

February 2014

“The Hitchcock Touch”: Visual Techniques in the Work of Alfred Hitchcock

Paige A. Driscoll

Bowling Green State University, paigead@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/irj>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [International and Area Studies Commons](#)

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Recommended Citation

Driscoll, Paige A. (2014) "“The Hitchcock Touch”: Visual Techniques in the Work of Alfred Hitchcock," *International ResearchScape Journal*: Vol. 1, Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/irj.01.01.04>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/irj/vol1/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in International ResearchScape Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

“The Hitchcock Touch”: Visual Techniques in the Work of Alfred Hitchcock

Paige A. Driscoll

ABSTRACT

Since his beginning as a filmmaker in Britain, Alfred Hitchcock has become a household name not only in Britain and, later, the United States, but also internationally. Hitchcock’s unique auteur style has made his name recognizable even if one has not personally viewed one of his many films. How is it, then, that Hitchcock has accumulated such a distinct and well-known style? Using examples from his films, the research of other Hitchcock experts, and cinematic technique and terminology resources, this article illustrates the way Hitchcock’s visual techniques have contributed to the creation of this auteur style. The visual techniques examined include lighting, camera movement, and visual story-telling technique, each demonstrated using specific examples from one or more of Hitchcock’s films. While Hitchcock’s audiences may be diverse in spoken and cultural language, visual communication is universal. The visual techniques Hitchcock employed are what made him the internationally recognized auteur that he is credited as today.

“I think, to me, the great art of the motion picture is by means of imagery and montage to create an emotion in the audience...”

--Alfred Hitchcock (qtd. in LaValley 25)

“It’s amazing when it comes to Hitchcock how often people will point out specific shots that left an impression on them,” writes producer Laurent Bouzereau (130). Alfred Hitchcock became a household name through his directing of over fifty films. Whether a person has seen a single one of these films or not, it is highly likely that the name “Hitchcock” is familiar to him/her. People will hear references to his work in conversation, such as in a comparison to another work or a situation (how many of us have not heard the title of *The Birds* [1963] dropped in the presence of a myriad of seagulls or pigeons?). Filmmakers will look to him for inspiration, students will study him not only from a film perspective, but also a cultural perspective-- he holds his cultural cache for many reasons. But what exactly is it that made Hitchcock so well known? Many will point to his signature style or, “The Hitchcock Touch” (126). Across his body of work-- from his early British films to his late American films-- Hitchcock has produced a style individual

compared to other directors. What is it about this style that is individual? And how has this individual style made him such a distinct international influence?

This question can be answered in many ways with many different aspects of his films; however, one of the most prominent aspects that makes up the Hitchcock signature style is his use of visual techniques. When watching a Hitchcock film, the audience is seeing things in ways that they are not likely to see them in other films. Hitchcock's use of lighting and camera perspective stand out in particular in setting his films apart from others. Attributes like low-key and edge lighting create mood. Odd angles and voyeuristic perspectives and themes place the audience members in a place they don't normally find themselves and alert them of what they may not have noticed otherwise. The techniques we will examine are ones that manipulate the way the audience sees Hitchcock's fictional worlds and create the suspense that he is known and admired for internationally.

It is important to note that, even with the extensive number of people collaborating to create any film, Hitchcock does take a large amount of responsibility for the visual techniques used in his films. As Bouzereau writes, "Hitchcock's philosophy about filmmaking made the director central to every aspect of a given film" (129). This may be hard to believe at first, considering the fact that Hitchcock rarely looked through the camera; however, as he states in an interview with several producers, "Looking through the camera has nothing to do with it at all. It's the rectangle where the composition arrives. I would say, if I looked through a camera, having asked for a certain composition of a given set-up, it would be as though I distrusted the cameraman and he was a liar, and I'm testing him out" (qtd. in LaValley 24). He trusted his

director of photography to capture what he was asking for (likely due to the fact that he often stuck to the same cinematographers for long periods of time), but also worked very closely with him, conversing with him often and always on set working with them to put his own vision into motion (Bouzereau 130). Although films, like other forms of artistic practice (e.g., theatre) are always a collaborative work, it is the vision and desires of the director that everyone is collaborating together to put onto the screen. Hitchcock ensured that everyone was, indeed, working towards this point. Art designer Robert Boyle, who worked with Hitchcock on several films, recalls,

