

Advanced Critical Thinking Report

In this report, I will be analysing three works of one of Britain's most famous director, Alfred Hitchcock. I will be examining on how Hitchcock has challenged the existing conventions in his films that I have chosen. The three works I will be studying are 'Psycho' 1960, 'Rear Window' 1954 and 'The Birds' 1963.

I start this essay focusing on one of Hitchcock's biggest films that was made in the 1960, 'Psycho'. Hitchcock broke the conventions of a film by leaving it 'X' rated and shocking the audience of who is watching it. People of today who have not seen the film, would not understand the impact it had when it was released. One of the ways that Hitchcock's 'Psycho' pushed boundaries of challenging convention is through the use of point of view shots with non-diegetic sound that builds the terror and suspense in the film. Marion, who is the female protagonist, drives late at night in the pouring rain leaving Fairville. During this scene, a number of shots exposes her view outside the car windshield. As the rain pours, the suspense builds up during the scene and the blinding lights starts to hit Marion's eyes. The sound of the orchestra string is fast paced which is used to remind the audience of her situation. The dialogue that is used in the car scene challenges Marion's purity because it reminds the audience of her misbehaviour.

Hitchcock uses restricted camera angles to highlight the inner terror of the main characters. In the murder scene, there is a high angle shot where Marion showers. With the high angle shot, the audience instantly looks down on Marion and can see how innocent and unsuspecting she is. During this shower scene, Marion is naked which is a common used convention in the horror genre before a female victim dies. This represents how unsafe they will become as danger will approach them or that they will approach danger. There is constant close up shots of Marion face before, during and after the murder throughout the scene. With the shape of an elderly woman that approaches the shower, there is a front over the shoulder shot that is used which creates a twist for the audience because Marion is oblivious to the fact that she is in danger. When we watch a horror or thriller a film, the killer is usually masked and unidentified. This is because it creates a suspense and anxious fear of the unknown to the audience while adding a film's effect to put the terror in the minds of the viewers watching. The killer in 'Psycho' undermines the generic conventions, as we, the audience initially think the killer appears to be an elderly woman but turns out to be the hotel manager who has disguised himself as his mother, to perhaps shift the blame. This dramatic irony give us as an audience a shock when the truth is revealed and makes the storyline of the film more thrilling and twisted. The typical murder weapon used to kill Marion in the shower scene is a knife. This adds to the terrifying carnage in the film as this murder becomes very gory. Just before the 'elderly lady' is about to use the knife on the protagonist, it is shown in the light which connects it's shadowed background. The use of lighting in this scene on the murder weapon is used to draw the audience's attention to focus towards it and alarm them of an attack that is about to happen. We as the audience never get a full view of the bathroom used but are aware that the killer's presence just seconds away before the murder. Marion screams are mixed with screeching measured sounds. This scene caused a huge argument among some viewers and critics. French critic Serge Kaganski quotes, "The shower scene is both feared and desired". Kaganski believes that, "Hitchcock may be scaring his female viewers out of their wits, but he is turning his male viewers into potential rapists" (Wikipedia Contributors). The films rare use of the portrayal of the horror conventions used, did willingly add to its impressive representation of the mentally 'psycho' killer and how far he would go cover up his dangerous actions. From this murder, it breaks a key narrative. The protagonist is killed just after she signifies she will return back home to give the money that she has stolen. The convention orders those who are evil will be punished and those who are good will be praised. Marion timing of her death comes early in the film which becomes as a surprise to the audience. Another tragic death is from another one of the positive characters in the film which is the private detective. He is killed by the 'elderly woman' top of the stairs in Norman's home. All the characters used in Psycho are made to exist in a world where the security of society are limited and the good are dismissed. Hitchcock's passion is to deliver classic conventions to shock those who watch his films. He provokes the classic conventions by killing

positive characters. The shots choices make the audience informed of the character psychology to add terror.

