited to:

Sub-text Level – Meaning-affecting sub-textual function.

Image Level – Meaning-affecting imagery function.

Aural Level – Meaning-affecting sound function.

Montage Level – Meaning-affecting film editing function.

Design Level – Meaning-affecting production design function.

Symbolic Level – Meaning-affecting symbolic function.

"Before I came here I was confused about this subject. Having listened to your lecture I am still confused. But on a higher level."
---Enrico Fermi

Appendix

The Myth of Three Act Structure

"Your theory is crazy, but it's not crazy enough to be true."
---Niels Bohr

Screenwriter, blogger, and author, Alex Epstein has stated the following in his book *Crafty Screenwriting*, pp. 59 – 61, and in his blog article, *The Myth of Three Act Structure*:

> "Where are the act breaks in [*A*] HARD DAY'S NIGHT*?* ALL THAT JAZZ*?* How about SPARTACUS*?* FORREST GUMP*?* APOLLO 13*?* ANNIE HALL*?* Or the superbly written WILD THINGS*,* which has about five or six major twists?"

See my analyses of each film below and in Section II.

> "Or how about THE WIZARD OF OZ? Does the third act begin when the Wizard sends Dorothy after the Wicked Witch of the East? Or when Dorothy gets home to Kansas? Or when the Wizard turns out to be a fraud? What difference does it make to the story? Who cares where the third act begins?"

My answer – because it is Dorothy's story, the third *act* and the third *portion of the deeper logical structure* both begin at the *end* of the scene of Epstein's third choice: "when the Wizard turns out to be a fraud," because that is when Dorothy finally is on the path to go home, see the film's analysis, below; and as for who cares, see "Why should we care?" below.

> "In THE FUGITIVE, does the second act begin when Dr. Richard Kimble escapes the prison bus, or when he escapes the following manhunt? When does the last act begin? When he discovers the one-armed man? When he confronts Dr. Charles Nichols at the doctor convention? When Marshal Samuel Gerard begins to realize that Dr. Kimble is innocent?"

My answer – because it is Kimble's story, the second act begins "when Dr. Richard Kimble escapes the prison bus" and is formally declared a 'fugitive' by Gerard, because that is when he sets out to change his fate; and the last act begins "when he discovers the one-armed man" because that is when he understands what must be done to resolve the question of his fate, see my analysis below.

> "Who cares?"

See "why should we care?" below.

> "Suppose you could decide where the third act begins. How would that help you understand how the story works?"

My answer - see "Why should we care?" below.

Later, he writes:

> "But don't worry about having three distinct acts. You may find that a five act structure works better for your screenplay. It worked for Shakespeare. You may have a true story that just naturally breaks down into four acts. Squeezing it into the Procrustean bed of Three Act Structure is just going to mangle it.
>
> "Just tell a good story that keeps people interested.
>
> "Note, however, that if you are turning in an outline to a producer, he will probably want to know where the act breaks are. Pick some plausible page numbers or events and humor him."

Despite my advocacy for three-part logical structure, and aside from that last suggestion, the point about three acts is *not* invalid. As I've pointed out, this is all just splitting hairs about what I have referred to as *physical-level* structure. Epstein, like many others, has either missed or failed to acknowledge the deeper, *logical-level* structure of character growth/non-growth that articulates the meaning of stories. But, **as pure surface-level structure analysis, Epstein has, indeed, nailed it:**

Don't force your story into an artificially-imposed <u>physical</u> structure!

And that is why I have devoted so much space to a re-assessment of structure and the variety of possible physical-level structures available to writers. There's just "more to the story" than that. And that is where the multi-level concept of *deep structure* comes in.

The films Epstein mentions to which I have not already applied my notion of structure include those listed below. In order to articulate their structures we first ask whose (and what) story the film is. In the answer to that question lies the deep or logical-level structure.

Successful narrative films that do not exhibit logical-level structure through a protagonist's arc of transformation/non-transformation may exist. But, if so, then they are few. Can anyone name one? Meanwhile, the films that *do* exhibit deep structure are in such an overwhelming majority, that for all practical storytelling purposes (see "Why Should We Care?" at the end), the multi-level structural model remains valid, and indeed, thanks to its applicability across narrative cinema, is, thus far, *the best structural model for evaluating story in films*.

In separating my notion of deep structure from the surface-level physical structure, I have chosen to call those three portions, "Parts" rather than "Acts." In fact, as I have mentioned, and

as will be seen in some of these films analyzed below, the two do not necessarily correspond. The surface level physical structure is not always in three parts, consistent from one film to another. It can exhibit other structure than that which is articulated by three acts. But my notion of multi-level structure with that deeper, logical level *is* consistent for virtually all of narrative film. There, likely, is *no better* structural model. That is its strength, for it offers cogent meaning to audiences. That is its value, for its identification of an arc of transformation establishes a proto-story's suitability for writers.

Here is my identification of each film's physical and logical-level structures with the turning points and/or transition points ***underlined, bolded, and italicized***:

ALL THAT JAZZ

Q - Whose (and what) story is it?
A – Joe Gideon's (his death in 5 acts).

The film states its physical surface structure in the first 12 minutes via Gideon's movie-within-a-movie's standup comic in a monologue. He explains that, for the dying, there are 5 stages: anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Death, as an entity, is present throughout the film. Connecting the stages, it manifests as a series of dialogues between Joe and (what else?) a beautiful woman ("death").

The film's **Physical Structure** can be charted in those 5 stages (with running times listed):

Act 1 - Anger Stage – (1" to 38") - Joe in his life, living cynically, sleeping around despite loving his ex-wife, his daughter, and his mistress; preparing a show, ***but unhappy with it despite its excellence***; editing his movie-within-our-movie, THE STANDUP.

Act 2 - Denial Stage – (38" to 57") – ***Has a mild heart attack, but shrugs it off***;
Business as usual, rehearses, works on his show, making it brilliant, but summing himself and show business up ("we take you everywhere, but get you nowhere"); ***eventually abandons his "cut" of his movie on the monologue about death stages even though he has improved it (because it is too accurate about his own life)***.

Act 3 - Bargaining Stage – (57" to 65") – ***Joe and his life "bargain," showing him that he has love, his work is great, but even in the face of it, during the reading with everyone in stitches, he can't hear them, and he can't accept it***.

Act 4 - Depression Stage – (65" to 101") – ***Joe has a heart episode, angina, and is admitted for surgery***; Joe in the hospital; the show goes on hiatus; producers interview a new director; glimmers of health; **THE STANDUP *is a hit, but has a bad review, and that's all Joe can see***; Joe tells Katie he loves her, but if he survives will hurt her again; surgery; ***show is financially autopsied, and if Joe dies, it will reach profit because of insurance and the fact that the hiatus***

hit before major set expenditures; ***4 songs, back-to-back showing Joe what he stands to lose, one from each woman in his life, including "show business" itself***; he survives surgery, and it looks like he'll return to the show.

Act 5 - Acceptance Stage – (101" to 120") – ***Set-back: he has a heart attack***; ***A re-statement of the 5 stages as Joe accepts his coming death, tears off the hospital gear connected to him, escapes his room, and wanders through the hospital back-areas and basement***; each stage is summarized through Joe's behavior, culminating in his kissing the dying old woman, one last flirtation as he bows out; death is signified by the song "Bye Bye Love" (substituting "Life" for "Love"), ***at the end of which Joe moves forward to meet his death, the beautiful woman in white***.

The film's **Logical Structure** can be charted in 3 parts:

Part 1 – (1" – 33") - Joe Gideon, director, loves but strays from the women in his life, ***culminating, at 33," in the admission that he cannot re-marry because his behavior would hurt the person***.

Part 2 – (33" – 101") - Joe lives his life, loving and hurting both those around him and also himself; ***at the mid-point, 65" into the story he sees what's in store for him, heart failure, both figuratively and literally***; he has surgery and almost comes back from it, but resumes his bad ways; ***ultimately, at 101" into the story, he has a set-back while still in the hospital***.

Part 3 – (101" – 120") - Joe symbolically re-examines his journey toward death through an unauthorized "journey" through the back areas of the hospital, ***at the end of which Joe dies, embodied in a big song and dance number as he says goodbye***. The film ends at 120" of story time.

Conclusion - ALL THAT JAZZ is classic dramatic structure: both physically using the 5 act framework used by dramatists such as William Shakespeare, and logically, using the 3 part "meaning" structure of classic storytelling (with a breakdown of 27% - 57% - 16%). In fact, it bursts brilliantly into view as soon as the question of whose story the film is, becomes answered.

_____

APOLLO 13

Q – Whose (and what) story is it?
A – The Apollo 13 mission's (the mission's response to the threat of destruction).

The **Physical** and **Logical Structures** are *each in 3 identical and corresponding parts*:

Act 1/Part 1 – (1" – 35") – The events introducing the crew and the NASA scene, leading up to the launch; the preparation for the launch establishing the training and the way trouble might arise during a mission; the relationships of the families of the astronauts; the launch and first "leg" of the journey up to the point at which ***the explosion occurs and threatens the mission***.

Act 2/Part 2 – (35" – 103") – The assessment of the damage, and the impact of the explosion on the crew as well as NASA and the families; efforts on Earth to figure out what to do to save the crew; the arrival of Mattingly the astronaut who missed the mission, and his efforts to figure out how to save the astronauts; ***the arrival on the dark side of the moon is the Mid-Point of the story as well as the mid-point of the mission***; the crew continues to try to cope with the inability to get home, including saving the battery power by shutting down all non-essential systems; on Earth the NASA engineers look for a way to repair the air cleaning equipment so the carbon dioxide can be removed from the air aboard the ship; NASA finally solves the air-cleaning problem, and moves on to how to get them home fast enough to avoid suffocation when the air runs out; ***a very risky engine burn succeeds, gaining them the necessary speed, so they are assured of getting back in time***, though their safe re-entry is still in doubt.

