

Formal Essay

Rear Window is Hitchcock's showcase of how camera works with mise-en-scene to create suspense and ultimately terror. I've decided to choose that film as a subject of my analysis, because the way it was constructed and framed visually is impressive. In order to explain this point, I will deconstruct a scene from the movie in terms of lighting and camera movement by using a method called formalism and also will demonstrate how spatial construction can affect the audience's emotion and understanding of materials and environment. The scene that I will analyze starts with a small dialogue between Stella, the nurse, and Jeff after a massage and ends with the kiss of the new neighbors. I've chosen this scene, because I think it gives a small introduction to the world and the plot of the movie. That will help to show how these two elements are combining with the other film forms to produce or shape the meaning that is beyond the dialogue and plot.

The plot develops the main idea of the moving image by dialogues between the characters and narration, but it also restricts the way details can be shared with the audience, because it can't focus on small facts and details. That's why the formal method is most useful to analyze all movie aspects, because it can comprehend how they contribute to the mise-en-scene and their influence to the audience. Richer Maltby argues that meaning is contained in every form of visual presentation and by exploring that we can receive a more detailed story 'We can achieve a much richer understanding of any ... movie by examining its visual presentation than we will obtain if we presume that its meaning is located solely in plot and dialogue' (Maltby, 2003, p. 353). Therefore formalism is to reflect critically and ideologically what is framed and showed on the screen. In addition, Friedberg explains that how the world is framed may be as important as what is contained within the frame (Friedberg, 2006, p.1). The idea interprets that what is within the frame is there to help the audience to follow the story and that's what we call mise-en-scene. And together with the movement of the actors, it creates a 'language' that guides the audience's view through the film (Belton, 1994, p.44). This analysis will demonstrate explicit knowledge on two main aspects – lighting and camera movement, which I consider as most meaningful and symbolic in terms of visual language and the effect that they create. The following section will illustrate this thesis.

The scene that is under analyze, starts with a medium shot of Stella who is tidying up the room after the massage procedure with Jeff, while having a conversation with him. As we look closely at her hand, a strong shadow can be notice at the table in the background. This shadow

is created by the main source of light, called key light. At this stage, we can not pass the fact that the illuminating source is the light coming from the window, because it over exposures her face and frontal part, while shading the back. As Bordwell explains the key light is the primary source, providing the dominant illumination and casting the strongest shadow (Bordwell, 2010, p.133). That helps to create a feeling of a warm summer day and at the same time to infer about the following events. This dark light goes through the whole story and even gets darker when we go deeper into the problem of the movie.

In the next frame the woman moves from the bed to the chair to get the hat, her strong shadow disappears, because that part of the room has two more lights – filling light and backlight. The filling light is used to eliminate the strong shadows created by the key light, so that makes it less bright than the key light. And the backlight in this scene, is used to create the contrast between the character and the background, so it makes the audience see Stella not as one with the set, but more like three dimensional. So the difference in the exposures of the subjects gives the room more depth and keeps the natural look, but also helps to maintain the feeling of space for the audience. For this period of filmmaking, Bordwell and Thompson introduce that as three point lighting in the following quote. 'Classical Hollywood filmmaking developed the custom of using at least three light sources per shot' (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p. 194).

The next shot reveals Jeff sitting on his chair as he speaks, as a medium close-up shot. The light which illuminates him well emphasizes on the expressivity on his face and constructs more depth as it makes it look more conventional and realistic for the audience. Three point lighting creates balanced illumination that affects the view of the audience by shaping the object and its texture in the space that it is. Even when Jeff stays alone and watches over his neighbors, the light that illuminates the following shots isn't different from the light in the room. The realism that is created through this lighting schema and the control over it combined with the other film elements creates a highly conventionalized space. Maltby argues that this spatial construction, usually called continuity system, constructs the space in which its action unfolds as a smooth and continuous flow (Maltby, 2003, p. 312). Or in other words this system builds and shapes the safe space for the viewers.

The other thing that can shape the space for the audience is the camera and her ability to control and frame the attention of the viewer and his knowledge as how far he can see in the story. As the camera moves from one character to another, we learn more as for the surrounding environment, but also for the relationship between these two protagonists. At the beginning, the camera shows only Stella who is doing her job while talking, but then the

woman moves. As she moves, the camera goes after her as well or as we know it— a pan move. This type of movement is described by Bordwell and Thompson as movement that rotates the camera on a horizontal axis (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 198). Normally this shot reveals more from the surrounding, but also as we see concentrates on a character by giving more importance to their movement or action. As Stella moved to the other part from the room, she also reframed the whole shot and gave the scene another 'light'. By moving around the room, she builds up a relation between her and the next shot. So that makes the flow between the cuts smoother and more realistic and maintains the idea of safe space within the movie for the viewers. And whole circle of movement within this frame is closed, when we see the nurse joining Jeff in one shot. She walks across the camera and appears right next to him. A fast tilt camera movement frames the shot for seconds by focusing on the action of the characters. And here the same authors present the term tilt movement as a vertical motion of the camera (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p. 267). This process of creating the realism of their conversation relies not only on the camera, but also on the actors. As we see through the scene, they maintain the visual contact even when they were of camera and that's what improves the realistic or conventional look of these shots.

After Jeff ends the conversation with her, she leaves the room and the camera moves and zooms to emphasize the character and to make the audience more concentrated on his action. The next frame shows his neighbor going inside the building. As we look at that image, we see everything but the slightly blurred window frame and the high angle that is used for the camera to create the view of the character. Followed by a medium close up of Jeff moving his eyes to another direction as he's seeing another image. The image of the woman who is sitting on a chair and sun bathing with a newspaper on her face. All these images are there to create the atmosphere of the neighborhood that Jeff lives in and by providing them in this particular way, Hitchcock wants the viewer to see through the eyes of Jeff, to live through the story and to be him.

Reference List