The second film I focus on is 'Rear Window' which was released in 1954. According to (Morrow, 2014), Alfred Hitchcock was very skilful at editing. In 'Rear Window', Hitchcock has called this film his most cinematic because it was only told by visual terms. When it comes to producing an audience's reaction, Hitchcock wants the viewer who is watching his film to feel afraid. No matter what the subject is, as long as it is shot and edited in a convinced way. He has established this idea when he had explained a theory called the 'Kuleshov Effect'. He used 'The Kuleshov Effect', which was named after a Russian director called Lev Kuleshov and it was almost impossible to undervalue the influence of his effect. We as the audience can see how 'the Kuleshov Effect' adds the drama to the film. The character L.B Jefferies is a photographer who is held in his apartment due to a broken leg. With this, the only contact he can have to the outside world is through his window, and it is through his apartment window that he discovers a murder. Hitchcock has turned this film into a classic as he was always informed of the audience, camera and the framing of a shot. Most of the film is focused on the character L.B Jefferies in either a medium or a close-up shot looking out of his window following what he sees, to what his reaction is to it. This could dispute to a great intensity that 'Rear Window' is the Kuleshov effect. The film is about looking and Hitchcock was intelligent on different levels. The character of L.B Jefferies in the film story is a voyeur as he likes to peek through his window into people's private lives with his photography camera. In the framing of these shots, Hitchcock always makes sure that he keeps his point of view shots adjust with the character's eyeliner. From this point of view shot, we are seeing what the character sees. We as the audience become even more voyeuristic than we already are. Hitchcock's technique in the film was so powerful in the film, that in an interview, Jimmy Stewart who played the character of L.B Jefferies, declared not to remember playing his character role the way he had seen on our screens. This is because Hitchcock's control of the Kuleshov effect was so skilful that he could change the montage and create different meanings. For what Stewart was looking at during the filming process or what he was supposed to be looking at, may or not been what he thought he was likely to be looking at.

As Jimmy Stewart looks out of his window, they cut to what he is looking at which is a dog, we see him smile. He then looks at a woman in her room which she is undressing and then we see him smiling. Those two smiles we see have a complete different meaning even though we all see that they are the exact same smile. Hitchcock uses this technique to put an idea into the mind of the character without describing it through dialogue but instead it is described by using a point-of-view shot. This is called a subjective cinema where you take the eyes of the character and then add something in for them to look at. They use this technique editing shots back and forth between the character and the subject as many times to build tension in the film and for the audience. This is one of the most powerful form in filming industry, even more important than acting. Another way Hitchcock takes things further is having the actor to walk towards the subject they are looking at. He then switches to a tracking shot to show his angle changing as he walks. From this, the audience would believe that they are sharing something personal with the character. Hitchcock calls this, 'pure cinema'. (Horton, 2017)

The final film of Alfred Hitchcock's that I focus on is 'The Birds' which was released in 1963. In this film, Hitchcock uses the gothic elements of a psychological terror to explore the theme of the women's role in society. (Thompson, 2017). Throughout this film, there are different species of birds who attack a small town just shortly after a woman called Melanie Daniels arrives from San Francisco. The character of Melanie does not meet the typical conventions of a female during the sixties. This is because Melanie decides to remain independent and often entertains in activities such as jumping naked into a fountain instead of becoming a housewife. The final sequence of the attack in the film uses several aspects of the female gothic mode. By applying the gothic elements, 'The Birds' important theme of the female character is against the traditional role of a woman that is punished. One of the scenes start with all the characters asleep except for Melanie who is awake. Throughout this scene, the lack of shadows on the walls from the fireplace would put the

audience in the same state paranoid state as the character. The silence in the scene is broke by when Melanie hears a strange noise coming from upstairs then followed to a room filled with numerous species of birds. The first shot of this shows Melanie walking out of the shadows which is made from low-key lighting and into the light so that the audience can detect features of Melanie face. Once the audience examine her features, the next shot Melanie is attacked by the birds. During the attack, the noise that is heard other than the noise of the birds flapping is the sound of sexualised moans of the character. This means to us as the audience that Hitchcock has used this to indicate Melanie as a sex symbol. By using the gothic elements in the scene of the terror that Melanie faces, the audience are able to observe the events from the perspective of Melanie to realize the horror that is shown throughout the film is aimed at her. The aesthetic of this scene is on a visual level. This is due to the low-key lighting and the attention on the negative ideas such as death. The two-minute attack strengthens the argument that the attack of the birds was an outcome of Melanie's enthusiasm to the gender roles. With the other half of the final attack with the birds, the audience are able to see how the film examines the gothic theme of the women being punished. This is due to Melanie having agency and left alone as she was being passive. The birds in this second attack were angry with her on the fact that she had distressed the balance of the gender roles. With Melanie in this state, Mitch, (male lead character) protects the family to safety as the birds no longer threaten within the group now as the gender roles are not being questioned. After the bird attack, Mitch's mother Lydia understands that Melanie can be controlled and accepts that she is good enough for Mitch.

