

as early as film's "second period" (in Eric De Kuiper's wording), and Feuillade exemplifies it perfectly. Eighty years later, Hou rediscovered the same idea, this time as a deliberate choice (a constraint he imposes upon himself, in the interest of form). It is also what Bordwell nicely terms a tool of "modulation," and the choice of Mizoguchi explains itself: staging, indefinitely varied, never predictable, is in his work the nerve of emotion—an emotion that will be tinged with melancholy in a more modern work, such as Angelopoulos's, where staging does not any more have the quality of naturalness.

Of course, the theoretician is never forgotten in the critic's analyses, and the examples are always here to help demonstrate a point. However, the cleverness and agility of the comments never burden Bordwell's respect for the filmic text: no interpretations, or at least no interpretation that would be a mere projection on the film from a general stance. At most, a slight tendency to overestimate the filmmaker's intentionality or his mastery (as early as the very first analysis, that of *O! Soo-jung*, turning a semi-improvised shooting into a masterpiece of calculation and meticulous direction of the slightest gesture). In fact, Bordwell gives way to his theoretical streak in separate pages, between the analytical chapters, where he addresses in passing stylistic and esthetic problems in general, such as: "The cinematic playing space," "Aggressive foregrounds and reticent depths," or "Two ways to dedramatize filmic space."

The definition of staging that is given by Bordwell may seem excessively formal: a problem of putting things in their proper place, and of a transcription of this putting-in-place in the rectangle of the frame. But one must observe first that such is its basic definition, to be found quite early in the first treatises on filmmaking (in particular by the Danish director Urban Gad, who authored as early as 1919 a voluminous treatise, well-known by Bordwell, who has commented on it on several occasions); in simple terms, it opens onto a vast set of complex problems. The critical (and polemical) use of "mise-en-scène" by critics from the 1960s to name a sort of *virtus artistica* of film may have been more vigorous, but at the price of a great imprecision, even of total confusion. Bordwell's book—whose writing is always clear, precise, and warm—has the immense merit of turning back to the only authoritative data: the films and what they show us on the screen. Staging or mise-en-scène is not a concept, not an aesthetic program, not a manifesto (though it could occasionally be one or the other): it is the flesh of a film shot, the very flesh of film, its intimate relationship to what has remained, in spite of all, its true subject—the figuration of human beings in *interesting* states and actions.

David Bordwell's earlier book, *History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998) often failed, I must confess, to convince me. Its minute description of successive styles seemed to be somewhat abusively disguised as a history (a concept that supposes at least a minimal concern for causality). Paradoxically, *Figures Traced in Light*, which makes no pretence at history-making, is far more convincing on that very ground. From Feuillade to Hong, from Evgenij Bauer to Quentin Tarantino, no genealogy is sketched here; even less does one suppose an essence named "staging," whose contingent incarnations one

might trace. If this finally is a historian's work, it is by its amplitude, by its synoptic view of an entire century, which has not by chance been often labeled the century of cinema. In his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1997–99), Godard has surmised that, of all the inventions of cinema, montage is the most fundamental, inasmuch as it is the most original. With totally different procedures and arguments, Bordwell modestly suggests that this claim was perhaps easier said than proven: in matters of staging also, and in spite of its supposed relation to theater, cinema has left its indelible mark on images.

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On Film-making: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director

By Alexander Mackendrick, edited by Paul Cronin. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005. \$35.00 cloth; \$16.00 paper. 336 pages.

It is a rare volume that attempts to address film directing as a profession. There are how-to guides such as *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* by Michael Rabiger (Focal Press, 3rd edn 2003) and *Directing for Film and Television: A Guide to the Craft* by Christopher Lukas (Allworth Press, rev. edn 2001), which are general texts written by little-known practitioners. When the writer is an acclaimed film director, as in the case of *King Vidor: On Film Making* (David McKay, 1972), *Making Movies* by Sidney Lumet (Bloomsbury, 1995), or *On Filmmaking* by Edward Dmytryk (Focal Press, 1986), they draw on experience culled from a body of work known to, and respected by, the reader. *The Film-Maker's Art* (Basic Books, 1966) by Haig P. Manoojian is of great interest because the legendary NYU professor taught so many now-prominent filmmakers, notably Martin Scorsese.