Act 3/Part 3 – (103" – 133") – The crew hangs on as the engineers on Earth work to make sure the ship enters the atmosphere at the exact right angle to achieve re-entry without burning up or bouncing off the atmosphere and back into space unable to return; the families and NASA cope with the uncertainty; ***successful re-entry and splash-down***.

Conclusion – The film is almost "Fieldian" in its three-part breakdown: Part 1 runs 35 minutes, Part 2 runs 68 minutes, and Part 3 runs 30 minutes of actual story time (almost precisely in the Field paradigm, with a breakdown of 26% - 51% - 23%). The reason Epstein sees no acts in this film is that he doesn't view the mission as the protagonist, nor the story as structuring about it. If he had, the structure would have stood out like the Las Vegas Strip on payday.

FORREST GUMP

Q - Whose (and what) story is it?
A – Forrest's. However, he doesn't materially *seem* to change through the story. This is one of those cases where the *audience changes* in its understanding because of Forrest's indomitable spirit in the face of the turmoil around him. ***A way to articulate this is to see Forrest as a metaphor for the country, a kind of embodiment of the American spirit.*** Like it, Forrest endures through war and social change. But the essential and salient points are still there to signal the changes (***bolded*** and ***italicized***).

The film's length is 141" and it structures in an unorthodox manner: Part 1 covers 56" of screen time; Part 2 covers 63" of screen time and Part 3 covers only 22" of screen time. This works for this movie because the short Part 3 signals that the rest—the task America faces (as

seen through Forrest)—*is still ahead*, there's a long way to go, both for Forrest (a single father at this point), and for America (imperfect and struggling), but everything either one needs to get through, each already has.

The **Physical** and **Logical Structures** *each are in 3 identical and corresponding parts*:

Act 1/Part 1 – (1"- 56") – This portion comprises Forrest's youth through his arrival in Vietnam. Forrest's remarkable good fortune, beginning with being able to "throw off his shackles" and run faster than his pursuers, an ability that, despite his problems, gets him into college and beyond, signals that Forrest serves as a metaphor. When he loses Bubba in Vietnam, he gains a purpose: to carry on Bubba's ambition to own and operate a shrimping boat. ***Bubba's death is the event that thrusts Forrest into Act2/Part 2 and his adulthood.***

Act 2/Part 2 – (56" - 119") – This portion comprises Forrest's entry to and progress in adulthood. Forrest's success with international ping pong and how endorsements enable him to start the shrimping business with Lt. Dan, put him into position for the trials he must face. These include his overcoming and/or contention with such challenges and obstacles as Lt. Dan's depression, Forrest's mother's death, and Jenny's continuing struggles with life. Thanks to the sheer luck and inexperience of being out during a hurricane that spares them but destroys all the other shrimp boats docked back in port, Forrest and Lt. Dan corner the shrimp market. Forrest as a metaphor is reinforced when he decides to run across America for several years, crossing and re-crossing the continent, "from sea to shining sea." The act culminates with Jenny's re-appearance in Forrest's life and her acceptance of his love, followed by her abruptly leaving him, once again. Thanks to the rise of technology and Lt. Dan's foresight, and thanks to Lt. Dan's investing, Forrest and he get in on the ground floor of the computer industry. ***When Jenny finally writes Forrest and asks him to visit, Forrest races to see her and finds out he's a father, the event that sends Forrest into the final portion of the story.***

Act 3/Part 3 – (119" – 141") – This portion, then, follows Forrest as he adjusts to learning he's a father. Following this news, Jenny lets him know she has an illness, and asks him to marry her. They marry with Lt. Dan in attendance. Forrest assumes fatherhood and tends to Jenny as she declines in health. ***When she is gone, Forrest takes over as sole parent, and faces his and his son's future with a kind of serenity, somehow in tune with the changes he's seen in his extraordinary life***.

Conclusion – FORREST GUMP is a story of America, enduring through trial, embodied in one young man who moves blithely through it, yet unaware of it in any context. And true to Forrest's lack of awareness, the film audience in America mostly never saw itself in him. The structural breakdown is 39% - 45% - 15%. The story's transformation seems almost *ex*ternal to him, *in*ternal to us: He goes from innocence to a kind of victim of political and social forces greater than himself; emerges from that only to grapple with personal change, success, and their costs; finally to accept the responsibility of caring for someone other than himself, and, as always, facing an uncertain future. Only through our own hindsight are we able to appreciate

the impact of the forces acting upon and around him. And only in that way are we able to recognize the profound qualities this country itself embodies, as evidenced by the character of Forrest Gump.

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THE FUGITIVE

Q – Whose (and *what*) story is it?
A – Dr. Richard Kimble's (his search for his wife's killer)

The **Physical** and **Logical Structures** *are each in 3 identical and corresponding parts*:

Act 1/Part 1 – (1" – 24") – The film begins during a long credit sequence that extends all the way to the 15 minute point. During this, we see intercut sequences of Dr. Richard Kimble's wife's murder; back-story of a reception and Kimble's interrogation by the police; Kimble in surgery after being pulled away from the reception; ***The Inciting Incident in Kimble's story is his conviction as his wife's murderer at the 10 minute point in the story***; then, during transference to prison to await execution, aboard his prison bus, another prisoner fakes a seizure and stabs a guard who tries to assist him; a melee ensues, the prisoner gets a gun, another guard opens up with a shotgun, and the bus driver is hit, causing the bus to crash and land on railroad tracks; as the remaining prisoners, Kimble and one other, try to collect themselves, a train is heard to be approaching; Kimble tries to help the wounded guard as the others jump from the bus to avoid the train; just as the train hits the bus, Kimble gets clear; ***He starts to run from the scene; Gerard and his team arrive at the scene within an hour, and at the 24" mark, Gerard declares Kimble a fugitive.***

Act 2/Part 2 – (24" – 90") – The hunt is on; Kimble runs and Gerard sets up the manhunt; Kimble begins the process of solving his own predicament by attending to his own wound at a clinic, then he begins to change his appearance by shaving off his beard; Gerard gets a lead and starts to close in on Kimble; Kimble steals an ambulance, but the hunters are on to him, pursuing him by car and helicopter; Kimble abandons the ambulance in a tunnel within a dam complex, finding his way into the service tunnels within the dam; Gerard chases on foot, catching up to him at the tunnel's end overlooking the drop to the spillway, hundreds of feet below; Kimble jumps. Gerard sets about finding either Kimble alive or his body in the spillway; Kimble gets away, and finds his way to a hospital where he is able to begin the process of finding the one-armed man whom he fought, the killer of his wife; meanwhile Gerard hunts the other fugitive and finds him in a house, where he has to kill him; Kimble begins to research prosthetic arms like the one he saw in his fight with his wife's killer; Kimble makes his way back to Chicago and contacts his colleague, Dr. Chuck Nichols for money; Gerard continues to pick up leads and begins to study Kimble, noticing that he isn't just running, but is hunting something, too; ***searching in his hospital database, at the mid-point, 67" into the story, Kimble manages to narrow his search down to five suspects with the type/brand of prosthesis of the killer***; Kimble saves a kid whom the hospital has incorrectly diagnosed, along the way; Gerard learns

of this, and begins to realize Kimble is innocent; Kimble tries to find the killer through his list of leads, and learns that one is a prisoner in the jail, so he goes there and tries to get a conference with him; Gerard has tracked the same lead and intends to find this inmate, too, so they are both in the jail at the same time; Kimble realizes the guy isn't his man, so starts to leave when he is spotted by Gerard; the chase is on, as Kimble manages to disappear into a downtown St. Patrick's Day parade; ***Kimble continues his search, breaking into a suspect's apartment, and realizes he has identified the killer, a man named Sykes; he calls Gerard and tells him that "I just found a big piece" of the mystery about why his wife was murdered, and he realizes it has to do with him and a colleague at the hospital, Dr. Lentz—this is the Act 2/Part 2 to Act 3/Part 3 transition point, 90" into the story***.

Act 3/Part 3 – (90" – 124") – Kimble begins to close in on Sykes; Gerard does, too, discovering that Sykes has a connection to Kimble and the hospital; the team stakes out the Sykes house, waiting for him to return home; Kimble contacts Dr. Nichols again and tells him he's found his wife's killer and that it had to do with Dr. Lentz, their colleague at the hospital; Kimble contacts one of his other colleagues at the hospital, a woman in the tissue lab, and having procured several samples of liver tissue that he had submitted to a drug company for testing of a new drug, his colleague declares that the samples were switched and all from the same liver, thus calling into question the drug's efficacy; they also determine that Lentz, who had died suspiciously in a car accident, could not have switched half of the samples because he was already dead, so suspicion is now falling on Dr. Nichols, himself; meanwhile, Sykes, aware he is being hunted by Kimble, begins to hunt Kimble; they come together aboard an "El" train, and Sykes mistakenly kills a Chicago cop during the fight; Kimble subdues Sykes in the fight and handcuffs him there before making his getaway; Kimble goes to a conference at which Nichols will be announcing his testing of the drug, confronts him, accuses him, and a running battle and chase ensues; meanwhile Gerard, who has been close on Kimble's heels but having to clean up all of his collateral damage, gets to the hotel conference and hunts Kimble; ***Ultimately, Kimble kills Nichols as Nichols is about to shoot Gerard, uniting Kimble and Gerard as allies rather than enemies, and ending the struggle***; the film story ends at the 124" point.