Hitchcock was such a wonderful communicator. He said what he wanted and he drew rough sketches. And then, he'd just scribble all over it. He would say I want the smoke to come in like that. Of all the directors I had worked with up to that point, this was the first time that someone not only told me what they wanted but showed it to me as well. (qtd. in Bouzereau 129)

Furthermore, Hitchcock was not without knowledge of how the cameras and lighting worked.

When asked in an interview how he achieved the filming of the carousel sequence in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), he was able to give a detailed and thorough description of the process:

For rear-projection shooting there is a screen and behind it is an enormous projector throwing an image on the screen. On the studio floor is a narrow white line right in line with the projector lens and the lens of the camera must be right on that white line. That camera is not photographing the screen and what's on it, it is photographing light in certain colors, therefore the lens must be level and in line with the projection lens. (qtd. in LaValley 30).

It is safe to say, then, that while Hitchcock's techniques and films are not and could not be entirely his own work, he has enough influence and knowledge to classify these techniques as part of his own style.

To begin, it is appropriate to look at the basis of vision: light. In all of Hitchcock's films, lighting is used deliberately to many effects (while this is the case with any film or even form of

visual media, we will see later on that it is a combination of this and other visual techniques that creates Hitchcock's signature). As Robert Boyle states, Hitchcock took great pleasure in having "control over the light" when working on set, or, in other words, having the ability that film and photography gives one to manipulate the lightness, darkness, and even colors that illuminate and set the mood of a scene (qtd. in Bouzereau 129). It is not precisely the lighting that makes this technique useful and important, however. It is, rather, the darkness that the lighting casts: "Hitchcock does wonderful things with light, or lack of it" (Bouzereau 139). Using darkness in visual mediums allows the artist to use many techniques to manipulate the audience's viewing perspective. Often darkness will be used to set a mood. Where sunlight "epitomizes light and openness," darkness is "concealing, and has overtones of mystery or treachery" (Millerson 247). The darkness in low-key lighting creates similar tones, conveying a "heavy, tragic quality," or again tones of mystery and the sinister (239). Dark backgrounds can give a "closed-in effect" (250). Darkness allows the creator to "prevent the audience from seeing the surroundings clearly," to "hide information" from the audience, "to intrigue," "to mystify," "to enhance" certain objects or characters, or to "threaten [or] create surroundings in which danger may lurk" (260, 261). Shadows as well can be used to great effect, creating environmental effects, but also often feelings of either comfort or unease (253). Through Hitchcock's entire body of work, one can see these concepts and techniques being applied, often liberally, and often to great effect.

Hitchcock employs lighting often in a way that not only instills feelings in his audience, but also implies important information about the characters in the film. *Strangers on a Train* shows many instances of strong usage of lighting, many techniques being used with many different purposes. In the very beginning of the film, lighting is used to show the contrast between Guy

and Bruno. As the two sit in the train compartment, a combination of shadows and edge lighting is used to create an interesting effect. Edge lighting is an effect used to “[throw details] into sharp relief” (Millerson 70). In this particular scene, the shadows cast from edge lighting on the venetian blinds on the window of the compartment cast bar-like shadows across Bruno’s face. While this could simply be seen as an aesthetically-interesting effect, it becomes something more when the viewer sees that these shadows are not cast upon Guy. If we think of these bars of shadow and consider them similar to jail cell bars, and compare the fact that they are cast upon Bruno’s face and not Guy’s, then we can infer very early on that Bruno is a character not to be trusted and Guy is of a much more stand-up personality. We see, as the film progresses, that this is true of each character. Where Guy acts to alert Bruno’s father of his son’s plans to murder him, Bruno arrives at Guy’s house unannounced, commits the murder of Miriam without ever getting true consent from Guy, again appears at a party of Guy’s uninvited and unannounced, and even acts out the murder that he committed during that party. Furthermore, this lighting emphasizes the moral connotations of imprisonment relatable to Bruno-- specifically, the inability to escape one’s wrongdoings (Bruno is punished in the end for his crimes in the most permanent of ways when the carousel accident takes his life). It can be inferred safely then that this lighting technique was deliberate, and not a simple fluke.

