Review: Warren Buckland, *Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling*

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Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling
By Warren Buckland
Columbia University Press, 2021
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Warren Buckland's monograph *Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling* is a succinct look at the intricacies of narrative, narration, and other critical storytelling devices in film. The author provides terminology, concepts, and properties that enable the reader to unlock how stories are told cinematically making what is often rendered an opaque process by filmmakers, easy to comprehend. The book, is part of the *Short Cuts* series, that provides introductions to a myriad of topics in Film Studies for both film scholars and those simply interested in film. Indeed, Buckland's book in addition to being a key scholarly text, is also an indispensable tool for the screenwriter. The clarity it provides on topic of narrative, would strengthen any writer's knowledge of the mechanics of storytelling.

Starting with the history of early cinema, in chapter one, Buckland takes the reader on an immersive dive into early modes of narration – from "intertitles, primitive narrators, voyeur-characters" (8) and how they "contribute to the transition from the cinema of attractions to the cinema of narrative integration" (8). A scene from *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903) explores the tension between the director's "attempt to develop a narrative scene" (6) and lingering notions of "attraction" found in early cinema (ibid).

The second chapter is devoted to Hollywood narrative structure both in classical and contemporary films. Buckland discusses Vladimir Propp and his work in *Morphology of the Folktale* here. Propp "abstracted" the "seven character types (the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, etc) and thirty-one narrative functions" (12-13). To illustrate this further, Buckland points to Graeme Turner's (1988) work in 'mapping' these onto the well-known characters of *Star Wars* (1977) – the Donor (Obi-Wan Kenobi) and The Helper (Han Solo) are just two examples. Ultimately by doing this, Buckland posits that Propp's work shows "the same

narrative elements are used again and again (recursively) but are "filled in" with different content" (14). To put it plainly, the narrative framework is repeated – it is just the details, supplied by the creators of the story that change it. Buckland particularly uses examples from Alfred Hitckock's films *North by Northwest* (1957), *Psycho* (1960) and *Marnie* (1964) which "appear to share the same underlying narrative structure" (22), as a further example of these theories. The James Bond franchise is also analysed here, with a specific look at *Quantum of Solace* (2008), that works as an example of the shift in narrative form within the Bond series compared to earlier forms of narrative expression.

The third chapter explores narration which the author sums up as "the organization of space, time, character experiences, and narrative actions" (47). Using *Gone Girl* (2014) and *Jurassic Park* (1993) Buckland illuminates "how narrative actions are reorganized, when spectators receive information about those actions, and how those actions are filtered through characters and narrators before reaching readers or spectators" (29). Using a close textual analysis of the "fence scene" from *Jurassic Park*, Buckland deftly describes the deployment of narrational manipulation in his book's most riveting passage. This close textual analysis reinforces to the reader, the author's argument, that it's not just what the audience knows but *when* they know it versus the characters in the film. A definitive overview is also given of Roland Barthes' definition of hermeneutic code and proairetic code. "The proairetic code is…a technical name for the linear series of linked narrative actions and events." (31) While the hermeneutic code, as Barthes sees it, "structures narrative actions in terms of multiple elements, including a theme, a proposal, delay, and disclosure" (31). These structures are then evinced by an analysis of *Gone Girl* in a revealing case study of a film well known for its narrative complexity.

The fourth and final chapter of Part I, explores "the theory of enunciation" and reflexivity. The author conveys how films purport themselves to audiences and also, and

perhaps, more interestingly how they draw attention to these gestures. With an in depth look at Wes Anderson, and by analysis of his masterpiece *Grand Budapest Hotel,* the author demonstrates to the reader how an auteur draws purposeful attention to the characteristics that both define their films, and in Anderson's case, how they define his unique style.

Chapter five is entitled *Feminism, Narrative and Authorship* and utilises *Gone Girl* once more and while introducing *Orlando* (1992) as another requisite case study. The author asks questions if *Gone Girl* is it patriarchal, feminist, or both? (67). Buckland considers this in relation to second wave feminism. He outlines in clear steps how "it is possible to identify a series of characteristics that inscribe "femininity" into a film" (72) and how authorship influences the making of the feminist film. Challenging the patriarchy inherent in narrative cinema, *Orlando*, showcases how a film "constructs "another vision" a storyworld that privileges femininity" (78).

Chapter six delves into Art Cinema Narration by inspecting *Alice in the Cities* (1974) and *Inland Empire* (2006). Deciphering Art Cinema through the lens of David Bordwell's critical piece of film scholarship 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice'*,* Buckland moves away from Hollywood's dominant narrative forms to the subtle and complex modes of arthouse narration with an emphasis on European New Wave cinema. Special attention is given to the loosening of 'cause-effect logic' in art cinema which is so often prevalent in Hollywood. The author considers both objective and subjective realism in David Lynch's *Inland Empire*. Buckland makes clear that understanding these conventions prevalent in art cinema "does not tell us *what* a film means, but *how* it means" (93). This allows a deeper level of analysis of both the film's intention and how narrative can be exploited to great effect.

The penultimate chapter examines contemporary cinema's puzzle film narrative structure with a focus on "unreliable narration". Buckland posits that puzzle films "enrich and renew storytelling…and challenge deep-seated cultural conceptions about agency, identity,

memory, and time" (94). Videogame logic, often inherent in science fiction movies like *Inception* (2011) is explored in the final chapter. The rules of videogame logic are listed and examined using *Source Code* (2011) as a representative example of this expanding narrative form.

Warren Buckland's *Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling,* is a comprehensive yet concise study of storytelling technique in film. The book, a useful tool, for both scholars and writers will provide the foundation needed to understand cinema's array of narrative forms in an insightful and engaging manner.