Conclusion – The film is, as a Fieldian model, not far from being "mathematical" in its three part breakdown, with the first part at 24," the second part at 90," and the ending at 124" (a breakdown of 20% - 53% - 27%). Once it is determined that the story is Kimble's hunt for the truth of his wife's killer, the act transitions become clear: when he ***becomes a fugitive*** as he begins his own hunt (1), when he ***identifies the true killer*** (2), and when he ***resolves the entire mystery*** (3). Again, Epstein fails to see the transitions because he fails to identify whose (and what) story it is; this despite the title and the obviousness of the story's through-line.

SPARTACUS

Q – Whose (and what) story is it?
A – It's the Rebellion's (its rise and fall)

The **Physical** and **Logical Structures** are *each in 3 identical and corresponding parts*:

Act 1/Part 1 – (1" – 45") – The beginnings of the slave rebellion up to ***the decision to revolt*** at the gladiator school, 45" in story time, or exactly 25% into the story.

Act 2/Part 2 – (45" – 147") – The rebellion begins and gains strength as Rome first dismisses it and finally decides to crush it with all its strength; ***the rebels are defeated*** 147" in, comprising 56% of the story.

Act 3/Part 3 – (147" – 182") – ***The rebellion is crushed, but not its spirit; the rebels prefer to die over giving up Spartacus***; ***Crassus takes Spartacus' wife and child, but fails to defeat his spirit***; Gracchus frees Spartacus's wife and allows her to escape before committing suicide; Spartacus is crucified, but sees his son and wife before he, too dies. The story ends at 182," giving the third part 19% of the story, again, not far off of the Field paradigm.

Conclusion – SPARTACUS is structured in the movie standard of 3 acts (a breakdown of 25% - 56% - 19%). This is clear once the protagonist is seen as the rebellion, and the transformation arcs on its origin, confrontation with Rome, and its ultimate defeat by her.

WILD THINGS

Q - Whose (and what) story is it?
A – Suzie Toller's (her manipulation of a criminal conspiracy in 7 acts).

This is a movie of twists and reversals. Every time you think you know what is going on, a new revelation shows you that you are wrong. Many people praise this film, based on checks on the web. Unlike Epstein, I don't think this is a "superbly written" script. Why? Because there are so many twists in such short order that the viewer stops caring what happens, knowing, eventually, that after a few more minutes, it will all change again anyway. It is simply too cute for its own good. It is trying to *out-CHINATOWN*, CHINATOWN, *out-BODY HEAT*, BODY HEAT. And the characters end up amounting to no more than chess pieces being moved on the film's *board*. So, while it has surprises, it has no sympathetic protagonist because it eliminates them all through each successive reversal. I was waiting, as Suzie sailed away at the end, for the Bill Murray character to be revealed as the lover of Suzie, or maybe that he and opponent lawyer, Robert Wagner, were gay lovers who kill Suzie from a 2-man submarine as she *tries* to sail away at the end, leaving them with the money, only to... You get the idea: we could keep this going until there were literally no characters left to be revealed.

The **Physical Structure** consists of 7 acts:

Act 1 – (1" – 16") – The players are all introduced except our "heroine," Suzie Toller (Neve Campbell) in an opening scene at the high school auditorium where Sam Lombardo (Matt Dillon) is a Guidance Counselor introducing Police Sgt. Ray Duquette (Kevin Bacon), to talk about sex crimes. Student, Kelly Van Ryan (Denise Richards), is in the student audience. Even this opening scene, it seems in hindsight, is too "trumped up" to be believable, but they have to get everyone registered in order to get the conspiracy going. Kelly manipulates Sam into letting her come over, ostensibly to wash his car for a school fund raiser. She wheedles her way into his house, later leaves, and then ***tells her rich mother that Sam raped her*** at the 16 minute point in story time.

Act 2 – (16" – 34") – The accusation gets around, the police are brought in, and Duquette is told to bring his boss "a case." Sam hires a lawyer, Ken Bowden (Bill Murray), loses his current girlfriend, the daughter of Kelly's family's lawyer, Tom Baxter (Robert Wagner), and is attacked on the road at night by Kelly's mother's pool boy. Duquette visits Suzie, a low-life friend of rich-girl Kelly's as part of his investigation, whereupon ***she says Sam raped her, too, and uses the same detail Duquette heard from Kelly, that there is no physical evidence establishing the rape, a deliberate action supposedly by Sam who explains it to the "victim" with similar language in each rape*** at the 34 minute point in story time.

Act 3 – (34" – 50") – The case proceeds to court where after some proceedings, Lombardo's lawyer, Bowden breaks Suzie on the stand and she admits she lied and says Kelly lied, too. The case is thrown out. The parties meet at Sam's lawyer's office and settle for $8 million to avoid a lawsuit. But Sam is tainted, so he has to quit his job at the school and leave town. Then ***the crime is revealed as being a conspiracy engineered by Sam with the two girls to get the mother's money.*** It appears Sam and the girls will run off together. This is at the 50 minute point in story time.

Act 4 – (50" – 69") – Duquette then is shown to have figured out that Lombardo and the two girls, Kelly and Suzie, are in cahoots, and the whole thing was a job to fleece the money out of Kelly's mother. Duquette has no evidence, so he begins to watch the girls, believing they are the weak link that will give away the crime. He goes to Kelly and tells her he knows and that she should watch out because three's a crowd. Then he does the same thing with Suzie, but suggests that Sam and Kelly will dump her. Suzie then races to Kelly to confront her about this, followed by Duquette, who videotapes their meeting at Kelly's pool. The girls have a fight, but then make up and make love. Duquette and Lombardo have a meeting at headquarters where they have an argument and Sam threatens Duquette. That night, Lombardo meets Kelly and Suzie, and after she is drunk, ***Lombardo kills Suzie off-screen while Kelly is at the car***. Together, Kelly and Lombardo bag the body and dispose of it. This is at the 69 minute point in story time.

Act 5 – (69" – 81") – Duquette finds the murder scene after getting a tip from Suzie's mother about her hired hand finding teeth embedded in a boat. Duquette's partner Det. Gloria Perez (Daphne Rubin-Vega) stakes out Lombardo and then is discovered. He then tells her that Kelly killed Suzie and provides support to make it a real possibility. Duquette goes to Kelly at her

house and in a confrontation, ***she shoots at him, not mortally. He puts two bullets into her in "defense," killing her***. This is at the 81 minute point in story time.

Act 6 – (81" – 90") – Duquette is summarily fired from the police force. Then he is revealed as in cahoots with Lombardo. They go sailing while they must wait to get access to the money. Out on the open sea, Lombardo engineers it so that Duquette is thrown off the boat. But Duquette manages to hold a line and pulls himself back aboard, whereupon, as he is about to go after Sam, ***Duquette is shot and killed by a spear gun wielded by Suzie, somehow alive again, but now as a blond***. This is at the 90 minute point in story time.

Act 7 – (90" – 94") – So Sam and Suzie engineered it all. Since they are out in open water on Sam's sailboat, we can't believe little non-sailor Suzie would try to kill Sam, too, or can we? As they drink a toast to their good fortune we see that ***Sam's drink was spiked with poison by Suzie. Sam dies, and Suzie is left with sole remaining access to the money***. In a coda it is revealed that Suzie has a 200 I.Q., so could easily have engineered the whole thing as well as taught herself how to operate a sailboat and navigate back to shore. The film's story ends at the 94" point in story time.

The **Logical Structure** is in 3 parts:

Part 1 – (1" – 34") – A criminal conspiracy is shown in which a girl, Kelly Van Ryan, accuses a guidance counselor, Sam Lombardo, at their school of rape. As the story develops, a second girl, Suzie Toller, also accuses him. ***Suzie, then, emerges out of the shadows as a co-conspirator, it seems***. ***This is at the 34 minute point in story time.***

Part 2 – (34" – 71") – The police in the form of detective Duquette and his partner, investigate the accusations. There is commonality to the two girls' stories. A trial begins whereupon Sam Lombardo's lawyer breaks Suzie on the stand, and the accusations are established as lies. The trial is thrown out. To avoid a lawsuit, Kelly's mother pays off Sam. But Sam is tainted and must quit his job and leave town. Then the conspiracy is revealed: Sam and the girls are in cahoots to take Kelly's mother for the settlement money. ***This is the Mid-Point, 50 minutes into the story***. Police detective, Duquette, has figured it out, however. But he has no proof. So he starts to watch them. He begins to play one girl against the other to see if they will expose the conspiracy by running to Sam who now lives temporarily in a motel. The girls fight, but then make love, confirming their collusion to Duquette. But it's not enough. Lombardo and Duquette have a confrontation setting up animosity between them. ***Then Lombardo goes to see the girls and seems to kill Suzie while Kelly is at the car. We see them prepare the body for disposal.*** In truth, however, unknown even to Kelly, the un-harmed Suzie has now gone into hiding***. This is at the 71 minute point in story time***.

Part 3 – (71" – 94") Duquette, investigating, finds the murder scene. Lombardo tells him Kelly did it. Duquette goes to Kelly and they argue whereupon she shoots him. He kills her in defense. He turns out to be okay. Duquette is fired from the police force. Then it is revealed

that he is partnered with Lombardo, and they were in it together all along. Having to wait to get to the money, they go out sailing on Lombardo's boat. Sam tries to kill Duquette, but fails, and just as Duquette is coming after him, he is killed by Suzie, now revealed to be alive after all. ***As they sail off, Sam drinks a mickey prepared by Suzie, dies, and she is left with sole access to the money. The film ends at the 94 minute point in story time.***

Conclusion – The breakdown is proportioned at 35% - 39% - 26%, almost in thirds. No one in this movie was sympathetic for long. Beyond the fact that it was trying too hard, more than once it had scenes between various co-conspirators that would likely not have happened the way they did because the only people present who needed to be fooled were the audience. So the characters wouldn't have spoken to one another as they did. That is, unless each one, in turn only knew so much. But that begs the question as to why any of them would believe that the treachery stopped at them. The character relationships had so little development beyond the profit and sexual, that no reasons for such trust were ever established. And this, in turn, demonstrates the difficulty in doing a convincing 7+ act story full of twists and reversals in 94 minutes. Producers, directors, and studios are so obsessed with keeping it moving that the very substance that might have made it *worthy* of moving is either stripped away or never conceived of to begin with.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Q - Whose (and what) story is it?
A – Dorothy's (her search for home).