Lighting is used again with metaphorical intentions several times in *Strangers on a Train*. In the scene in which Bruno comes to tell Guy about the murder of Guy’s wife, dually literal and figurative contrast between light and dark comes into play. Consider that darkness often represents evil, and that light represents good. Bruno calls to Guy from the shadows, and Guy leaves his lit house. When speaking to Bruno, Guy stands underneath the light coming from the

street-lamp while Bruno stays in the shadows. Guy is coming from a good, morally virtuous world, and tries to stay in it while Bruno is attempting to draw him into his “evil” plan. It is not until the police show up that Guy finally draws into the shadows with Bruno-- perhaps showing a slight wavering in his “good”ness. However, when Guy finally decides he wants nothing to do with Bruno, he storms back into his lit house, leaving Bruno in the shadows. Though this is one of the most basic of metaphors, it produces a strong effect-- not only for his technically-literate audience members, but also the mainstream, everyday viewers. With the contrast of good and evil between Guy and Bruno being such a prominent element of the story, it makes sense that the lighting of the film would follow suit and help the audience see this contrast in a visual way.

Where *Strangers on a Train*-- a black-and-white film-- uses lighting techniques in the contrast of light and dark, *Vertigo* (1958), being a later work, is able to use color lighting techniques to manipulate the audience’s experience. One scene in particular stands out in its usage of color lighting. As Madeleine (or Judy) exits the bathroom upon her transformation, she is initially bathed in a white, almost heavenly light. This lighting shows us Scottie’s impression of her. She is now what he has long been waiting for, almost like an angel come from above (or perhaps even a ghost resurrected from the dead). And yet as she enters the room, the lighting changes. The two are bathed in a green light, much different from any lighting in previous scenes. As Millerson states, “we may *deliberately* introduce errors in color quality” to produce certain effects (42). This is most likely one of the intentions in using green light on this scene. The effect created is one of the paranormal. In casting the scene in an abnormal light (one of a color often associated with images along the lines of aliens), the audience is alerted to the abnormality of the scene-- how strange Scottie’s need for this woman to be someone else is, and how strange

her compliance is. It also emphasizes the paranormal aspect of Madeleine's "resurrection"-- the way that Scottie, as well as the audience, does not yet have any evidence that this look-alike is not the woman he loved risen from the grave. Green is also the color associated with envy.

While it is a stretch, it could be said that Scottie is envious of the fact that this woman will never truly be the Madeleine he fell in love with. The audience not only sees more information about the characters, but also the lighting in this scene creates an unsettling mood for Hitchcock's spectators. When a color filter is placed on lighting so strongly, it is rarely taken easily by an audience simply because it is not what they are used to seeing. This mood is, of course, heightened by the use of low-key lighting-- a technique in which "black areas predominate in the picture" that, like stated earlier, creates "overtones of mystery, and the sinister" (239). Had the lighting not been so deliberate and forceful, the audience would probably still understand this tone and the characters through the previous storyline; however, with the addition of the lighting techniques, the effect is far more powerful and the sense of unease much stronger. This is often the goal of casting colored light upon a scene: "to express emotional states or to create sensations [...] [that have] not always been recognized" (Ward 78). The eeriness and lack of normalcy that the relationship between Scottie and "Madeleine" provides is supported by the lighting and vice versa, creating a doubly powerful effect on the audience's viewing experience.

