well before German Expressionism, Keating points up the self-awareness behind exaggerated lighting effects in such films as The Cheat (1915) and Stella Maris (1918). He claims cinematographers Alvin Wyckoff and Walter Stradling saw nothing unusual in making the lighting design obtrusive if it met the expressive requirements of a scene. Keating does not treat invisibility and illusionism as mechanically applied, strictly enforced, and ideologically suspect rules; instead, he gives us the perspective of the practitioners, who saw these as two of several aims which they could fulfill or de-emphasize, depending on the situation. A shot/reverse-shot sequence in The Most Dangerous Game (1932) illustrates this creative liberty: Leslie Banks and Joel McCrea stand next to one another in the story world, but “look like they’re in completely different films” (174) on the level of brightness, contrast, tone and directionality. Banks, lit hard from below, appears in opaque nocturnal shadows befitting his villainous character; McCrea, lit softly for glamour, looks like he could be standing in the transparent shade of a sunny afternoon.

Keating distinguishes cinematographic styles not by romantically pitting rule-flaunting artistic rebels against conventional mechanics, but by asking whether a cinematographer balances the demands of storytelling, realism, glamour, and pictorial quality; or pursues one of these aims, sacrificing the others. Borrowing from the distinction made by art historian Ernst Gombrich in “Norm and Form,” Keating calls the first group classicists and the second group mannerists. We can see the first tendency in, for instance, the way William Daniels lit Greta Garbo in Flesh and the Devil (1926), The Mysterious Lady (1928), and Anna Karenina (1935). While Daniels, by his own account, worked to balance the glamorization of Garbo with the needs of the story, Lee Garmes, partly to separate his star from Daniel’s, made the cheekbones of Marlene Dietrich a priority by lighting her from above rather than the side: “I lit [Dietrich] with a sidelight . . . I looked at the first day’s work and I thought, ‘My God, I can’t do this, it’s exactly what Bill Daniels is doing with Garbo’ . . . So . . . I changed to the north-light [overhead light] effect . . . The Dietrich face was my creation” (189). Keating’s description of Garmes’s eye-catching, but space-flattening compositions in Morocco (1930) helpfully illustrates what mannerism can look like in practice.

What becomes of this distinction after the studio system’s disintegration? Keating devotes a chapter to Technicolor’s “promises and problems” and concludes with a chapter on noir, which considers John Alton’s mannerist work with Anthony Mann, particularly T-Men (1947). But there he ends this important contribution—comparable in its historical and critical approach to James Lastra’s 2000 Sound Technology and the American Cinema (Columbia University Press)—to our understanding of the history of film style. A sequel would be welcome.

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JEFF JAECKLE
Analysing the Screenplay
ed. Jill Nelmes

The Cinema of Preston Sturges: A Critical Study
by Alessandro Pirolini

The contributors to Analysing the Screenplay endeavor to convince readers that the screenplay is not what gurus Robert McKee and Syd Field would have you believe: a text, written by one person, that outlines a three-act narrative of a hero’s journey, complete with crisis, climax, and resolution. On the contrary, they insist that the screenplay is necessarily a collaborative production that may take a variety of forms: storyboards, video essays, or graphic novels (to name a few). It may eschew both the three-act structure and narrative closure, and it may be reinterpreted at each stage of a film’s production. To substantiate these claims, the contributors take a number of critical approaches, including industrial histories of screenwriting; studies of narrative strategies and production processes from different periods, genres, and national cinemas; and theorizing about the ontology of the screenplay. The results are equally varied, with essays running the gamut from groundbreaking to derivative, thus making this collection a mixed contribution to film studies.

The most intriguing essays debate the ontological nature of the screenplay. Steven Price and Mark O’Thommes interrogate conventional conceptions of the screenplay as, respectively, a “structuring document” and “blueprint” (204, 237). For O’Thommes, the term “blueprint” is especially useful when comparing stage plays to published screenplays. Whereas stage plays are typically read and appreciated without recourse to a live production, the ubiquity and accessibility of films mark the published screenplay as a “frozen entity” (237)—one that demands to be experienced on screen to be fully understood and appreciated. Adam Ganz and Kathryn Millard, by contrast, are skeptical of any conception
of screenplays as blueprints, especially static ones. Rather, they conceive of them as what Millard calls "design prototypes" (142) and Ganz refers to as an "interface design" (128). These authors regard screenplays as processes that may take the form of just about anything—from trailers to drawings to physical objects that evoke the future film. Also compelling is Barry Langford's meta-analysis of scholarly discourse about screenplays. Langford asserts that scholars often erroneously regard as "oppositional" any narrative conventions that depart from McKee and Field's models (255). These scholars' valorizing of fragmented, nonlinear, and decentered narratives as progressive, whether politically or aesthetically, reveals the extent to which academic criticism "lags some way behind both contemporary screenwriting practice and mainstream film culture" (255).

