

are fundamental to picture making. Beck's volume seems most meaningful when we consider Leonardo as a point of entry, leading us to a broader subject, the evolution of pictorial language.

A final point remains. Beck attempts to argue his thesis by visual means. However, no consistent principle structuring the presentation of the juxtapositions is presented. The illustrations enhance the text; often they vividly illuminate points made elsewhere verbally. But the juxtapositions do not demonstrate Beck's premise because he has not made them do so. An argument presented visually demands the same attention to structure as one presented verbally. Beck has failed his audience in this respect.



Donald Spoto. *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures.* New York: Doubleday, 1979. 523 pp. + xv illustrations. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Paul Messaris
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Aside from descriptions of the physical appearance of performers, the writing of many film critics rarely contains any evidence that the medium they are dealing with has a visual component. With most commercial movies, this critical blindness is of little consequence, since camerawork and editing are typically nothing more than devices for recording performances. The movies of Alfred Hitchcock, however, are so prominent an exception to this rule that any book about them which is at all discerning is bound to be of interest to an audience concerned with the specific characteristics of the visual mode of communication. Donald Spoto's analysis of Hitchcock's films is more than simply adequate in this respect, and the recent appearance of his book in paperback is a good opportunity for readers whose primary interest may not be in film itself to become acquainted with his writing.

The Art of Alfred Hitchcock is a chronologically arranged analysis of almost every one of Hitchcock's more than fifty theatrical motion pictures. Although there is no overview of Hitchcock's work apart from these discussions of individual films, cross-referencing abounds throughout the text, and the reader is treated to detailed expositions of the development of various Hitchcockian devices or "themes"—such as Hitchcock's almost obsessive repetition, over a series of many films, of the association between birds and chaos which finally erupted into feature length in *The Birds*. Throughout the book, Spoto's discussion of the films is intelligent, appropriately eru-

dite, and in impeccable taste. Most important—from the perspective of this review—there is evidence throughout the book of analysis based on repeated close viewing of the films, and in these passages the reader is confronted with illuminating examples of the working of visual intelligence—both the filmmaker's and the critic's.

A good example of the nature of Spoto's concern with visuals is his practice of tracing the use of a single device over the course of a film's entire structure. He does this with image brightness, in the case of the black-and-white film *Rebecca*, for instance, in which the progression in the heroine's emotional condition is carefully matched by changes in lighting, the color of costumes, and so on. In the case of *Rope*, Hitchcock's celebrated experiment in no-cut cinematography, Spoto notes that the film's sense of increasing "psychic" confinement and isolation is accompanied by corresponding reductions in the sweep and speed of camera movement. Camera movement is also a prominent subject in Spoto's very long analysis of *Vertigo*, his favorite Hitchcock film. He points out that, for example, the direction of movements in this film's second half reverses the directions of the first half, as the motive force behind the film's events reverses direction. Spoto also lists in detail the impressive variety of visual manifestations which Hitchcock was able to give to the film's central metaphoric image of the spiral: It appears, according to Spoto, in various aspects of *Vertigo* such as camera movements, the apparent direction of action in the camera frame, and architectural forms.

As these examples may make clear, what matters to Spoto in a film's visuals is rarely the presence of pretty pictures—and the same goes for Hitchcock. In fact, Spoto convincingly demonstrates that one of Hitchcock's prettiest sequences is actually a satire on that kind of filmmaking: It occurs in *I Confess*, in an overly gorgeous flashback of reminiscences by a character who would be expected to think of the past in lushly overdone images. Even in the case of authentically exquisite visuals, such as the overhead shot in *Topaz* in which a collapsing woman's long gown spreads out about her body like an opening flower, Spoto is careful to point out the narrative integrity of the image—in this case, its emphasis on the fact that the woman, doomed to die, has been spared the disfiguring tortures which accompanied the deaths of her comrades. In fact, there are times when Spoto may seem to be trying a little too hard to fit one or another feature of the film's visual devices into an integrated, rationalized pattern. This is particularly true of some of his claims about Hitchcock's colors; for example, he maintains that the on-screen presence of red objects, such as clothes, books, and flowers, in *Torn Curtain* is a deliberate suggestion of the fires of hell, with which the film's heroes are faced behind the Iron Curtain. In fairness to Spoto, however, it should be said that there is abundant support, in accounts of Hitchcock's working methods as well as in the films themselves, for this kind of assumption about

total deliberation and control. For example, in an interview with Spoto, Tippi Hedren, star of *The Birds*, points out that in planning that film Hitchcock had used charts of rising and falling action, to regulate tension and avoid predictability.