Another technique that is particularly "Hitchcockian" is the use of "spider web" shadows-- not literally shadows cast by spider webs, but rather shadows cast by surrounding objects that create a strange and unsettling pattern, much like a web. This lighting technique is used to a strong effect in several of his works. Two scenes in particular stand out due to their similarity-- one in *Suspicion* (1941), the other in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). In *Suspicion*, we see this effect used

briefly as Johnnie ascends the staircase, carrying with him a tray upon which sits a glass of milk which we know (or suspect) from Lina's suspicions may be poisoned. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, a very similar pattern of shadows is cast upon Uncle Charlie as he (again) ascends the stairs in pursuit of the younger Charlie. These are both uses of *abstract shadows*, which are shadows used for "dramatic, decorative, and environmental effect" (as opposed to *atmospheric shadows*, which are used to draw attention to objects not in view) (252). In both cases, the shadows are used to heighten the sense of unease in the audience. The visual of each villain ascending a staircase could also imply deeper meaning-- perhaps the rising of the storyline to a climax, or the rising power of the villain over the helpless woman that awaits him on the upper level. The feelings of anxiety and mistrust that Lina and younger Charlie feel are instilled in the audience through not only the story, but also the visuals. The shadows, much more prominent than usual, are unsettling simply in this abnormal-ness, yet also in their distant reference to a spider web, accompanied by the impending doom of the spider ascending the stairs to meet its entangled prey. As the viewers' brains relate these images, the feelings associated follow accordingly.

Shadow of a Doubt also exemplifies another technique Hitchcock used in the area of lighting: contrast between high-key and low-key lighting. High-key lighting is a technique in which "mid-gray to white tones predominate in the picture [and create] a feeling of lightness, and cheerfulness," while low-key emphasizes shadows and again creates impressions of "mystery" and "treachery" (Millerson 239). While Hitchcock's use of low-key lighting is very noticeable in creating the "master of suspense's" dark scenes, high-key lighting is also used to important effect. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, high-key and low-key lighting are used to show contrast and create mood. Once Uncle Charlie's criminal record and evil intentions are revealed, low-key

lighting is used to assist other visual effects in creating that suspenseful mood; however, the intensity of this mood comes in part from the earlier lighting. In the early scenes of the film where we see the family as occupying just another average household, high-key lighting is used in the majority of the scenes. It is only when the plot starts taking a dark twist that shadows begin to creep in (both literally and figuratively). Here again, lighting is used to show a transition in the story and to create more intense feelings in the audience: the darker the visuals, the darker the emotions instilled in the viewers.

In *Rear Window* (1954), lighting is used again to convey deeper meaning to the audience, but this time in a very literal sense. Lighting is used to represent knowing: when the people in neighboring apartments have their lights on and shades open, the audience and Jefferies are able to see them and what they are doing. When they have their lights off or are in silhouette, Jefferies, as well as the audience, cannot know. Here, Hitchcock is using light in an incredibly simple and literal way, yet the film would certainly suffer without it: this idea of knowing versus unknowing would still be present within the diegesis, but the visual representation makes this theme much clearer to the audience and gives them a better understanding of what the characters in the film are feeling and experiencing.

It is hard to say whether foreign filmmakers using the same lighting techniques are taking them as an inspiration from Hitchcock or not, considering the fact that these different techniques are so widely used to similar effects. It is interesting, however, to consider the opposite: how the development of Hitchcock's lighting techniques might have been influenced by lighting techniques that were already at work in other national film traditions. Many of the described

lighting techniques are direct references to a film movement that took place directly before Hitchcock began directing films: the German Expressionist movement. This movement, taking place in Germany from around 1919 to 1929, turned the focus of films onto the psychology of characters, taking a far more formalist approach than the films preceding the movement. The result of their attempts to visually portray the inner workings of the human mind and soul is a highly stylized body of work. Films such as the canonical *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1919), directed by Fritz Lang, use surreal mise-en-scène and dramatic lighting techniques in order to portray something to the audience that cannot normally be seen (Cook). Hitchcock takes inspiration from the German Expressionist movement in many ways, particularly in his lighting techniques. The darkness used in *Strangers on a Train* and the webs created in *Suspicion* and *Shadow of a Doubt* are a way of creating a German Expressionist-style mise-en-scène. German Expressionist filmmakers often aimed to make their sets seem someone surreal in order to convey the inner workings of the characters' minds, and this often produced a stylized, somewhat disturbing image: the web shadows that Hitchcock uses would have fit perfectly into any German Expressionist film, giving an unsettling feeling and providing a visual insight into the minds of his characters. The low-key lighting in *Shadow of a Doubt* relates to the low-key lighting often used by the German filmmakers (Hitchcock's extension of this technique, using high-key lighting, would not be as effective had these ideas about low-key lighting not already been put in place by the German filmmakers). Hitchcock's use of color is also an extension of the German Expressionists' use of surreal mise-en-scène, creating a strange atmosphere in order to communicate something about the character's psychology to the audience. The German Expressionist movement is what Hitchcock's work is most often compared to in historical