The **Physical** and **Logical Structures** are *each in 3 identical and corresponding parts*:

Act 1/Part 1 – (1" – 18") - Dorothy lives in Kansas with her dog, Toto, Aunt Em, and Uncle Henry, and dreams of faraway places; Miss Gulch, an ugly old spinster hates Toto and gets an order to have him removed; Miss Gulch takes Toto away, but as she rides away, Toto escapes and runs back to Dorothy; still, ***Dorothy might lose Toto to Miss Gulch, so she decides to run away from home—this is the Inciting Incident***; she sets off on her journey; Dorothy meets Professor Marvel and is shown how she has hurt Aunt Em, so she goes back; a cyclone hits, and before she can find her family in the storm cellar; ***she is knocked unconscious by the violence of the storm and begins to dream, concluding with her and her house falling from the cyclone at the 18" point in story time***.

Act 2/Part 2 – (18" – 90") – Dorothy dreams, whereupon she finds herself in Munchkin Land, part of the Land of Oz, greeted by the Munchkins; then she finds her house has accidentally killed the Wicked Witch of the East by dropping out of the cyclone on top of her; the Wicked Witch of the West arrives to see her sister dead; the Good Witch Glinda gives her the Wicked Witch's ruby slippers to protect her; the Wicked Witch of the West wants the slippers; Glinda sends Dorothy on her way to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard of Oz to help her get home;

She starts on the yellow brick road, and along the way is met and joined by the Scarecrow who is looking for a brain, the tin man who is looking for a heart, and the lion, who is looking for courage; after nearly being put into a permanent sleep by the Wicked Witch, but then rescued by Glinda, ***they reach the Emerald City and the story's mid-point at the 56" point in story time***; there they meet the people and finally the scary, great, and powerful Wizard of Oz; they ask for their desires: a way home, a brain, a heart, and courage, and the Wizard commands that they bring him the Wicked Witch's broomstick; They reluctantly set out for her castle; the Witch sends her army of flying monkeys to capture Dorothy, and they bring her and Toto back to the castle; Toto escapes, finds the three companions, and shows them the way to the castle; they masquerade as guards and sneak inside; they find Dorothy, and set her free before she is to be killed; running through the castle to escape, they are chased and cornered by the Witch and her minions; the Witch sets the scarecrow on fire, and Dorothy splashes him and the Witch with water, putting out the fire, but causing the Witch to melt and die; The guards, happy to be free of the Witch, give Dorothy and her companions the broomstick; they return to the Emerald City and the Wizard with the broomstick; they discover the Wizard is a fake, and accuse him of being bad; he admits it, causing them to lose all hope; but then the Wizard tells them the scarecrow already has a brain but needs a diploma to prove it; the tin man already has a heart, but needs a token to remind him of it; and the lion already has courage, but needs a medal; ***at the 90" point in story time, the Wizard tells Dorothy that he will help her get home in his hot air balloon; she is going home!***

Act 3/Part 3 – (90" – 99") – At the balloon's send-off, they say their goodbyes, and Dorothy gets into the balloon with the Wizard; Toto decides to chase a cat, and jumps out of Dorothy's arms; Dorothy goes after Toto, and accidentally releases the balloon's rope; the balloon departs, stranding Dorothy once again; Glinda appears and tells Dorothy she's always been able to go home, she just has to know it inside; ***Dorothy realizes it's true, and that her true destiny is in her "own backyard"***; she clicks her heels together and wakes up back home with her family at her side. The film ends at the 99 minute point in story time.

Conclusion – This is about Dorothy's *journey* to find home. The transitions are present, but skewed from classic, Fieldian structure, with the first part ending only 18" in; the second ending 90" in; and the story ending 99" in (a breakdown of 18% - 72% - 10%). Each minute, in effect, represents about 1% of the story. But, it is obvious that the story is Dorothy's search to get back home—that's what motivates her to find the Wizard, and it is articulated by her arrival in Oz—establishing her problem; her achieving a way to get home by getting the witch's broomstick back to the Wizard—establishing how she can finally resolve her problem, and her arrival back home at the end, re-joining friends and family, effectively solving her problem.

As I've said, for physical-level structure, while everyone should use what works for them, I prefer using the "Sequence Approach" (described in the Gulino book) over Syd Field's unwieldy use of acts, plot points, mid-point, and pinches. Field breaks the story model into almost (but not quite) the same number of parts as the sequence approach does, but without the various

different names and confusing functions. There is a hierarchical value in using Field's approach in that it establishes relative degrees of rank for each part in relation to the story as a whole, but the names are slightly confusing as he says there are many "plot points" in stories, but stresses only two, Plot Point I and Plot Point II; he uses the term, "pinch," but hardly establishes any good reason for the otherwise confusing name, and then abandons the notion in later books.

It is better, then, I feel, to just locate each portion of the script in relation to the others by the use of a letter designation. I should note that the reason Field started off with just a three part model, then added the mid-point, and then added pinches to that, in each successive book, and since then seems to have forgotten pinches, was likely that he was struggling the same as Epstein with the fact that there was a three-part structure present in stories with greater or lesser so-called acts, so the conclusion was that there must be some better way to modify the three part paradigm or discard it. What neither of them understood was that they were not describing a two-dimensional (or three, including time) model! Instead, they were struggling with, as many as a *five* dimensional model (*including the temporal*—signifying change over time, and an *emotional* one signifying the deep structure level where the protagonist's internal transformation resides), and trying to fit it into two or three dimensions. In Field's case, this was by modifying or adding parts. In Epstein's case, it was by abandoning them entirely and choosing a kind of creative anarchy over understanding.

This struggle is at the heart of why, beyond the profit bandwagon, there are so many screenwriting books out there: nobody could get a handle on structure. The moment someone found a model that seemed to describe all stories, someone else found a story that didn't seem to fit. That is epitomized by the Field-Epstein debate, but shows up over and over in other books (Field vs. Vogler; Field vs. Hauge; Field vs. Truby) and in screenwriter comments in interviews.

Why should we care?

This question is Epstein's (and many other people's) misunderstanding, *crystallized*. It is true, if story structure were so broadly variable that it included *no* act, *9+* act, and *everything in between*—in other words, if it had so little consistency that literally any story could have what could be called "structure," and that was the end of it, then, and only then, there would be no real value to it. It would *not* be useful because we could not apply it toward future stories as we were conceiving them with any consistency. ***So we have to ask ourselves, why talk about story structure in the first place? There is only one reason: to better understand and tell stories***.

For if, as I contend, structure resides on at least *two* levels, the surface or *physical* level, and the deeper or *logical* level; and if the deep structure model *is consistent,* from film to film (i.e., *you can see the* ***Arc of Transformation***), then three part, logical level structure *has value!* This is because it can be *used* as a *tool* by writers *to evaluate* their ideas' *suitability* as stories. It can be

used to *understand* how to *best tell* their stories. And, by staying focused and centered, pinned to the Arc of Transformation, writers can *better, more effectively, write them*.

Both surface, physical-level structure, and deeper, logical-level structure are useful. One helps writers find a way to tell the story, and the other helps writers find a way to tell the truth.

There's a saying that is often heard: "The exception that proves the rule". This refers to an example of something that, by its existence, and widely-believed failure to succeed, proves the thesis demonstrated by the other examples in a given argument. It's my contention that this is the case when Alain Resnais' and Alain Robbe-Grillet's film (and the screenplay for it), LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD are included in this essay. Rather than provide a skeletal analysis like the others above, here is a discussion I've published elsewhere on the film and its screenplay.

LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD (French, 1961, black and white) has been hailed as a breakthrough approach to filmic narrative. It presents a dream-like scenario of some people at a classically-accoutered hotel somewhere in Europe. A man, un-named, and identified in the script only as "X" tells a woman, also un-named, and identified in the script as "A", that he wants her to leave with him, as they had planned, "last year at Marienbad". She, at first denies she ever met him, and spurns him. But he persists, presenting various recollections and details that gradually result in her agreeing. Complicating this is another man, also un-named, and identified in the script as "M", who may or may not be her husband. So, the tale is not much, just a pursuit of a man for a woman. And the events and scene juxtapositions are such that any chronological ordering is in doubt, much like dreams and memory can function. The characters, rigid, and always formally-dressed, behave almost emotionlessly—in a dream-like manner of inscrutability. The setting is simultaneously classical and yet, stark; beautiful, but cold—equally dream-like, as drawn from a memory's archive. The resulting film, then, deliberately keeps us at a distance so that the characters and their motivations remain for us as mere objective elements and events. Nothing draws us in. The film amounts to a chess-board; the people, the pieces. And deliberately so.

Having gone on record preferring films with ideas, complexity, and ambiguity that challenges viewers even as they entertain them, I find the comments below both fascinating and prescient. I believe filmed narrative will eventually transcend its current preoccupation with depicting overt melodrama, physical impossibilities and absurdities (e.g., the current spate of super-hero movies; the male or female entourage [or wedding party, or school clique] on-the-prowl films), to the exclusion of almost all else. After all, how many different ways can you blow something up, or "get wasted and have sex"? Even the DC and Marvel Comics pantheons have limited populations suitable for adaptation to movies. And, if I'm wrong, well, that faith still gets me through.