While the essays by several of Langford's fellow contributors help to bridge these gaps between industry practice and academia, others maintain it by making excessively bold pronouncements about well-established narrative strategies. Ken Dancyger's review of four action-adventure films from 1939 leads to the underwhelming conclusion that genres "are not fixed forms" (122), while Julie Selbo's study of pre-Code films by and about women merely reminds readers that they "explored story elements like abortion, birth control, alcoholism and drug addiction" (26). Drawing on examples from Samira Makhmalbaf and Tran Anh Hung, among others, Sue Clayton asserts that some filmmakers outside the West "privilege the visual elements of storytelling over the verbal" (194); yet the same has long been said of many filmmakers, including those in Hollywood. While these essays might serve as useful overviews for those new to film studies, more advanced readers are likely to wish that the contributors had taken greater pains to complicate these valid yet familiar arguments about narrative and genre.

Fortunately, the same cannot be said of the essays by Ian MacDonald, J. J. Murphy, Mark O’Thomas, Steven Price, Paul Welles, and editor Jill Nelmes, all of which do justice to the collection's title by analyzing, in compelling detail, screenplays (and storyboards) by, among others, Eliot Stannard, Graham Greene, David Mamet, Anthony Minghella, and Alexander Payne. Price's comparison of characterization techniques in Mamet's House of Games (1987) and Greene's The Third Man (1949) is a model analysis of how verbal details, such as contractions in dialogue and the wording of prefatory character descriptions, can substantially impact how a production's cast and crew interpret a screenplay. Likewise, Murphy's study of the collaborations between short-story writer John Raymond and screenwriter–director Kelly Reichardt on Old Joy (2006) and Wendy and Lucy (2008) demonstrates the importance of even changes in typeface. Despite my criticisms, this collection is nonetheless a worthwhile enterprise. The contributors' diverse and occasionally divergent theories will likely serve as the foundations for various camps or movements in screenplay studies as they take shape over the coming decades.

One figure who should arguably be central to screenplay studies, yet who is curiously absent from Analysing the Screenplay, is Preston Sturges, the first Hollywood filmmaker to receive the screen credit "Written and Directed by," and the inaugural winner of the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay (The Great McGinty, 1940), for which he was also nominated twice in 1944 (The Miracle of Morgan's Creek and Hail the Conquering Hero). After a flurry of scholarship on Sturges between 1990 and 1998, including a posthumous autobiography, biography, and twelve annotated screenplays, no monographs have appeared (in English) for over a decade. Alessandro Pirolini's The Cinema of Preston Sturges: A Critical Study is therefore long overdue.

In framing his study as a look at the "cinematic practice of text deconstruction, rather than through focusing on the recurrence of themes and motifs" (6), Pirolini offers readers a welcome change from the well-worn accounts of Sturges's creative treatments of the American dream, heroism, entrepreneurship, and marriage. He concentrates instead on Sturges's complicated position as a filmmaker (and would-be television series creator) with regard to classical Hollywood cinema. Rather than accept the laudatory yet limiting conceptions of Sturges as a pioneer of screwball comedy, Pirolini repositions him as a staunchly pragmatic director who mastered the classical Hollywood system while also gaming it through groundbreaking experiments with nonchronological storylines, pastiche, metanarratives, and self-referentiality.