analyses of his work, and lighting is one of the key similarities that he and the German Expressionists share.

Without his liberal and purposeful use of lighting techniques, Hitchcock's work would certainly not create the same experience for his audience. And yet, does that make him different from other directors? Plenty of filmmakers know and use these techniques; however, it is the combination and extensive use that makes Hitchcock stand out. It is also that these lighting techniques do not stand alone in creating the visual experience that is a Hitchcock film.

Perhaps one of the most key visual techniques Hitchcock uses (in addition to lighting) that makes his work "signature" is his use and manipulation of perception through perspective-- that is, how he manipulates what his audience perceives from the film from what he shows them and how he shows it to them. Hitchcock is able to manipulate his audience members in choosing what they see, what they don't see, where they are included into the same world as the characters in the film, where they are reminded of their exclusion from that world, and even the emotion that they feel (most often suspense and the rise and fall of tension). What makes this technique powerful, like other visual techniques such as lighting, is that the audience does not have to think about it in order for it to take effect on them. As film and television picture composition expert Peter Ward states, "perception is instantaneous and not subject to extended judgment. It is an active exploration rather than a passive recording of the visual elements in the field of view and is selective and personal" (9). When a certain scene or shot is considered outstanding or representative of Hitchcock's style, it is usually due to the perspective from which it is filmed-- the placement, movement, and/or angle of the camera. While this is, of course, the job of all film

directors, Hitchcock puts his own unique vision into each shot and creates perspectives and combinations of perspectives that are uniquely his own.

Perhaps one of the most well-known of these outstanding shots is the aerial shot of the staircase in *Vertigo*. With this shot, we see manipulation of mood and also the inclusion of the audience-- the audience is allowed, in effect, to see through Scottie's eyes and feel the dizziness and uneasiness that Scottie's vertigo causes him to feel. Combining track-out and zoom-in, Hitchcock creates a shot that "provides a visual approximation of a psychological condition -- extreme dizziness and disorientation -- that is afflicting one of the film's protagonists [...] [and] enhances audience identification with Scottie by providing information 'through his eyes' both physically and psychologically, carrying to new heights [Hitchcock's] point-of-view approach" (Sterritt 82). In the simple use of two two-second long shots, Hitchcock is able to make the audience feel not only Scottie's physical affliction, but also his anxiety in the moment when he fails to keep Madeleine safe and finally learns the truth.

While this well-known shot draws the audience into the story and lets them feel like they take part in the characters' experiences, Hitchcock has produced other well-known shots that do just the opposite. Take, for instance, the shot in *Strangers on a Train* during the murder of Miriam: while Hitchcock could have simply chosen to depict Bruno strangling Miriam in a shot of the two, he instead chooses to show it in the reflection in the lens of Miriam's discarded and broken glasses on the ground. In watching the event from a secondary view (as well as the self-reflexive mediation that sitting and watching things on a screen creates), the audience members are reminded of the fact that they are outsiders, and that they may not be truly able to fully

understand the intentions of a character or the implications of what is happening. At the same time, being only onlookers, the viewers are instilled with a sense of helplessness-- a further inability to stop the murder from happening (other than the fact that they are watching a film). This feeling of helplessness, in turn, creates the feelings of shock and fear that Hitchcock wishes to instill deeply within his audience. While this kind of shot is opposite from the stairway shot in letting the audience into the characters' minds, it is, however, the same in producing a very strong sense of feeling. As Hitchcock biographer Donald Spoto writes,

