In the new Sony Center on Potsdamer Platz, the new heart of 21st century Berlin, the focus of entertainment is a CineStar IMAX cinema featuring a 588 m² Flatscreen, the overwhelming impact of three-dimensional vision - and a red carpet on which the original screenplay for *Taxi Driver* is printed. The fact that you trample on the screenplay before you get to the image which reigns supreme, puts the condition of screenplay research in a nutshell. The downtrodden screenplay is a text type which has remained largely opaque - to the viewing public, to the industry of filmmaking, and, of course, to film as well as literary studies.

Claudia Sternberg's survey of the history of screenplay literature (7-21) paints a depressing picture: the screenplay is notable merely for its textual instability; appearing in various guises through the filmmaking process, it is marred by the industrial production mode, multiple authorship, and a literary bias in evaluation which constructs the antipodes of 'hack writer' vs. 'eminent author'. Sternberg has set herself a demanding agenda. Not only does she seek to re-evaluate and legitimize the neglected film screenplays as a subject of study, but in doing so, she also descends into the Hollywood snakepit of industrial text production, instead of opting for the more promising pinnacles of the European Autorenfilm, literary adaptations, and the (still rather few) published screenplays. She concentrates, therefore, on the purely functional aspects of texts which, as Richard Dyer and others hold, are essentially functional within a system of corporate authorship. Traditionally, Sternberg argues, a screenplay would be regarded as a property and a blueprint for shooting, rather than as a text for interpretative reading. A case in point is David Lodge, who in *The Practice of Writing* deplores the author's lack of control over the production process and the distance to the reception of his films.

Sternberg turns this deficiency into an asset by consistently viewing screenplays as authorless texts and by refraining from relating their effects to supposed sources. Equipped with the language awareness of her formal training in text linguistics and narratology, she instead addresses screenplays as texts which ingenuously encode in words the process of production and visual or aural effects. Film, Sternberg argues in view of an ongoing discussion in film theory, is a hybrid of dramatic and narrative texts, incorporating both (dramatic) dialogue text and (narrative) scene text in various proportions according to functional and stylistic paradigms.
Dialogue text, which has been slighted as inferior by many screenplay scholars, is nevertheless the only part of the screenplay which reaches the auditors directly. In combination with the image, it tends towards reduction and is most often tied to 'natural' characterization. Sternberg, however, shows that its 'naturalness' should not be taken for granted, as screenplays may contain open spaces, cues, and deviant passages (99-107).

Not surprisingly, Sternberg devotes a much more extended passage to scene text, exploring its function for characterization (108-130), narration and focalization (131-158), setting, light and sound (158-197), time (197-206), camera, editing and montage (206-219). She succeeds in shattering some more myths of screenplay criticism, arguing that rather than lacking aesthetic potential, screenplays often predetermine even decisions attributed to the director. In fact, Sternberg maintains, even in non-literary or director-authorial contexts, it is fair to attribute to screenplays the role of a "hidden director" (231).

Sternberg's study offers a thorough and convincing functional analysis of screenplays. Perhaps the analytic scope could have been broader, incorporating the theory of intermediality and embracing the ekphrastic dimension of writing. After all, her findings could be used to investigate on a more general level the verbal representation of non-verbal signs.

In addition, a few words on the storyboard, that other unique stage in producing the scripts, would not have seemed out of place. The study's self-inflicted lexical bias does not seem to do full justice to the sensual impact and instantaneous appeal of the produced film which will forever put the clumsy consumption of the screenplay at a serious disadvantage.

Multiple chapter headings and a rigorous structuring belie the influence of structuralist and narratologist paradigms and may put off readers who expect a less academic essay-style study which one finds all too often in the 'How to Write a Screenplay'- market segment. (For a recent example, see Robert McKee's Story. Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting.) For all its structuralist scholarship, however, Sternberg's book is remarkable in its clarity and lack of unnecessary jargon. Sternberg took great pains to arrive at a 'natural' English, homogenizing her manuscript by translating the German quotations, while at the same time keeping the conventional Courier font of the screenplay typescripts intact. Among other things, Sternberg's English book which derives from a dissertation in German, attempts to break out of the insularity of much German academic writing. Even if one may harbour doubts about her plea for screenplay research outside its traditional niche, the careful editing as well as the cogent arguments in Written for the Screen make it seem written to be read.

Some film scripts are available on the Net at http://www.screentalk.org/moviescripts.htm