Pirolini delivers on these claims with his close analyses of Sturges's nonlinear masterpiece The Power and the Glory (1933), his meta-movie Sullivan's Travels (1941), and his genre-bending narrative of hypothetical revenge, Unfaithfully Yours (1948). The same is true of Pirolini's discussion of Sturges's unproduced television projects, which provide fascinating insights into a largely unexamined area of the director's career. Rather than signal a departure or decline for Sturges, these projects constitute his most elaborate experiments with metanarratives. His account of The Preston Sturges Show as a show-about-a-show set in The Players, Sturges's restaurant-theater, reveals a degree of self-awareness and extensive blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction, the likes of which, Pirolini argues, television audiences would not encounter until David Lynch's On the Air (1992). Likewise, the unrealized reality-based proj-
tects “They Still Live,” “You Be Witness,” and “It Happened Exactly Here”—referenced in Pirolini’s main chapters and an appendix of unpublished letters and treatments—reveal that Sturges’s ideas about the documentary potentials of television programming were startlingly prescient, anticipating Edward R. Murrow’s See It Now (1951–58) as well as entire networks such as the Discovery and History channels.

Problems arise when Pirolini attempts to parlay these observations into a broader reappraisal of Sturges’s place in film history with respect to classical, modernist, and postmodernist cinemas. As if unable to resolve the “theoretical difficulty in defining the boundaries between classicism, modernism, and postmodernism in cinema” (5), Pirolini seems content to apply these terms in muddled, unsubstantiated, and contradictory ways. He informs readers, for example, that “Preston Sturges anticipates all these forms of postmodern pastiche” (31), yet determines that the filmmaker’s other experiments, such as those with chronology, fall “somewhere between classicism and modernism” (87). The imprecision of these categories becomes even more pronounced when readers recall another of Pirolini’s introductory comments, namely that “cinema has always emerged as a postmodern form of art tout court” (4). Not surprisingly, his arguments about Sturges’s historical significance possess a contradictory quality, given that readers are expected to accept that the filmmaker is, at once, a classical modernist, classical postmodernist, or even classical-modernist-postmodernist.

Readers are therefore likely to wonder why Pirolini did not address head on the theoretical difficulty of defining these admittedly fluid concepts, or else why he did not jettison this critical framework in favor of deepening his close readings of the filmmaker’s craft. Personally, I found myself wanting Pirolini to address Sturges’s aural style, particularly his dialogue strategies, given the filmmaker’s foundational status as a writer–director. However, Pirolini concentrates almost exclusively on Sturges’s narrative experiments and visual techniques, failing to undertake any serious study of Sturges’s dialogue, which included a reliance on monologues, overlapping speech, heteroglossia, misspeaking, and allusion. Even during Pirolini’s explicit discussion of style in chapter 6, “A Style Without a Style,” he focuses primarily on visual patterns, for which he reserves the term “cinematic techniques,” while limiting discussion of the presumably uncinematic dialogue to descriptive buzzwords long common in studies of Sturges, such as “witty” and “fast-paced” (109, 106). This approach ultimately hinders our understanding of how Sturges’s films actually work; it also reinforces the longstanding yet deeply flawed belief that cinema is a visual, as opposed to audiovisual, medium. As with his treatments of classicism, modernism, and postmodernism, one wishes that Pirolini had paused long enough to work through the implications of his critical terminology, so that readers could truly appreciate Sturges’s historical significance and continuing influence on Hollywood cinema.

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LEO CHARNEY

The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s by Malcolm Turvey

This illuminating book helps mark the moment of what we could call (if it did not already mean something else) postmodernity studies. This is the second wave of work that aims to re-examine our understanding of the links between modernity and cinema as they emerged and developed together in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Malcolm Turvey analyzes five key European avant-garde films of the 1920s, in an effort to demonstrate that artistic responses to modernity present “a much more complicated, even contradictory phenomenon” (11) than in traditional accounts that depict avant-garde art as simply rebelling against mainstream bourgeois values. “Modernity itself,” he writes, “is contradictory, and the changes it brings about can be experienced as libidary and oppressive at one and the same time” (91). For example, “the avant-garde did not simply oppose bourgeois modernity; its response was more varied than that … avant-garde artists disagreed, often vehemently, about what aspects of modern life needed transformation and how such transformation should be accomplished” (9–10).

Each of the book’s five central chapters combines history and film analysis to focus on one major trend in European avant-garde filmmaking of the 1920s, as exemplified by one major film. The first of these discussions, for example, presents abstraction in the context of Hans Richter’s Rhythm 21 (1921). Turvey suggests that Richter was seeking not a wholesale rejection of rationality but “a type of (anti-)art that could effect a balance between reason and unreason” (26). For Richter, rationalization is a dark side of modernity,