

# Critical Books Review

## Guión audiovisual (Audiovisual script)

ARANDA, D.; DE FELIPE, F.

1st ed. Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2006.

ISBN 84-9788-506-6

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In issue number 22 of this journal, reviewing a book by lecturer Martine Joly (*La interpretació de la imatge. Entre memòria, estereotip i seducció*), Fernando de Felipe stated that "there are many books that talk about how to write scripts for cinema and television". Well, one of the most recent titles published among this multitude is precisely the work by De Felipe himself, in this case in collaboration with Daniel Aranda: namely the book entitled *Guión audiovisual* (Audiovisual script).

Within this context of a certain saturation, it is not easy to provide original contributions that are truly valuable. In spite of this, De Felipe and Aranda manage to give this work a series of suitably differentiating and effective characteristics to make it stand out among the accumulation of manuals within our reach for scriptwriters and those aspiring to become scriptwriters, which is quite an admirable feat.

The first of these characteristics is their stated desire to demystify this task. Unlike the tendency of many theorists to *inflate* the importance of their object of study, Aranda and De Felipe attribute a purely instrumental role to the script. The script is just one part (albeit a key one) in the process involved in creating an audiovisual product. It does not have a life of its own, it is an ephemeral work that loses its meaning as soon as filming has ended. Following the suggestive metaphor of Carrière, a script is like a dry skin left behind by a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly.

This is not a very idealised notion of the trade (the experience of De Felipe in this area may have something to do with it) and it means that the scriptwriter is seen as a professional bereft of the conceit of authorship. Whenever the "ruling whims of production" so require, the scriptwriter must show his or her flexibility and capacity to adapt. Being capable of taking on radical changes, of improvising in situ (be it during the shoot or in the editing room) and of resisting any temptation of creative vanity become essential professional skills. And even the myth of originality is thoroughly shattered, albeit with the help of theorists such as Rohmer who, and not by chance, is also a well-known film director and scriptwriter.

The second characteristic that makes the book interesting is its multipurpose nature. The contributions it makes are valid both for works of fiction in the cinema and television as well as for audiovisual advertising, videoclips and even videogames and other interactive media. It should be noted that most of the examples proposed and the numerous quotes sprinkling its pages certainly come from the world of cinema. However, the authors make a constant effort for abstraction to ensure their considerations and recommendations are fully applicable to any field of audiovisual production, which is certainly laudable.

A third outstanding characteristic of the work is the didactic vocation that exudes from each of its 222 pages. This feature is not surprising if we bear in mind that both De Felipe and Aranda have notable teaching careers and that the book's point of departure lies in the educational materials both authors had prepared as the backbone of a subject in the Audiovisual Communication degree for the Open University of Catalonia, namely audiovisual scripts.

Any amateurs taking a look at this book will no doubt be grateful that the authors have not taken any knowledge for granted. From the most elementary to the most sophisti-

cated, all the speciality's concepts introduced in the book are defined with precise, exact and comprehensible language. In a field where terminological *confusionism* often causes havoc (unfortunate translations of terms, a lack of uniformity, etc.), this disciplined work is aimed precisely at tidying up the existing scenario, both conceptually and lexically, and this is one of the book's key values.

In this respect, dedicating the first chapter to the basic principles of audiovisual narration is already a complete declaration of intent. But this eminently pedagogical focus is emphasised throughout the book and is particularly meritorious at those times when the authors' discourse takes flight and tackles issues such as the main differences between credibility and realism or the different types of film narrative.

Exhaustiveness is the fourth characteristic that sets this work way above the average for books on this area. De Felipe and Aranda systematically tackle, with the love of detail of an entomologist, almost all aspects related to preparing an audiovisual script. Plot, character and dramatisation constitute the three pillars on which the book's central chapters are structured, providing a more than notable level of detail in the sub-themes deriving from each one.

For its part, the last chapter is dedicated to the essentially formal aspects regarding the presentation of scripts. This may seem like a minor theme, a kind of anticlimax, to use a term that is in no way unfamiliar in the field in question, but, as the authors themselves acknowledge, "the formal appearance of our script is as important as its internal structure or its content", as a non-too impeccable format might be all a busy producer needs to reject the script in question. So Aranda and De Felipe have no problem in explaining how to number the pages or which spacing is the best one to use, and they do so with the same rigour and pragmatism as they tackle, to give some very different examples, the anagnorisis of Aristotle or the patterns of Biegalski.

And, finally, there is a fifth characteristic that is equally worth mentioning. Unlike other more conventional manuals, the book we are reviewing shuns magical formulae and universal recipes. The authors acknowledge the extraordinary technical and creative difficulties involved in writing an audiovisual script and provide tools, reflections, conceptions and resources to ease this difficulty and maximise the chances of success. They do not pretend to pontificate on

the subject. The aim is to put at the disposal of the reader the experience and knowledge, carefully sifted and structured, provided by numerous professionals and theorists in this area. This "baggage" will be extremely useful for those working as scriptwriters but it will not restrict them. Also, those who wish to analyse and evaluate scripts or who want to theorise about writing them will not get very far without incorporating the content of this book in their hand luggage.

Curiously, the fact that the authors include so many quotes in the book from renowned academics and scriptwriters might lead us to believe that they lack a truly personal discourse. This is not the case. If we consider both the content that Aranda and De Felipe express in their own words as well as that which they place in the mouths of other authorities on the subject, the whole has such an overwhelming coherence that in no way can it be considered as the result of a mere juxtaposition of conceptions and ideas.

Is the work we have reviewed here absolutely complete then? Well, almost, but it could still be improved in three aspects. Firstly, the valuable list of bibliographical references provided includes practically no book that has not been written in Spanish or at least that has not been translated into Spanish, a questionable criterion that has ignored some works of undeniable interest that are, however, only available in other languages. Second, given the eminently didactic vocation of the work, the examples proposed might be insufficient both in number and diversity. And thirdly, the edition of the book (most particularly with regard to the footnotes) is less conscientious than might be expected.

In any case, thanks to De Felipe and Aranda, all those who intend to contribute in the future to increasing the already numerous literature dedicated to scriptwriting will now find the bar set a little higher.