

In the last seven or eight years, a few times when answering interview questions, I caught myself saying this: "For me film is an extension of writing." And also: "I started directing to make sure that some director doesn't ruin my screenplay." This I said, of course, half jokingly, but half meaning it.

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I envy painters and real writers. They don't need other people in order to do their work. They work on their own, with joy or tears. Sometimes they suffer like sinners (Van Gogh, for example), or they have fun (Picasso, for example). Either way, they usually create on their own (even though, they could - if they wanted to - work with company). They don't have to explain the work to anyone before it's finished.

They'll do their thing, and sooner or later their piece is finished. The audience can accept it right away (Picasso, for example), or it can accept it many years later, even after the artist has died (Van Gogh, for example), or it might not accept it ever. Either way, the piece has been completed, finished, ready, made, delivered from head or heart onto canvas or paper.

It ain't so with the film folks. First you have to make a sketch of what you want to film, and the name of that sketch is screenplay. Then, that sketch (screenplay) has to be shown to other people. The future film must be explained even before it's been filmed, you have to ask people to take part in it, or finance it.

Sometimes - while seeking partners or money - long many years will pass between the writing of the screenplay and the actual filming.

Yet, sometimes, the screenplay will remain just that - a screenplay. It'll never be filmed.

Which means, there will be no piece of art. There will be no film. Just an undeveloped sketch will survive.

With the film folks, you have to sell the piece first, and only then can you film it.

That's why I envy painters and writers. Easel in hand - off to the fields... or pen in hand - off to the attic... They'll do their thing, and the piece is done, finished, ready, made, delivered from head or heart onto canvas or paper.

It doesn't even matter whether people see it right away, or whether they discover it a hundred years later. Or never. What matters is that it was made at all.

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A few years ago I was in a museum where I saw a whole series of drawings of the same thing: a bull and a man. All of them - fifteen or so - were various phases, preparations for the same painting by Picasso.

A drawing is most likely a sketch for a painting, the way a screenplay is a sketch for a film.

A drawing on its own can be a finished work of art. A screenplay on its own can not be a work of art, unless we treat it as a work informed by Dadaism, Conceptualism, Structuralism, Post-modernism, etc.

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Reading a screenplay is a bit like reading an architectural blueprint. There is an awful lot of technical stuff and a lot of things you have to imagine.

Screenplays are not written for literary readings. They are technical blueprints for future films.

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A good screenplay doesn't necessarily make a good film. (The same way you can screw up a good drawing, making an average painting out of it.) On the other hand, I don't think you can make a good film without a good screenplay.

They say that Jean-Luc Godard had only a two-page synopsis while making "Breathless." All I can say to that is: "Perhaps so, but they must've been two really good pages."

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Often time during filming the director will change something. The screenplay is only a sketch, not the Holy Book. So, after the shoot, you often end up with a film different from the screenplay you started with. Sometimes very different, sometimes not so different, sometimes not different at all. Seldom not different at all.

During the filming, as these changes take place, the continuity person meticulously notes the changes. Later, they go back to the screenplay and apply these changes to the script. Retroactively. In the end, of course, that screenplay is not the same as the initial screenplay from before the filming.

When you buy a published screenplay, in your hands you hold an exact description of that which already exists in the film itself, the words which the characters have spoken, and the images which the camera has shown. You don't hold the sketch after which they all started working many months ago.

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The screenplay contained in this book is a real screenplay. In other words, this screenplay has not been polished after the finished film. In your hands you hold that screenplay after which we started making the film. (The idea for "Dust" was slowly hatching since 1994, and the first draft screenplay was written in 1995. I wrote at least fifteen drafts since. This is the last one, the one after which we shot the film.) During the shoot and the edit I felt some things should be changed, so I changed them. The screenplay is not a Holy Book, is it...

Those changes you won't see here.

However, you will see a few scenes which were in the screenplay, which we even shot, but scenes which I later decided not to have in the film.

Anyway, I felt that changing the screenplay after a finished film is like going back to your old high school ten years later to improve on your grades.
It just doesn't fly.

M.M.