In INTERVIEWS WITH FILM DIRECTORS, Edited by Andrew Sarris, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967, pp. 439 - 46, director Alain Resnais, in speaking of his remarkable and seminal film, LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, discussed his approach to its conception and style of discourse:

> For me the film is an attempt, still very crude and primitive, to approach the complexity of thought and its mechanism. But I stress the fact that this is only a tiny step forward by comparison with what we should be able to do someday. I find *that as soon as we delve into the Unconscious, an emotion may be born... I believe that, in life, we don't think chronologically, that our decisions never correspond to an ordered logic. All of us have 'clouds,' things which determine us but which are not a logical succession of acts arranged in perfect sequence. I am interested in exploring that universe, from the point of view of truth, if not of morality*. (Italics mine)

"I am interested in exploring that universe (thought), from the point of view of truth, if not of morality." It seems to me that standard Hollywood movie narrative, believe it or not, is all about Resnais' use of the word, morality. Today's films, perhaps more than those of earlier periods, seem obsessed with moral (rather than ethical) sorts of questions. Everything from IRON MAN to THE HANGOVER to THE HURT LOCKER has, as a pivotal element, ethical conflict dispensed from a moral (i.e., Judeo-Christian) viewpoint. Resnais prefers truth to morality. Why? Perhaps because truth is constant, while morality is relative.

For example, you (China) see yourself in a world with economically threatening political systems all around you. But you have an advantage: you have a much greater population of peasant workers who can out-compete the rest of the world. But you know you need to maximize that or be transcended by your closest competitor (India) who is populous, too, and also full of peasants. So you compel your population to produce fewer girls in favor of more boys, because males, in your view, form the predominant industrial work-force. A kind of state-genocidal imperative becomes patriotic, a moral choice made for the State's perceived short-term good, at the expense of half its children and the life experience of those potential families. And with no care for any long-term good a natural approach to population might engender.

But Resnais is interested in telling his truths at the speed and manner of thought. He likens it not as extruded through the standard Hollywood narrative's "toothpaste tube", in a linear progression, cause-to-effect. Rather he sees thought as a *cloud* within which the mind apparently wanders, making sense of it (or not) as it will. Dreams always seem more reasonable to us while dreaming them, than they do when we are awake and recalling them. Resnais wants to explore film as dreams. To get at truths *we otherwise might never realize*.

In the Introduction to the published text of the script for the film, Robbe-Grillet writes:

> Everyone knows the linear plots of the old-fashioned cinema: which never spare us a link in the chain of all-too-expected events: the telephone rings, a man picks up the receiver, then we see the man on the other end of the line, the first man says he's coming, hangs up, walks out the door, down the stairs, gets into his car,

> drives through the street, parks his car in front of a building, goes in, climbs the stairs, rings the bell, someone opens the door, etc. In reality, our mind goes faster—or sometimes slower. Its style is more varied, richer and less reassuring: it skips certain passages, it preserves an exact record of some "unimportant details, it repeats and doubles back on itself. And this *mental time*, with its peculiarities, its gaps, its obsessions, its obscure areas, is the one that interests us since it is the tempo of our emotions, of our *life*.

And later:

> A brief synopsis is enough to show the impossibility of using it as the basis for a film in traditional form, I mean a linear narrative with "logical" developments. The whole film, as a matter of fact, is the story of a persuasion: it deals with a reality which the hero creates out of his own vision, out of his own words. And if his persistence, his secret convictions, finally prevail, they do so among a perfect labyrinth of false trails, variants, failures and repetitions!

And from the Sarris interview:

> For MARIENBAD, we (Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet) made a complete chronology on graph paper. And we always said before beginning any scene with the actors: 'This scene follows, on the level of the montage, such and such a scene, but in terms of its degree of reality, it follows another scene which will appear much later in the film.' Moreover, very often, I would film a bit from the preceding scene, in order to work from the continuity and not from the cue itself. Of course, this chronology was established once the scenario (the script) was finished. For example, all costume changes naturally correspond to different pieces of time. This is certainly not the key to the film, if indeed there is one. *But it is true that we could re-edit the film so as to restore the chronological order of the scenes.* We might imagine, for example, that the film extends over a week, or at least that everything which is in the present takes from Sunday to Sunday inclusive. Which doesn't keep Robbe-Grillet from saying: 'Perhaps it happens in five minutes.' This is consistent with the dilation of time in dreams, insofar as we understand the mechanism of dreams. (italics mine)

"But it is true that we could re-edit the film so as to restore the chronological order of the scenes." This is not unlike what was added (as an "Easter-Egg") to one of the DVDs of Christopher Nolan's MEMENTO, where, the backwardly-ordered film was re-edited into chronologically-forward order, resulting in a mundane narrative, and rendering the original's truths as trivial, if not irrelevant. For MEMENTO, the released film's original narrative order allowed me to *relate* to Leonard's (the central character's) plight, to, in effect, *walk in his shoes*, and understand, perhaps even *condone*, his actions. But would there have been a MEMENTO without a LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD?

Alain Robbe-Grillet adds:

> Very curiously, the people who reproach MARIENBAD for being 'contrived' are those who accept as spontaneous works which respect fixed rules of contrivance, recipes, norms. And these people reason as if there were a previously existent reality and as if it were no more than a question of finding the forms which would make a good understanding of the story available to the public.

This is reminiscent of our point published elsewhere, about *audience manipulation*. "Contrivance" doesn't just exist because someone other than the creator(s) *identify* it. *All of cinema is contrived*. The question becomes, *why?* Is there a nobility? Is there an honesty to the contrivance? Or is it subversive for dishonest purpose? The test of contrivance in the cinema, as with *manipulation*, is whether it achieves a *noble* result *efficiently*. The act alone, on its face, is not a *hanging offense*.

At another point in the interview, Resnais adds:

> One must know to what extent one can share one's subjective reality with 'everyone,' in the sense that we all have two eyes, hair, a thought, etc. One arrives quite naturally at the notion of a planetary Unconscious.

and:

> When I see a film, I am more interested in the play of feelings than in the characters. I think we could arrive at a Cinema without psychologically definite characters, in which the feelings would have free play in the way that, in a contemporary canvas, the play of forms becomes stronger than the anecdote.

I found LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, itself, to be boring. And the reason is the same one at the heart of many, if not *most,* of the failed films out there: *I could not relate to the characters*. I didn't *care* what their issues were. Of course, when Robbe-Grillet says "...a cinema without psychologically definite characters, in which the feelings would have free play..." I find that said "feelings" remain impenetrable, and therefore, irrelevant, unlike what Nolan achieved in the original edit of MEMENTO. As I indicated, I could relate to Leonard's feelings, *as the result of the action I witnessed*, when he sets in motion the murder of Teddy at the end. In MARIENBAD, I felt *nothing* for the character of X's desire to leave with the woman, A. Neither did I care about A's initial unwillingness or eventual capitulation. And this is consistent with Resnais' point that "the film is an attempt, *still very crude and primitive* (my italics), to approach the complexity of thought and its mechanism." As he said, the film is "only a tiny step forward by comparison with what we should be able to do someday."

It appears his "experiment" was to see if mere thought could engage us on its own, with no *audience investment* in the characters. Otherwise, why leave them un-named and emotionless? Think about it: we come to dreams with pre-conceived notions, in many cases, *of the people in them*. So Robbe-Grillet and Resnais, with an almost scientific conservatism, chose to, in the interest of a "scientific" breakdown of the process, disconnect us from the characters. A noble experiment, but merely the first step. As *intended*.

Traditional narrative films succeed, when they do, by providing us with characters through which we become engaged, almost exclusively through their causally-based behavior, actions, and dialogue. Only by this cause-effect structure do they usually engage us. Of course, there will always be exceptions, viewers who immediately find a newly-introduced character engaging at first glance, thanks to an action or a line of dialogue that can pull that viewer in all by itself. But this is *not* the norm. Therefore, non-causal, dream-like narratives in which *none* of the characters are familiar to us (or even *named*), and who behave inscrutably (or understandably only in terms of the moment); randomly-ordered narratives with non-causal moments *prior*… *those* narratives… will fail to succeed in engaging us. Would it be going too far now, more than fifty years since the release of MARIENBAD, to say that this has been proven by the lack of further and deeper "experiments" by Resnais and Robbe-Grillet or any others? And, so, isn't this film "the exception that <u>proves</u> the rule"?

I found MARIENBAD's narrative approach, nonetheless, fascinating and worthy of extending to cases where the events were compelling and engaging on an emotional (and therefore, *relatable* and *personal*) level. Imagine a favorite film in which the emotional stakes are both universal and powerful, told, instead, in this manner. Imagine characters we cared about, loose in Resnais' and Robbe-Grillet's filmic world. Perhaps the closest we've come to this in popular cinema is with *some* of David Lynch's works, and, the afore-cited MEMENTO. But, if the narrative continued on the tangent created by the dream-like juxtaposition of normalcy with normal-*seeming ab*normality, it could produce effects that would rival, if not equal, our own dreams (and, so, our own *nightmares*). And they would compel us and intrigue us to re-visit again and again.

> I want to know what happens next, not what happened Last Year at Marienbad.
>
> ---I.A.L. Diamond (Billy Wilder's screenwriting partner)

Post-Script – So, what if we took one of those page-turners that would meet I.A.L. Diamond's requirement and filtered it through Resnais' "thought-cloud" approach? Would it "up the ante" of what the straight thriller narrative was producing? Probably not the tension, as that is a causally-built construct. But it might have the potential of achieving a result that is both emotionally and intellectually arresting in the extreme.

———

And so, here we are at the point I described at the start. Have I both adequately defined story structure, and does it apply to what I believe the average person refers to as "movies": *all mass-audience, narrative fiction, feature-length, theatrical films exhibited to enlighten and/or entertain for profit*? I have tested my definition against every film I could find that either deviated from obvious 3-act structure, or was held up by others as doing so. I believe that in every case I have shown how the ideas put forth here explain and de-mystify these otherwise notorious examples. But the truth is, only the reader can answer the question. If anyone out there has a film that fits the above description of a "movie," and feels it defies my definition of structure (MY DINNER WITH ANDRÉ, perhaps? LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD? ERASERHEAD?

