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Film Essay on *Rear Window* and *12 Angry Men*

On the material level of film, camera work is a very important part that plays many roles in defining a shot. Camera angle, height, distance, movement, and different lens types work together to create different emotions in film. In “12 Angry Men,” we see the use of a wide-angle, panoramic view that is derived from the director Sidney Lumet’s unique perspective from his previous television works and career. Television directly affects films because of directors like Lumet who started on TV, and who have decided to use fewer cuts and more movements in their work. This preference for the movement of the camera as opposed to cuts stems from its necessity in a live TV set. Camera panning lets an audience see and follow the action of a scene, instead of using cuts which would simply show one shot immediately after another. Not only does using a panning method work well to follow action in film, but it simultaneously works to draw out scenes, whereas the use of fades or dissolves make scenes look as if time had passed.

In “12 Angry Men,” we see the camera distance start out farther away. This is because the audience at the beginning of the film does not know about any of these men on the jury. Not only does the audience not feel any emotional or reasonable connection when the characters are first introduced, but the characters themselves are not fully developed and many of them go back and forth between declaring the suspect guilty or not guilty. This farther camera distance helps the audience take in the setting, which in this film revolves around one stuffy and sweltering room,

and this distance illuminates the idea that we only know merely the surface of each man. As the film goes on, the camera distance starts to come in closer to characters as we get to know their background and opinions and see their emotions through close-ups, where the audience is able to read a character's face better. Close-ups in this film also indicate when a character is in deep thought about his own decisions regarding the evidence on this case. Because we get a spatial confinement of the one jury room, filmmakers had to get creative with camera placement and canted camera work to make each shot mean something. Camera angles are a big part of this film because of the progression and changing mindsets of each man. When the film starts, the camera work seems to remain above eye level, where the audience is able to take in the scene of the room and the weather outside of the windows. As the film goes on and tensions rise, (and temperatures rise as well) we see more variation in this camera level. The audience is able to see high, low, and eye-level camera angles. A portion of this film is shot at eye level, which closes in on each character and gives audiences their own seat at the crowded and tense table, to analyze them and watch their emotions. With each progression of the film, the claustrophobia and heat become more overwhelming, and there is no break from this until tensions seem to subside. Subtle changes to the environment like the fan suddenly switching on, and the rain starting up, indicate personal conflicts and changes of the group from verdicts of guilty to not guilty. The final shots of this film are wide-angle shots that physically and metaphorically free the jurors from their tension-filled room, and ease audiences from the same feelings. For such a small setting, one has to get comfortable showcasing emotion, tension, relief, fear, unease, and conflicting views through camera work.

In "Rear Window" we see camera work in long tracking shots that pan across various windows. Director and auteur Alfred Hitchcock sets up the whole setting within the opening

scenes of the film before we are introduced to any characters. Audiences are watching through the view of photographer and protagonist Jeff who sports a leg cast and is stuck in his apartment with one view, the seemingly mundane world of his neighbors in a heat spell which causes them each to have their windows drawn open (with the exception of a honeymooning couple who relish in their privacy). The audience plays a fun role in this film, as we fight through emotions of guilt and embarrassment because of this unique point of view camera work. Similar to “12 Angry Men,” we meet the characters throughout the film, understanding their emotions through close-ups when our main character Jeff spies on them more closely through his camera lens. First viewing the characters with his eyes, and then his binoculars when things start to catch his attention, to finally a telephoto lens when the plot thickens and he suspects one person of murder. Each of these brings a little more clarity, and therefore more emotion through close-ups, to his neighbors. The confinement of space and experimental POV in this film make for an interesting set of scenes that pan across his vision. This limited confinement due to Jeff’s broken leg also adds to the conflict when he cannot stop Grace from breaking into the presumed murderer’s house. Another important conflict that the confinement of space includes, is the scene where Mr. Thorwald traps Jeff in his room, where he is unable to escape due to his broken leg. Audiences feel the tension that arises from this claustrophobic scene and the confinement works to add dimension to the film that would otherwise not be present.

Through Jeff’s unique point of view, each neighbor’s window becomes his own (and as the audience, our own) shows, with TV-like characters. What Hitchcock does in this film is embrace a filmmaking challenge and use subjective camera work to implicate the audience. Voyeurism in this movie becomes an ethical question (for Jeff and the audience) of whether it is alright to spy on people, and if it is acceptable when a potential crime has been committed in order to catch the

criminal. This vulnerability of moral questioning coupled with a space of confinement and Jeff's inability to escape work to make audiences feel uneasy, and overwhelmed with suspense.

In "12 Angry Men," camera work and confinement of space, along with extreme weather and strong personalities keep the audience curious for the outcome of the jury. Emotions are displayed through the level or skewed camera work, and distance from the camera. Audiences feel tension and unrest because of the confinement and stress of it all. In "Rear Window," camera work and confinement of space, along with murder, red herrings, and constant suspense keep the audience on the edge of their seats, nervous about the clues and close-cut instances with a killer. Different shots work to illuminate each character's secrets and create voyeurs out of the audience, whether they want to become voyeurs or not. Both films use camera angles, lens lengths, and confinement of space to create art and very interesting films!