Both teacher and practitioner, Alexander Mackendrick directed *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), *The Ladykillers* (1955), and *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), subsequently becoming the Dean of the California Institute of the Arts after his retirement, in 1960, as a filmmaker. At CalArts, Mackendrick wrote hundreds of pages of class notes and sketches that formed his curriculum and encapsulated his philosophy on the practical teaching of his craft. Those texts are adroitly compiled here by Paul Cronin, himself a film scholar and maker. The collection begins with a foreword from Scorsese, who explains that after only one hundred years there is little consensus concerning a syllabus for the training of a film director. After Scorsese applauds Mackendrick's pioneering work in the field, Cronin provides a lengthy introduction which covers background and the essential tenets of teachings that stress practice over theory. Cronin pored over all the handouts and notes Mackendrick produced during his academic career before condensing them into a single volume divided into two categories: dramatic construction (the

creation of a screen story) and film grammar (the rules and properties behind motion-picture production). Cronin proves himself as meticulous as his subject: his annotations, which are printed in the margins, are excellent and, at the beginning of the book, veritably encyclopedic. Mackendrick is especially vigorous on the topic of cinematic dramatic construction. He believed a film story should utilize limited dialogue to create meaning between the words. He judged storytelling by the highest standards, often citing the Ancient Greeks, Shakespeare, or Ibsen. Presenting himself as a classicist, Mackendrick challenged his students to learn the fundamentals of their art and craft and to discover their own future form. This position would be admirable at any point of time but was critical during the essential cinematic decades of the 1960s and 70s when filmmakers were fueled with passionate ideas but often lacked formal categories for their visions. Before the wave of script gurus (Syd Field, Robert McKee, and Linda Seeger), Mackendrick was exploring the writing process by suggesting the student create index cards indicating a simple account of the principal action, outlines as short as four pages or as long as fifty pages, charts of the chain of narrative events, step outlines of an existing film to deconstruct its architecture. And all this planning needed to be bolstered by constant rewriting.

In a series of lectures, the tenets of narrative writing are explored: activity versus action, exposition, dramatic irony, plausibility, structure, suspension of disbelief, creation of subplots, and poetics. A deconstruction of the screenplay for *The Third Man* (1949) includes a character relationship map that analyzes motivation, state of mind, emotions, and personal agendas. A lengthy section is dedicated to the story construction of *Sweet Smell of Success* in which Mackendrick explains his working process including the contributions of Ernest Lehman and Clifford Odets, character breakdowns, and an in-depth dissection of several key scenes following pages from the original screenplay.

The second section is a practical examination of film grammar that connects content with form. Mackendrick presents the rules of film direction with respect for dramatic interpretation, communication with the viewer, and self-expression. Continuing his high-ground approach, Mackendrick references the teachings of Lev Kuleshov, Karel Reisz, and the application of the moving camera of Alfred Hitchcock. Pacing is examined with a sample script page, a step-by-step list of the actions, analysis of the dramatic rhythm, then an annotated storyboard that solves the problem of narrative compression by application of proper shot size, angle, blocking, and camera movement. Directorial point of view and maintaining continuity through understanding the geometry of camera placement and framing is taught with detailed line drawings and intricate notation. Several overhead schematic illustrations clearly demonstrate the relationship of the camera to its subject in several different two-character scene circumstances. Much attention is given to the art and mechanics of covering a scene during production so it can be properly edited. The iconic and deeply emotional taxi scene between Marlon Brando and Rod Steiger from *On the Waterfront* (1954) is a valuable example accompanied by

Mackendrick's insights, drawings, and charts. Mackendrick's high regard for *Citizen Kane* (1941) is evident at the conclusion of *On Film-making* in which he uses Susan Alexander Kane's attempted suicide scene to bring together all his lessons on cinematic techniques and concepts emphasizing the director–cinematographer relationship of Orson Welles and Gregg Toland which produced it. This is followed by a short epilogue concerning Mackendrick's on-the-job training and the hope his instruction contained within *On Film-making* will empower the reader with the basics of film directing. The rest, he states, is down to talent and hard work.

The lessons in *On Film-making* are both dated and timeless. The book's strength is in Mackendrick's ability to demystify. The guiding principles of filmmaking don't really change but it must be said that Mackendrick's literary and movie examples are of their time. But readers looking to make *Fight Club* (1999) or *Memento* (2000) might remember that students of drawing in Europe once had to spend hours making meticulous pencil renderings of a white napkin dropped in front of their drawing-table by their teacher. *On Film-making* is imbued with the same ethos of dedication and craftsmanship. Those who study Mackendrick's old-school approach could, with time and practice, become the next David Fincher or Christopher Nolan.

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Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film

Edited by John Gibbs and Douglas Pye. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. \$74.95 cloth; \$27.95 paper. 264 pages.

This anthology of new essays has bold aspirations. Originating in a conference held at the University of Reading in 2000, it argues for a reshaping of the methodologies of contemporary film studies. Amid the wide range of approaches taken by contributors, two key themes emerge: firstly, that “grounding writing about film in observable detail should be fundamental not to just one form of critical practice but to all, and not just to criticism but to theory” (5); and, secondly, “that to be concerned with film style and its significance is inevitably to be involved in interpretation” (2). For some writers, these propositions are linked to a third dictum, which is that interpretation is a process inseparable from evaluation.

The ways in which the close analysis of film style has been employed have shifted substantially over the past few decades. Its popularity within the mainstream of academic writing has, several contributors argue, been displaced by other critical methods. And yet, one might counter, if it has a lesser presence in scholarly journals than it once did, it can be found alive and well elsewhere. Featuring prominently in many studies of directors and genres, it has (in conjunction with other approaches) also proved foundational to the wellspring