INLAND EMPIRE? Something else by David Lynch or, maybe, Peter Greenaway?), please contact me at LateralTao@gmail.com or LateralScreenwriting.com, and let me know. Should I agree with the reader(s), I will include an analysis of the film(s) in a future edition of this book with credit to the reader(s).

"Good tests kill flawed theories; we remain alive to guess again."
---Karl Popper

Footnotes

Part I

I-1 – “To grok (pronounced /grɒk/) is to intimately and completely share the same reality or line of thinking with another physical or conceptual entity. In {science fiction author, Robert} Heinlein's view, grokking is the intermingling of intelligence that necessarily affects both the observer and the observed.

From the (Heinlein) novel (Stranger in a Strange Land):

The Oxford English Dictionary defines grok as "to understand intuitively or by empathy; to establish rapport with" and "to empathize or communicate sympathetically (with); also, to experience enjoyment."

In an ideological context, a grokked concept becomes part of the person who contributes to its evolution by improving the doctrine, perpetuating the myth, espousing the belief, adding detail to the social plan, refining the idea or proving the theory.

Robert A. Heinlein originally coined the term, “grok” in his 1961 novel Stranger in a Strange Land as a Martian word that could not be defined in Earthling terms, but can be associated with various literal meanings such as "water", "to drink", "life", or "to live", and had a much more profound figurative meaning that is hard for terrestrial culture to understand because of its assumption of a singular reality.

According to the book, drinking is a central focus on Mars where water is scarce. Martians use the merging of their bodies with water as a simple example or symbol of how two entities can combine to create a new reality greater than the sum of its parts. The water becomes part of drinker, and the drinker part of the water. Both grok each other. Things that once had separate realities become entangled in the same experiences, goals, history, and purpose. Within the book, the statement of divine immanence verbalized between the main characters, "Thou Art God,” is logically derived from the concept inherent in the term grok.

Heinlein describes Martian words as "guttural" and "jarring." Martian speech is described as sounding "like a bullfrog fighting a cat." Accordingly, grok is generally pronounced as a guttural "gr" terminated by a sharp "k" with very little or no vowel sound.” – *Wikipedia*. So, for all you sophonts out there who can grok it, check your memes at the door.

I-2 – Elsewhere in the book (p. 55), Froug interviewed celebrated screenwriter, Bo Goldman (ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO’S NEST, MELVIN AND HOWARD, SCENT OF A WOMAN, etc.), who says on the subject of art vs. craft, “I never saw a lawyer in my life until I started making some money, and then I got one lawsuit after another (laughter). And I remember one of these lawyers, representing someone who’s coming out of the woodwork claiming I’d just stolen their

life, said something about my 'craft.' Well, you know, it's not a craft. Whenever I hear the word craft, I think of a rainy day at Camp Wigwam, where you throw darts and make leather pouches. It's not a craft, it's an art. It takes the sensibility of an artist. *And a lot of great writers who are novelists or journalists can't do it*." (*italics*, mine) On the other hand, screenwriter Philip Dunne (THE ROBE, TEN NORTH FREDERICK, THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY) in *Backstory 1*, p. 166, said, "I agree with my old friend Jo Swerling, one of the earliest screenwriters, who said screenwriting is not so much an art as like fine cabinetmaking. I think that's right. Nunnally {Johnson} used to use that analogy, too... We never claimed to be artists, but we thought we were good craftsmen."

I-3 - In *Screenwriters' Masterclass*, p. 133, screenwriter and director, Darren Aronofsky said, "I was aware enough to know those Syd Field books were evil. I was always anti-establishment enough to resist those. And I sort of developed a process which is the first job of trying to identify a three-act structure, *which I do believe in* (*italics*, mine). I'd love to see if there's anything beyond the three-act structure but I think it works very well as a narrative structure of a film." So, in the name of being "anti-establishment" he falls into the—can it be described any other way?—*reactionary*, though *radically-chic* response to Field that developed over time. He remains uninformed (self-protection, perhaps?), and yet he prefers and uses Field's own structural approach while longing for something "beyond the three-act structure." I'll show that it's all around him and he just refuses to see it.

I-4 – In Patrick McGilligan's *Backstory 1*, p. 287, screenwriter Richard Maibaum (numerous early James Bond films, CHITTY, CHITTY, BANG, BANG), said, "You know, Hitchcock once told me, 'If I have thirteen bumps in a picture, I think I've got a picture.' A bump is something like someone says, 'I'm looking for a man who has a short index finger,' and a totally unexpected guy says, 'You mean like this?' That's in THE 39 STEPS. After DR. NO (producers) Cubby (Broccoli), Harry (Saltzman), and myself decided that we weren't going to be satisfied with thirteen bumps in a Bond story, we wanted thirty-nine."

I-5 – These were moments or scenes in the narrative Field identified as re-connecting the narrative to the story's through-line, in effect "pinching" it to the spine to hold the story on-track toward resolution, rather than wandering off in any direction the writer might have otherwise chosen. - *The Screenwriter's Workbook*, pp. 153-8. However, by Field's book, *Four Screenplays*, Dell, 1994, he seems to have abandoned the notion of the Pinch.

I-6 - They rightly complained about writing screenplays by the numbers: putting Plot point I on page 25, the Act 1/Act 2 Transition on page 30, Pinch I on page 45, the Mid-point on page 60, Pinch II on page 75, Plot point II on page 85, and the Act 2/Act 3 Transition on page 90, etc. Of course, to be fair, even a superficial reading of Field cannot help but show that Field never urged such a hard-line, fixed and unyielding page-numbering approach. He used them only as *rules-of-thumb*. And, in fact, the page numbers mattered much less than the minutes to which they corresponded in the film. His point related to developing the story dilemma quickly and moving the narrative on by certain points in time during the movie. Of course, these same

students and academics complain incessantly when a movie runs on too long or doesn't develop its characters sufficiently. Field found that well-developed and paced screenplays usually accomplished this in a 25%-50%-25% breakdown of the three acts, give or take a few minutes. What his former disciples cannot complain about is the relative accuracy of that assessment. Check classic films, modern films, or favorite films for yourself. Field's insight is, *for the most part*, borne out.

I-7 – Field's original idea is found in the 3rd Edition of his first book on screenwriting, *Screenplay*, first on p. 13, and again on p. 123. The inference that *structure is a function of the protagonist* is my own. If the protagonist refuses either to take on or to resolve the dilemma, there is no story; hence, there is no structure.

I-8 – In a review of Field's books since first encountering this initial insight of the "plot point" as "a function of the main character" in the 1st Edition of his first book, I have found no evidence that Field even understands the implication of his observation. In other words, it may just have been "how-to book" rhetoric. This seems clear when one recognizes that he stays entirely on the surface level in his discussions of structure. In fact, in *The Screenwriter's Workbook*, he even *re*-defines his notion of structure: "But when I thought about it, I realized *structure is a function of story*." (*italics,* mine), p. 139. From his use of the word throughout, it is clear that he means "story" up on the surface or plot level, not, as we see it, having a multi-level structure.

I-9 – *The Screenwriter's Workbook*, p.58

I-10 – In *Screenwriters' Masterclass*, p. 238, writer-director Alexander Payne comments, "When I give screenwriting seminars or classes and they ask me, 'What advice do you have for young screenwriters?,' I say, 'Don't read any screenwriting books.' I actually think the whole three-act structure is so deeply ingrained in us from living in this culture and watching movies that in order to come up with new movies (which is what I want to see), you really have to fight what you have innately learned. When you're writing, you will find yourself being drawn naturally by gravity into doing something which corresponds to all of these things that you have seen. You have to fight that instinct in order to come up with a new movie." Payne can "fight" the logic, or recognize that multi-level structure frees him to (as scores of other filmmakers have practiced already) craft his story *using his surface structure of choice*.

I-11 – "A 2006 study by Jonathan Gottschall, an English professor at Washington & Jefferson College, found relevant depictions of romantic love in folktales scattered across space and time. The idea of romantic love has not been traditionally considered to be a cultural universal because of the many societies in which marriage is mainly an economic or utilitarian consideration. But Gottschall's study suggests that rather than being a construct of certain societies, romantic love must have roots in our common ancestry. In other words, romance—not just sex—has a biological basis in the brain.

"You do find these commonalities," Gottschall says. He is one of several scholars, known informally as literary Darwinists, who assert that story themes do not simply spring from each specific culture. Instead the literary Darwinists propose that stories from around the world have universal themes reflecting our common underlying biology.

"Another of Gottschall's studies published earlier this year reveals a persistent mind-set regarding gender roles. His team did a content analysis of 90 folktale collections, each consisting of 50 to 100 stories, from societies running the gamut from industrial nations to hunter-gatherer tribes. They found overwhelmingly similar gender depictions emphasizing strong male protagonists and female beauty. To counterbalance the possibility that male storytellers were biasing gender idealizations, the team also sampled cultures that were more egalitarian and less patriarchal.

"'We couldn't even find one culture that had more emphasis on male beauty,' Gottschall notes, explaining that the study sample had three times as many male as compared with female main characters and six times as many references to female beauty as to male beauty. That difference in gender stereotypes, he suggests, may reflect the classic Darwinian emphasis on reproductive health in women, signified by youth and beauty, and on the desirable male ability to provide for a family, signaled by physical power and success." ---*Scientific American* magazine, September, 2008, *The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn*, by Jeremy Hsu.