This film explains to us audience that the theme of 'The Bird' revolves around Melanie to disrespect the gender roles of women and through the attack of the birds who punish her for it. The birds at the end fail to attack when Melanie allows Mitch to save them. By using the visual elements of the story in a gothic mode, 'The Birds' are able to examine the theme of the gender roles in society. This shows to us that this may not be Hitchcock's view on how women should be treated but 'The Birds' clearly sets out to punish women.

In conclusion, from examining and focusing on three different films that are directed by Alfred Hitchcock, it is shown that he has challenged existing conventions. Hitchcock is named as the 'master of suspense' with his brilliant thrillers and was known as one of the greatest filmmakers. He has changed cinema back in the day for those who have watched his films and from now. Hitchcock knows exactly all the tricks to work his audience and still manages to scare and shock the audience who watches his films today. This is due to the visual conventions that were simply the impressions by the cinematic techniques of camera angles, lighting, sound, setting, and composition.

References

Adeyemi, N. (2010). Conventions of Horror - Psycho. [online] Available at: <http://nancydodger.blogspot.com/2010/01/conventions-of-horror-psycho-1960-by.html> <https://ufilmanalysisfall13.wordpress.com/2013/10/18/style-and-convention-breaking-in-psycho/> [Accessed 18 Oct. 2018].

Borgus.com. (n.d.). Film Techniques of Alfred Hitchcock - suspense, camera angles, style, editing, basics. [online] Available at: <http://borgus.com/hitch/hitch2011.htm> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

Brooks, X. (2012). My favourite Hitchcock: The Birds. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/jul/31/my-favourite-hitchcock-the-birds> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

Deutelbaum, M. and Poague, L. (2009). A Hitchcock Reader.

Elementsofcinema.com. (n.d.). The Kuleshov Experiment I Basics of Film Editing. [online] Available at: <http://www.elementsofcinema.com/editing/kuleshov-effect.html> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

En.wikipedia.org. (n.d.). Psycho (1960 film). [online] Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho_\(1960_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho_(1960_film)) [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

Filmsite.org. (n.d.). Psycho (1960). [online] Available at: <http://www.filmsite.org/psyc.html> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2018].

Gleiberman, O. (2009). 'Psycho': The horror movie that changed the genre. [online] EW.com. Available at: <https://ew.com/article/2009/08/04/psycho-the-horror-movie-that-changed-the-genre/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

Horton, H. (2017). The Pure Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock. [online] Film School Rejects. Available at: <https://filmschoolrejects.com/the-pure-cinema-of-alfred-hitchcock-7159dea78af/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].

Miller, M. (1980). We Need Alfred Hitchcock More than Ever. [online] The New Republic. Available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/114279/alfred-hitchcocks-hidden-genius-greatest-artist-century> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2018].

Morrow, J. (2014). How Hitchcock Used Editing to Turn 'Rear Window' into a Masterpiece of Visual Storytelling. [online] No Film School. Available at: <https://nofilmschool.com/2014/07/alfred-hitchcock-editing-rear-window-kuleshov-effect> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2018].

Renee, V. (2013). Pudovkin's Montage: 5 Editing Techniques That Speak Louder Than Words. [online] No Film School. Available at: <https://nofilmschool.com/2013/10/pudovkin-montage-5-editing-techniques> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2018].

Renee, V. (2016). The Cinematic Tools Alfred Hitchcock Used to Toy with Your Emotions. [online] No Film School. Available at: <https://nofilmschool.com/2016/03/cinematic-tools-alfred-hitchcock-used-toy-emotions> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2018].

Spoto, D. (2010). The Art of Alfred Hitchcock Fifty Years of his Motion Pictures. New York: Knopf.

Thompson, R. (2017). The Birds (1963) Analysis. [online] Celluloid Cinema. Available at: <http://www.celluloidcinema.com/post/the-birds> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2018].