

Daniel Phillips 1802581

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Tutor – Robert Jones

In this study, I shall be looking into the depths of the directing style of Sir Alfred Hitchcock in parts of his unique portfolio and how they have left a lasting impact on cinema history. I will be exploring several pieces of his work and how they are all connected by what we see as the audience and the words to describe what he hoped to accomplish by Hitchcock himself and how his style progressed through out his long tenure as one of cinemas greatest film makers and the origins to his iconic techniques.

Conversationalist

Looking at several of his films, it is clear that Alfred knew how to keep the audience captivated in the drama unwinding on screen. He creates the clever situations that are constantly being discussed amongst the characters on screen and its almost as if he wants the viewer to be a part of it. In his 1948 film *Rope*, we witness two men murder a man via strangulation with a piece of rope and then hide the corpse inside of a cabinet. The murder takes place within the first five minutes of the film and yet it's not the centre point of the films plot, the plot merely revolves around the perpetrators trying to successfully succeed as alpha males by killing with absolute discretion and ultimately committing a perfect murder regardless of how well the initial killing was carried out in the first place, the same can also be said for his 1954 film *Rear Window*, where James Stewart plays an injured photographer recovering in his home from a broken leg and believes one of his neighbours, Lars, has committed murder and constantly watches him from his window throughout the day. We see Stewarts character Jeff and his girlfriend Lisa (Grace Kelly) trying to decipher everything they are witnessing and discussing any possibility of outcome over the suspects suspicious behaviour. Unlike *rope*, we do not see the murder take place, however, we do see Jeff overhear a scream coming from across the building which can only suggest that was the point the killing took place as we won't hear a confession until near the end of the film. The true horror aspect in these films is what you don't see but you are able to use your imagination to fill in the gaps of what has likely taken place off-screen which makes the audience want to know what's happened and ultimately keep them guessing until the film reaches its end.



James Stewart as Jeff in Rear Window 1959

Another example similar to this can be seen in *Psycho* when Marion and Norman are discussing Norman's mother. As a first-time viewer, we of course don't know that Norman is the film's antagonist as we have only recently met him and are only now getting to know him and the troublesome and double-sided relationship he has with his mother and only see the ugly side of the life of Norman Bates through audio and a point of view short as opposed to seeing it first person and collapsing all matter of suspense leading up to the film's revelation. It's one of the film's most strongest moments in terms of suspense, we get a peak into the type of person Norman really is and it's so evident when watching for a second time as we are now aware of what he is and why his polite and cheerful behaviour is abandoned when the mother figure is at all threatened, almost as if Hitchcock wanted there to be a barrier between the two characters being played by one person. The defence mechanism makes things all the more uncomfortable, particularly when we see him switching back and forth between moods within a matter of seconds, which at first can be misinterpreted as anger management issues as opposed to a form of identity disorder that cannot be controlled. This conversation is arguably scarier than the iconic shower scene purely because of how we are now aware that the character is of fragile mind and somewhat unstable, it's by far more frightening when watching it again as at first we are not meant to think that the murderer is Norman as he himself is repulsed by her.

"I don't hate her. I hate what she's become, I hate the illness." (Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates, *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).

Trepidation

It is visible throughout his work that Hitchcock wants his protagonists to be ruled by fear, and use their anxiety to somewhat their advantage. In his 1958 film *Vertigo*, James Stewart portrays John, a retired policeman who is suffering from acrophobia, the fear of heights. In the opening sequence he is chasing a felon along rooftops with fellow officers and loses his footing and slips down the roof almost plummeting to his death, frozen by the terror he can't pull himself up and another officer attempts to aid him but ultimately falls trying to save him. Throughout the rest of the film we see John trying to overcome his fear of heights despite him not allowing it to consume his life, although visibly we can see this is clearly one of his biggest phobias, the real phobia is him failing as an officer of the law/civil servant, which could imply that he is suffering from PTSD due to what happened on the roof, or that his true phobia is atychiphobia brought on by a combination of other phobias. Hitchcock cleverly picked one of the more common fears that many members of any audience watching the film could relate to, the same can also be said for atychiphobia, as many people suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder as well as being a complete perfectionist in every way. Further examples of fear amongst main characters in Hitchcock's films span from characters such as Phillip in *'Rope'* who is constantly paranoid about him and Brandon getting caught for the murder. Charlie in *'Shadow of a doubt'* consistently trying to evade identification by authorities so much so that he refuses to have photographs taken of him.

Hitchcock was asked many times in interviews what he himself was afraid of, to which he stated that he was afraid of the police and had been since a very early age. In an interview with Dick Cavett regarding his phobia, Hitchcock went further in further detail about his fear; **"I was placed in a cell for five minutes. Psychiatrists say, if you can trace the origin of your fear, it will disappear. The**

whole thing is a confounded lie because I still have it. It has never left me.” – Alfred Hitchcock on the Dick Cavett show, 08/06/72.