I-12 – In David S. Cohen's book, *Screen Play*, p. 123, screenwriter, Leslie Dixon (OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE, MRS. DOUBTFIRE, PAY IT FORWARD) comments, "Somebody gave me a copy of Robert McKee's *Story*. I said, 'This is like trying to understand a human being by looking at DNA.' Maybe we could put the McKee book on the shelf, and right next to it could be the Leslie Dixon book, which would be a flyer saying, 'Do they want to turn the page?'" That's nice for established folks and insiders, but for new screenwriters with little experience, such advice is little more than glib sloganizing: useful (as are our quotes), but how does that help someone take the story in their head all the way to the theater screen? "The devil is," indeed, "in the details." Like a lot of writers, Ms. Dixon does not want to look too hard under the rock of her talent, presumably out of fear of what she (or they) expect to find. "Oh ye of little faith," talent, de-mystified, is no less potent, no less yours.

I-13 – Ring Lardner, Jr., in his interview with Pat McGilligan and Barry Strugatz in *Backstory 3*, pp. 223-4, describing the differences between the source book and the movie of M*A*S*H: "I took some of the main incidents, invented a couple more, and organized them into a continuity that I thought would work, even though it violated *the cardinal rule that a story involves a change of character in one or more of the principals* (*italics*, mine). In my adaptation, the main characters were all the same all the way through, and the illusion of a story had to be sustained by the action and the comedy."

Lardner's comment, by a writer from Hollywood's golden age, before today's "rules" were conceived and imposed, is interesting. His reference to "one or more of the principals" (rather than the protagonist) implies that as he comes out of a generation of writers who wrote out of instinct and inspiration, rather than any training they received in film school, his understanding of story is similarly instinctive. Today's screenwriting establishment tends to think of all of its rules as formalized and in place from "time immemorial," i.e., *known, understood, and practiced* by its masters from that golden age. In truth, our understanding of how stories work is *always* emerging. The thing even *he* doesn't recognize is that the "change" he claims doesn't happen, actually *does*. It occurs in the audience's mind based on the experience undergone by the protagonist: the entire group of M.A.S.H characters, and it is a realization through the group's experience of the absurdity of war—later crystallized in the tv series and embodied by Jamie Farr's character of Klinger. The characters in the film don't change *by design*. It is *required*. Their un-changing stoicism gets them through it.

I-14 – Many writers (such as William Froug) eschew terminology such as "arc" and "paradigm" as needlessly theoretical, overtly intellectual, and steeped in theory instead of the realities and practicalities of storytelling. While it is a valid viewpoint, such terminology helps us to understand things operating under the surface of stories just as those more "practical" approaches understand things on the surface.

I-15 - Now all of this would be fine, ascribable to the evolutionary process of any art-form, and unworthy of notice, but for the effect it has on the emerging writer community and its freedom to experiment and innovate within the medium. When a script is passed over because it has three brads or, heaven-forbid, *screw posts* binding it; when a work is tossed aside because it runs 131 pages or uses leatherette rather than card stock for its covers, something is truly wrong with the process. Jack Kerouac submitted his break-through novel, *On the Road*, on a *single roll of brown butcher paper*. How many "Kerouacs" among the new and emerging screenwriters will the industry miss in the coming years?

I-16 - SONATA MUSICAL STRUCTURE
Some describe the films of Stanley Kubrick as employing the Sonata musical form as a model for their construction. Kubrick, himself, has said:

"A film is -- or should be -- more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later. After you've walked out of the theatre, maybe the next day or a week later, maybe without ever actually realizing it, you somehow get what the filmmaker has been trying to tell you." (Source, http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=7630, also, http://www.dailygalaxy.com/my_weblog/2008/03/stanley-kubrick.html)

A sonata is an extended composition, differing from vocal composition in that it`s usually for piano or another solo instrument. It comes in (for the umpteenth time, what else?) three parts or movements: The Allegro, Adagio, and Rondo. They differ in tempo, tone and melody but are

usually held together by the same motif (similar to a visual motif in film: the X`s in Ben Hecht`s SCARFACE, the flawed eyes in Robert Towne's CHINATOWN, etc...)

Allegro is usually fast, bright, cheery, up in tone and melody. Adagio is slower, more leisurely. The last part, rondo, restates the other themes along with its own new theme (an echo of the main motif) at least three times, sometimes more. Handled properly, it all builds to a complete climax, and it is sometimes even followed by a coda, a formal tying-up.

The simplest way I`ve heard the sonata form described is first the allegro makes a statement of exposition, the adagio develops it more deeply, the rondo recapitulates it, and finally the coda closes it.

An example from modern American music is by Wynton Marsalis on his *Blue Interlude*, particularly the title track. I believe this was originally written to be accompanied by a dance troupe. A second example is the *Jubilee Suite*.

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CLASSIC SONATA-ALLEGRO FORM in Screenplay Structure

Sonata-Allegro form mirrors 3-act structure as follows. There are many exceptions, but this is the general classical form (a la Mozart):

Adagio (Exposition/Act I):
Themes/characters introduced; stable harmonies/events.

Allegro (Development/Act II):
Themes comingled, reinvented, and restated through a variety of techniques; harmonies unstable with a tendency toward modulation; ends with a promise to the listener/viewer for a...

Rondo (Recapitulation/Act III):
A return 'home' to stability and a satisfying conclusion.

Coda (Epilogue; optional):
A new, yet related, theme/idea tagged on the end.

I-17 – Most prominently laid out and discussed in Paul Joseph Gulino's excellent book, *Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach*.

But it comes out in other places, too. Screenwriter and director, Alexander Payne, interviewed in SPLICEDwire on April 16, 1999, http://splicedwire.com/features/payne.html, commented: "There's a strong tendency right now toward formula. Like this is how a screenplay is written: By page 30 this has to happen, your Act Two goes to page 90...That's just horse sh--. I think a

badly crafted, great idea for a new film with a ton of spelling mistakes is just 100 times better than a well-crafted stale script.

“For example, Scorsese talks not about three acts in a script, but rather five sequences. Or you watch Fellini films -- you watch NIGHTS OF CABIRIA or LA DOLCE VITA or 8 1/2 -- and you get a sense not of a three act structure, but of episodes with (one) character going through all these episodes. Then you get to the end of the film and there's a sudden realization or a moment that pulls a loose string suddenly taut through the whole movie you've been watching up until that point.

“(We need) different mental models of what a film can be, and if you pay too much attention to these books, by (Syd Field) and Robert McKee and I don't know who else, they're only presenting one cultural paradigm, and that's really, really dangerous to the act of creation and to our cinema, which needs new ideas and new blood now more than ever. Hollywood films have become a cesspool of formula and it's up to us to try to change it.

“(Suddenly laughs out loud.) I feel like a preacher!”

Lest we also are lumped into Payne’s “one cultural paradigm” crowd, perhaps we should re-state that we, here, see these “paradigms” (*what <u>happens</u> in a story*) all operating at the surface level. Therefore, we support *all*, rather than *one*, of the many successful narrative paradigms. Story meaning (*what one <u>thinks</u> about what happens*), on the other hand, operates primarily at deeper levels, and therefore can be communicated through any such paradigms. We, then, advocate *many* approaches to narrative, as determined by the story, the teller, and its success with its audience.

I-18 – The history of screen story creation is interesting. Peter Bogdanovich, in his book, *Who The Devil Made It*, pp. 56, 60-1, interviewed director Allan Dwan (1885 – 1981) who started two years after D.W. Griffith, in 1909, the dawn of movies, but was still directing into the early 1960s, and planning to direct into the ‘70s. Dwan described story creation from those early days: “On the way out (to the location for the shooting), I’d try to contrive something to do (author’s note-i.e., *conceive the story!*). I’d see a cliff or something of the sort. I had a heavy named Jack Richardson, so we’d send J. Warren Kerrigan, the leading man, up there to struggle with Richardson and throw him off the cliff. Now, having made the last scene of the picture, I had to go backward and try to figure out why all this happened.” Later, Dwan, who studied to be an engineer, added, “Stories, to me, were mathematical problems—as most problems were. There’s always a mathematical solution to anything... But everything I did was *triangles*... (*italics*, mine) If I constructed a story and I had four characters in it, I’d put them down as dots and if they didn’t hook up into triangles, if any of them were left out there without a sufficient relationship to any of the rest, I knew I had to discard them because they’d be a distraction. And you’re only related to people through triangles or lines. If I’m related to a third person and you’re not, there’s something wrong in our relationship together. One of us is dangling. So I say, ‘How do I tie that person to you? How do I complete that line?’ And I have to work the story so I

can complete that line. In other words, create a relationship, an incident, something that will bring us into the eternal triangle."

Old advice? Consider this from current writer-director David O. Russell (SPANKING THE MONKEY, FLIRTING WITH DISASTER, THREE KINGS), interviewed in *Screenwriters' Masterclass*, p. 328, about his writing process, "Well, first there's whatever it is that excites me about the idea, and then sometimes you have fragments or pieces of a story, and then you have scenes that you love and think are really great, and then character ideas—all these things aren't necessarily meshed together, but (these *italics*, mine) *I list them all in columns, like characters. I've actually distilled it down so that I will take each character and write an arc from left to right, and then I try to find the links between those arcs, between the stories of each character*, and then I curtail them and condense them into one story. It can be a long process of trying to figure out what *the* story is—if it's interesting enough, whether it's going too much in the direction of one character, how do you pull it back? That's always a fight (again, my *italics*): *'Whose movie* is *it?'*" So these processes of writers separated by nearly a century, are *universal truths*.

I-19 – *Making A Good Script Great*, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1987, p. 4, Linda Seger writes: "Whether it's a Greek tragedy, a five-act Shakespearean play, a four-act dramatic series, or a seven-act movie-of-the-week, we still see the basic three-act structure: beginning, middle, and end—or **set-up**, **development**, and **resolution**."