In general, then, Spoto's book is a good example of meticulous visual analysis in response to deserving cinematic material, and in this respect it is relatively unusual as film criticism goes. Spoto is not completely free, however, of all the typical weaknesses of the "serious" critic. The one of which he shows symptoms at times is the undue emphasis on broad thematic interpretation at the expense of attention to the mode of narration itself. What this means is that high-level metaphorical interpretations—like the ones in most of the examples cited here—consistently squeeze out the possibilities of dissecting Hitchcock's method of presenting to the audience the film's actions, in their literal sense. This overemphasis on Spoto's part is a pity: As Hitchcock himself demonstrates in the extended interviews in François Truffaut's *Hitchcock*, what makes his films an endless source of fascination for the careful viewer is not simply the masterful orchestration of thematic vehicles. It is also the extraordinary care lavished on such problems as—in *Psycho*—how to go into an overhead shot without signaling to the audience that the murderer's face and identity are thus being concealed. This kind of analysis is just as important as that of visual metaphors in leading viewers to a better understanding of the conventional expectations about form and meaning held by Hollywood's filmmakers and audiences.

To point out his relative lack of attention to such narrative devices is not to demean or derogate Spoto, however. In terms of his own aims, the author's book is flawless. In fact, the exemplary analysis of visual metaphor emphasized in this review is only one part of the very rich and many-layered immersion into Hitchcock's artistry that Spoto's book makes possible for the reader. Spoto himself hopes that his book will become a compelling impetus to see Hitchcock's films again. It is, in this reviewer's estimate, and provides, in addition, an important new key to their appreciation.

Henry B. Collins, Frederica de Laguna, Edmund Carpenter, and Peter Stone. *The Far North: 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. 289 pp., photographs. \$22.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper).

Hilary Stewart. *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979. 112 pp. \$6.95.

Review Essay by Aldona Jonaitis
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The Far North: 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art, a catalog of the exhibition presented in 1973 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is among the best books of its kind. Its value lies both in the large number of illustrated objects from museums all over the world and in the informative essays about Eskimo, Athapaskan, and Tlingit art written by the noted scholars of Alaskan cultures Henry B. Collins, Frederica de Laguna, Edmund Carpenter, and Peter Stone. It is thus with great pleasure that I report the reissue of this catalog by Indiana University Press.

The book contains 365 excellent photographs of archeological and ethnographic art of Alaska. In addition to the familiar Eskimo masks and Northwest Coast Chilkat blankets, less well known prehistoric ivory carvings from St. Lawrence Island, stone lamps from Kodiak Island, and wooden masks from the Aleutians are presented. Especially valuable for the scholar are the early nineteenth-century pieces from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Leningrad, as well as other rarely seen artworks from museums in Finland, Denmark, and Germany. The documentation accompanying each object includes the usual information about dimensions, media, and acquisition dates, in addition to valuable summaries of field notes by collectors and informative comment by the catalog's authors. One's understanding and appreciation of, for example, the Tlingit raven hat from Sitka (Pl. 259) is increased by de Laguna's discussion of the hat's social significance, an explanation based on Louis Shotridge's collection notes and Carpenter's discourse of the hat's mythological connotations.

Three clear but detailed maps provide the reader with a geographic context for this art. The first, a map of the circumpolar region, illustrates the relative distances between Alaska, Siberia, and Kamchatka; the second, a map of tribal distributions, shows the relationships of groups to one another; the third, a place map, gives the precise locations of each ethnographic village and archeological site mentioned in the book.