

## ON READING A SCREENPLAY

**A screenplay is NOT a read; it's a re-read, a creative act, an active engagement with the emotional life of the characters.**

One reads a screenplay in order to EXPERIENCE the characters and their world. It is as much an aural experience as it is a visual one, maybe more so. To read effectively is to see *and hear* the characters in their immediacy and to remain open and sensitive not only to what they do and say but to what is implied or suggested by what they do and say. When one "reads" from inside the story world, rather than as an objective, gawking spectator, one intersects and interacts with the characters at approximately the same emotional level at which they are operating. We read a script effectively when we are able to discern and emotionally respond to the TRUTH of the actions that comprise the story. In discerning a screenplay's truth, we are not looking for OUR truths, or the truths that we believe our society or the imagined society of the writer is trying to uphold. We are looking for the truth of the script... the sum of those almost indecipherable moments of grace by which the story becomes more than the sum of its parts.

### **Reading a screenplay is an art form in itself.**

To read effectively, creatively, you have to be able to HEAR and SEE what is actually occurring physically, intellectually and emotionally within the story-world, whilst at the same time not allowing yourself to read more or less than what is apt in terms of what the characters are actually doing and why they are doing it (including context). You must jettison any tendencies you might have to judge what is happening based upon what YOU THINK should be happening, or what you HOPE the writer must mean in terms of your own expectations and prejudices.

The reading of any coherent screenplay is largely a meditation on what is revealed, and an intuitive engagement with what might still remain hidden by the various possibilities and anticipations that subtext and context offer. At its best it becomes a thoroughly interactive experience in which the reader/audience enters into a dynamic, evolving relationship with the characters.

In many ways, the experience of reading a screenplay is allied to the art of translation, and - in its way - is for the individual reader every bit as demanding as the art of making the film.

A screenplay is a lure for feeling.

Speaking about reading scripts, Elia Kazan once said: **THE FIRST JOB IS TO DISCOVER WHAT THE SCRIPT IS SAYING, NOT WHAT IT REMINDS YOU OF.”**

Maintaining some degree of emotional detachment is necessary in reading, understanding and analysing a dramatic script correctly. It is not always easy to do. Screenplays – good scripts in general – are MEANT to be emotional experiences, and many readers respond strongly to the emotional stimuli in them.

A script is the expression of a story that is to be enacted by actors. A story is a carefully constructed series of vivid and emotionally charged actions (action = change) that attracts our attention and compels our interest by virtue of the conflict and significance inherent in these events.

Excerpt from:

<http://www.wheresthedrama.com/howtoreadascreenplay.htm>