For those interested, I found this explanation of Shakespeare's structural approach at http://www.enotes.com/taming/q-and-a/can-anyone-explain-how-shakespeare-uses-structure-217: "Shakespeare usually followed a standard Elizabethan Five-Act Play format when he wrote. In this format, the first act served as the introduction of plot, characters, and scene/setting. The second act contained rising action: those events leading up to the conflict (in a tragedy) or climax (in a comedy). The third act was the conflict/climax; this act represents a turn in power for our central character (described later). The fourth act is falling action: those events leading our central character from that conflict/climax to his or her resolution. And, of course, act five is resolution: what happens to our characters in relation to the plot. Those five acts are all joined by a central character who needs to be intricately involved in all five acts and their specific purposes.

"With that in mind, Kate is most likely our central character in *The Taming of the Shrew* (although an argument could be made for Petruchio also). Kate, her shrewishness, and the reason for Baptisa forcing her marriage are introduced to us in Act One (introduction). We see Petruchio meet her as a suitor and his early attempts at "wooing" her for a potential marriage (rising action). In Act three, she is married to Petruchio, and they immediately leave for Petruchio's home (climax, and the change in power from Kate to Petruchio). In Act four, the taming process is in full effect as Petruchio withholds sleep and food among other acts that Kate must accept (falling action). And if Act Five, as the bet reveals to us, Kate is tamed (resolution)."

If one asks, as we suggest, "Whose story is it?" we see that it is Kate's, not Petruchio's. Why? Because she embodies the arc of change or transformation. So while one might argue for Petruchio being the protagonist, it is really Kate.

I-20 – In Patrick McGilligan's *Backstory 1*, pp. 300-2, screenwriter Casey Robinson described his work on DARK VICTORY (1939). The New York play was a failure in 1935. They had tried three or four different endings while testing it on the road, and nothing worked. Robinson saw the play (about a woman dying of brain cancer), and had an epiphany as to what was wrong. He asked his boss and mentor, Hal Wallis, at Warner Brothers to buy it for Bette Davis to star in. Unfortunately David O. Selznick already had the rights locked up. Robinson said, "So for three years I had a prayer every night: 'Please don't let David's writers get the right ideas.' Well, he had, I believe four scripts prepared. He had very good writers. But nothing was happening. Finally, I heard that Ben Hecht had said to him, 'The only way to save this is to make it a comedy.' And I guess they tried that. At any rate—and now we are into 1938—word comes that Selznick is willing to sell DARK VICTORY... The play was about a rich, spoiled girl who gets carcinoma of the brain and is going to die. In the second act she learns she is going to die and accepts it gallantly. Oh, there was a little sadness about it; she was in love with her doctor and that part is still in the picture. ***But what had happened is that they had played the third act in the second act. Where were they going to go? If she accepts death, this is the end...*** (By the actual third act) it was dissipated. It was all gone. And they just had a lot of gabble in the third act that meant nothing. ***There had to be, in the middle of the piece, a period of great rebellion against fate—of anger***, which, of course, was mixed up with her love for the doctor. Also, the anger that she hadn't been told, and so on..." So the narrative was in three parts, but the Arc of Transformation was only in the first two.

In *Screenwriters' Masterclass*, p. 211, screenwriter Scott Frank (GET SHORTY, OUT OF SIGHT, MINORITY REPORT) talks about the difference between the novel and the script of Elmore Leonard's *Out of Sight*, "...the book was about her (Jennifer Lopez's character) and the movie was about him (George Clooney's character). She's a great character but she doesn't really change in the book, you can't really explore anything." With a film being, as Wm. Goldman says, essentially all structure, the writer must decide whose film it is, and that is dependent upon the story's central spine and that Arc of Transformation all good screen stories possess.

I-21 – Screenwriter, Nicholas Kazan (REVERSAL OF FORTUNE), in his interview in *American Screenwriters*, p. 248, says, "In essence, there are *no rules* with film. It's like a dream: it can take many different forms. The important thing is that what happens should be continually surprising and in retrospect seem inevitable. If you have that it doesn't matter what your structure is."

Part II

II-1 – This notion of multiple structures (the multi-dimensional model) functioning simultaneously within stories was seen at least as early as Linda Seger's book, *Making A Good*

Script Great, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1987, p.4. One might question, however, whether Seger grasped its profound value to writers and its equally profound importance to the audience, since it was noted but never explored.

II-2 – The first six of these are analyzed for structure in the Appendix, the last two were analyzed in Section II.

II-3 – In Peter Bogdanovich's *Who the Devil Made It*, p. 394, Bogdanovich interviewed writer/director Leo McCarey just prior to his death—he was in the hospital with emphysema, having never had his recollections recorded. McCarey had put Laurel and Hardy together before sound came in, and, with them, conceived over a hundred of their silent comedies. Bogdanovich asked him about his notion of threes in relation to comedy: *Bogdanovich - "Is it true that most gags are based on threes?"* McCarey – "Yes. It became almost an unwritten rule." *Bogdanovich – "Many of the Laurel and Hardys are in three sections. Was that consciously done?"* McCarey – "Yes."

And for some it just comes naturally. Consider this spontaneous answer Billy Wilder gave to Cameron Crowe for Crowe's book-length interview of Wilder, *Conversations with Wilder*, p. 308:

Crowe - "'During a commercial, I ask Wilder about the famous New York doctor Max Jacobson, also known as Dr. Feelgood.'

Wilder - 'He was my doctor in Berlin, Dr. Feelgood, yes. Max Jacobson. He was a good doctor, very bold... Kennedy was one of his patients. They called him before the subcommittee.' And then the joke, 'He is an old man. He's 110 now. However, he's dead.'" One. Two. Three. (Also a Wilder film title.)

II-4 – *Screenplay*, 3rd Ed., p. 123.

II-5 – The script was based on a "show" script by Avary called, PANDEMONIUM REIGNED. But Avary sold it to Tarantino for $25,000 (because Avary needed the money to get married) and Tarantino did his own revision. Avary, who went on his own to make KILLING ZOE, claims PULP FICTION is half his work, and a description of the original script's plot suggests there may be something to this. But Tarantino claims only the middle section (act 2, typically *half* the film) of the original was Avary's. And the dialogue sounds like Tarantino's—though the two had worked together long enough that that may be arguable, too. Ultimately Tarantino bought sole screenplay credit from Avary in exchange for lots of money and an original "story by" credit. The effect of this was to split the friendship, a lesson to all collaborators.

II-6 – Transformation within *both* the protagonist and the audience as it appears in the action genre (the Bond films, the DIE HARD films, the Indiana Jones films, etc.) is interesting in that, mostly it appears not to be present. But, in the best of these (including those listed above), it's

there. At times the poorer cases in a series, for example, transformation of both protagonist and audience is not present. But, when present, it has the effect of elevating the particular film, often single-handedly making it a classic. This is seen in RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, when Indy lets down his wall and shows his vulnerability and need for love in the scene with Marian where he itemizes all the places he hurts. It's seen in ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE (orig. version) where Bond loses the love of his life. These scenes, in effect signal the hero's transformation: he's been (or *is being*) changed by the experience. These moments give the films heart, solidifying the bond the heroes make with the audience, and they, by themselves, raise them to the next level.

II-7 – This is how ANNIE HALL's post-production assembly during editing (with time jumps, and causal time-ordering almost entirely ignored), nonetheless remains comprehensible.

II-8 – In the case of PULP FICTION, both the past and the future aren't even the real ones! Instead they are versions constructed by the mind in order to render meaning to the story's non-causal events!

II-9 – Director Rouben Mamoulian, in a session with students and members of the American Film Institute offered a great lesson of truth in art: "Let me ask you all a question. You probably know *The Thinker*, the great statue of Auguste Rodin. Will you show me how he sits? Let's see. Without exception all of you are wrong. It never fails. His man is sitting, believe it or not, with one elbow on the opposite knee. It's not natural or comfortable, but aesthetically and artistically it has a focus. It has design and rhythm and power. So what is unnatural becomes true, and you can apply this idea to any kind of a scene. You can put everything upside down or reverse it, *provided what it does is sharpen* (*italics, mine*). In your desire to express love or hate or doubt, whatever it is, you ask yourself, 'How can I express this more acutely?' Then you'll wind up with a gesture that is not natural, but perfect as an expression of that thought."

One of the greatest examples of *cinematic* truth is the shot in VERTIGO when Jimmy Stewart looks down the stairs in the bell-tower, and things seem to distort and extend, beyond what's real, *and yet we're seeing it.* And it's the truth of what he's feeling at that moment. Director Alfred Hitchcock puts us *inside* Stewart's head.

In a session at the American Film Institute, Hitchcock described how he came to shoot it: "That effect took thirty years to get. It really did. When I was making REBECCA, I had a scene where Joan Fontaine is supposed to faint. I explained to [producer, David] Selznick I wanted to get the effect of her looking and everything seeming to go far away. Where I got the idea from was at the Royal Chelsea Arts Ball in London on New Year's Eve. I remembered at a certain time during the evening everything seemed to go far away. And I asked for this effect and they said they couldn't do it. I tried again about five years later. For VERTIGO they tried different effects, and finally it was arrived at by a combination of a dollying in and a zooming out. When the head of special effects came to me, I said, 'how much was it going to cost?'. He said, 'fifty thousand dollars to put a camera high and take it up and zoom it, because of the enormous rig'. I said,

‘But there is no one in the set.’ Why didn’t they make a miniature and lay it on its side? ‘Oh, I hadn’t thought of that.’ So they did it, and it cost nineteen thousand dollars.” *Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood’s Golden Age at the American Film Institute*, pp. 272-3.

II-10 - Thus far, from protons and electrons, through muons and quarks, and right down to eleven-dimensional quantum foam on a scale that is, incredible as it seems, smaller than the atom *in the same proportion as the planet Jupiter is larger than it*.

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