



Directed by Steven Spielberg: Poetics of the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster

By Warren Buckland



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Although the blockbuster is the most popular and commercially successful type of filmmaking, it has yet to be studied seriously from a formalist standpoint. This is in opposition to classical Hollywood cinema and International Art cinema, whose form has been analyzed and deconstructed in great detail. Directed By Steven Spielberg fills this gap by examining the distinctive form of the blockbuster. The book focuses on Spielberg's blockbusters, because he is the most consistent and successful director of this type of film - he defines the standard by which other Hollywood blockbusters are judged and compared. But how did Spielberg attain this position? Film critics and scholars generally agree that Spielberg's blockbusters have a unique look and use visual storytelling techniques to their utmost effectiveness. In this book, Warren Buckland examines Spielberg's distinct manipulation of film form, and his singular use of stylistic and narrative techniques.

The book demonstrates the aesthetic options available to Spielberg, and particularly the choices he makes in structuring his blockbusters. Buckland emphasizes the director's activity in making a film (particularly such a powerful director as Spielberg), including: visualizing the scene on paper via storyboards; staging and blocking the scene; selecting camera placement and movement; determining the progression or flow of the film from shot to shot; and deciding how to narrate the story to the spectator.

Directed By Steven Spielberg combines film studies scholarship with the approach taken by many filmmaking manuals. The unique value of the book lies in its grounding of formal film analysis in filmmaking.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Buckland offers...a close examination of the filmic structures of Spielberg's blockbusters—from *Jaws* to *War of the Worlds*—with practically a shot-by-shot breakdown of some scenes. In deconstructing these films, Buckland uses his own definition of poetics: the activities and techniques involved in constructing a work of art. [H]e is an admirer of Spielberg's and absolves him of the oft-repeated accusation that his production of the 'first' blockbuster (*Jaws*) ultimately spelled doom for the 'little' movie.... highly enlightening." — Library Journal, May 15

Mention - Reference & Research Book News, August 2006 (mention)

Mentioned in Today's Books, "Book Register" (Abstract and Index), June 2006
(Today's Books "Book Register")

"While the other three authors attempt to address the extensive negative critical and review literature on Spielberg...only Buckland feels it necessary to correct all of film studies by inventing a whole new method of analyzing film...Numerous flaws detract from *Directed by Steven Spielberg*, but I want to focus on the central problem arising from Buckland's methodology and the goals he proposes for it: the disavowal of critical agency. On the level of data collection, using a statistical software package simply does not render findings objective...Moreover, judging by the kinds of information Buckland extracts from his statistical analysis, there seems to be no room for observing or recording factors which cannot be pinned down to individual shots, such as how tone, meaning or performance develops across shots. Presumably, such things are just too subjective and thus anathema to his historical poetics. If this is his position, then he would have been wise to edit out his own clearly subjective responses to Spielberg's films." —Mark Bould, "Nothing Much to phone home about (with exceptions): four books on Spielberg," *Science Fiction Film and Television*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Autumn 2008

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About the Author

Warren Buckland is author of four previous books: *Studying Contemporary American Film* (with Thomas Elsaesser); the best-selling *Teach Yourself Film Studies*; *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*; and *The Film Spectator*. He also edits the journal the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*.

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