

FILM & LIGHT

An explanatory note

There is a whole series of books containing rules and technical instructions for film lighting. These rules and regulations are taught in film schools today. Interviews with international cinematographers confirm their validity.

There are basically only two essays on the history of film lighting, an English one by Peter Baxter (1975, 23 pages) and a German one by W. Samlowski/H. J. Wulff (2002, 15 pages).

The history of film lighting by Richard Blank begins with the Californian glass studios of the time around 1900 and ends now. In addition to the recourse to secondary literature, films which are typical for the development of film lighting are analysed with great precision, with details of the scenes/times in the respective film. There is a DVD with numerous quotations accompanying the book.

The book not only observes the sequence of historical facts. Fundamental insights into the structure of the historical development of film result from this consideration of lighting. The rule book valid today is identical with the lighting of the Hollywood film, above all as it developed as a result of DeMille's great successes between 1915 and 1925. These rules were recorded by the Californian studios when labour laws were codified when they became important corporations in the middle of the nineteen-twenties and sought to prevent individual "experiments".

In Europe, particularly in Germany, a completely different film lighting was implemented at this time. The look at German directors who went to Hollywood at the end of the nineteen-twenties, either of their own volition or as emigrants is therefore of great interest. Did they conform (Fritz Lang)? fail (Murnau)?, or were they able to largely preserve their own personal vision, their own perception of film lighting (Ophüls)?

There are styles which do not abide by the light of 'classical' Hollywood films, such as Italian Neo-realism, the nouvelle vague or "New Hollywood". Where are the differences, how are they justified?

And there are, naturally, the films of Eisenstein, Orson Welles, Bunuel, Lars von Trier and others, who do not subject their personal vision to any rule book and whose films are fundamentally distinguished from 'classical' Hollywood by their lighting.

This book follows the historical development of film lighting and reveals astonishing structures which are not just crucial for the history of film but also for work in film today.