This particular phobia that he mentions can be seen in ‘Psycho’, in which Janet Leigh’s character Marion, is fleeing town with stolen money and is approached by a highway police officer when she has fallen asleep in the car on the side of a road. Given that Marion is in the possession of forty thousand dollars that does not belong to her, she has every right to be afraid as she is merely a few hairs away from being caught. The same can also be said for his 1935 film ‘39 Steps’, where we see Richard Hannay being chased by police from London to Scotland for a murder he is not responsible for. The final moments of the film entail Hannay being detained by private agents posing as Officers, his greatest enemy disguised as another, whilst also being surrounded by dozens of other officers which pose the greatest threat to him speaking the truth. This can simultaneously be found in North by Northwest in which Cary Grant plays a man mistaken for being a spy and ultimately being hunted across America by both spies and law enforcement, both posing and equal threat.



The silhouette of Anthony Perkins, playing Norman Bates/Mother in Psycho, 1960

Purity

Hitchcock notoriously stated that actors are “Merely cattle” indicating that he believed the actors were not meant to do what they wanted to do but to only take direction from the director and the director only. In a 1960 interview with Robert Robinson on the programme Picture Parade, Hitchcock was asked by Robinson whether he would at all consider the possibility of acting, to which he responded with “Nothing so low as that.”

Suspense is another word that I would indisputably associate with Hitchcock as there are many times throughout his career that he has been noted for his masterful technique of using suspense over shock. Ironically Psycho was his first film that experimented primarily with the use of shock over the traditional suspense and it remains one of his more favoured films.

Hitchcock was very lenient on noise being used only when needed, he felt the same with regards to violence as he strongly felt that it should only be used to drive the plot forward considering he started his film career as director during the silent film era and ultimately had to move with the times in order to stay relevant in the industry. I would imagine if he were alive today it would be possible that he would avoid the use of digital along with any form of use of computer generated imagery. His strong feelings on noise are undeniably visible in the crop duster scene in north by north west where as a first-time viewer we have no idea what Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is in for and the tension becomes more uncomfortable for the viewer by the second.

The scene revolves around Roger going to a country road to speak with George Kaplan, the man he has supposedly been mistaken for. This particular part of the film is where the audience feels most involved, we're finally going to have a one on one between Thornhill and Kaplan and hopefully have the misunderstanding explained and resolved but we get everything but. Much like his other films it's so easy to understand the motivation for the scene. Thornhill has been instructed by a foe to meet in an open yet secluded area, this can only mean that "Kaplan" doesn't want to meet publicly and can deal with Thornhill privately and swiftly without worrying to much about potential witnesses. We see the crop duster at the beginning of the scene, so we and Thornhill are both witnessing the threat without realising it. The shots of Cary Grant pacing back and forth along the road with an impatient and anxious look is identical as to what we the audience are feeling for both his safety and as to what might or might not happen in the next few minutes, carefully playing on everyone's minds. Once we finally get an encounter of what might be the man Thornhill is waiting for, is proven to be false as he is merely a man waiting for a bus. The stern and long glares from both men raise even further suspicion as to whether or not the man is threat or simply just there at the wrong time, all matter of this is suppressed once we and Thornhill are given the truth that he is in fact the wrong man but only to be shifted on to something more unsettling, the plane.

"That's funny. That planes dusting crops where there ain't no crops." – Malcolm Atterbury as 'Man at crossroads' uncredited role, North by Northwest, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1959.

The scene lasts for almost ten minutes, with the action only take place halfway through, it further emphasises on Hitchcock's rule of suspense over shock. Granted, a crop duster firing bullets at you, contributes to a moment of surprise, however it would only be classified as pure shock if the plane just appeared on screen from no where as opposed to it being there the entire time and striking at the right moment.



Cary Grant as Roger Thornhill being chased by a crop duster in 'North by Northwest',

The very same analogy is used in his interviews with the topic of the bomb exploding in his 1936 film 'Sabotage' which still holds relevancy in cinema. Hitchcock stated at an AFI seminar that;

"A bomb goes off and all the people are blown to smithereens, what do the audience have? Ten seconds of shock. Now take the same scene, but tell the audience there is bomb under that table and will go off in five minutes. The whole emotion of the audience is different because you've given them that information." - Alfred Hitchcock on mastering cinematic tension – Uploaded 12/12/08.

That summarisation of the two possibilities of how the scene could have gone show which outcome would be preferable for keeping an audience interested, as being aware is worse than not knowing at all as we continue as normal and suddenly are surprised by such an expected occurrence. That alone is what makes pure cinema and I would wish to go a step further and discuss what other techniques make Alfred Hitchcock one of the greatest directors in film history. I have watched several of Hitchcock's films for many years and there are still plenty that I haven't seen and wish to view, it has become quite clear that his techniques are still of relevancy in the film industry today as several other directors pay homage to both him and other directors who have left their mark in cinema which is what leads me to my dissertation question;

The question that I hope to answer near in the future as I still wish to further explore the depths of his work and possibly make comparison to films that have failed in trying to be both suspenseful and character driven to the best of their ability is;

"How do the techniques of Sir Alfred Hitchcock, make good cinema?"

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