In the oddly appealing visual originality there is a stark fusion of the grotesque and the beautiful [...]. The aestheticizing of the horror somehow enables the audience to contemplate more fully its reality; instead of turning away from the image, repulsed, we gaze, and so are forced to assess feelings, reactions and moral judgments about the acts perceived. (196)

The viewers are not only given a sense of the horror of the murder, but are also forced to look at the emotions within themselves. The act of strangulation itself is ugly and disturbing-- something one would likely look away from if unable to prevent it. Yet the intrigue viewers feel upon seeing such an interesting perspective does not allow them to turn away, in fact only making them want to look closer. Once they look closer, they must then let the feelings created by Bruno's actions in and assess them. This visualization fulfills two purposes. First, it makes the audience members cultivate stronger feelings of distrust and disgust towards Bruno. Secondly, it forces them to feel more acutely the horror of witnessing a murder (and supplements this feeling of horror with feelings of disturbance when they cannot make themselves look away). Hitchcock has again produced a shot lasting only for a few seconds that produces a powerful amount of impact.

Shadow of a Doubt is another film in which Hitchcock uses perspective to manipulate what his audience perceives. Often in this film, he plays with what the audience sees versus what they do not see in order to give impressions of the characters, and also, again, to set a mood. In one of the earlier sequences following Uncle Charlie, this older Charlie makes an escape from two visitors he obviously does not want to see. As he exits the building and walks past the visitors, they begin to follow him, but he escapes. He is suddenly gone from the view of the camera (and more importantly, the audience). The camera follows the visitors as they search in vain, then finally pans left to find him on a nearby rooftop. As film critic David Sterritt, Ph.D., describes,

It is a clever escape, but also an unexplained one. There are two ways of accounting for Hitchcock's decision to rely on visual slight of hand rather than narrative logic at this point. One is his fondness for narrative swiftness at the beginning of a film. The other, more interesting explanation is that Uncle Charlie -- like many a character in many a Hitchcock film -- has access to cinematic resources not granted to others [...]. Neither [the director] nor his camera is in league with Uncle Charlie, but both recognize him as a driving force behind the film. (54)

This is an instance of Hitchcock hiding information from the audience. How Uncle Charlie managed the escape, nobody can tell. What the viewers can tell, however, is that Uncle Charlie is a deceptive character, and likely to be the cause for other mysterious events that may occur in the film. Hiding information is not the only technique Hitchcock uses to create this feeling of unease surrounding Uncle Charlie, however. In fact, he produces the same effect in doing the exact opposite: alerting the audience of events that other characters are unaware of.

As in many of his films, Hitchcock does this in showing certain visuals in parallel. The use of this technique occurs in *Shadow of a Doubt* many times surrounding Uncle Charlie and young Charlie. In one instance, we hear young Charlie saying "If I fold it carefully, he won't notice," as she puts her father's paper back together while at the same time seeing Uncle Charlie folding

the cut-out section and sliding it into his pocket so that she will not notice. Hitchcock shows these parallels and many others in order to produce a very clear “association of the two Charlies” and a “disturbing idea that they share a common humanity” (Spoto 121). This idea of a common humanity is disturbing because the actions of the protagonist and the antagonist-- good and evil-- are so closely related. People are made uncomfortable when the two entities begin to mix the way that young Charlie and Uncle Charlie do in this presentation. The same sort of parallel can be seen at the beginning of *Strangers on a Train*, as the audience sees Guy (good) and Bruno (evil) going through the same actions in the train station. When the dispositions of these characters are later revealed, the viewers look back on the scene and feel confused and disturbed by the early parallels between good and evil entities. This feeling is exactly what Hitchcock wants to create to make an impact on the viewers. Had the audience members been unaware of these parallels, they would likely not have made the connections and would not likely be instilled with the same feeling of tension and distress that the film creates.

Another instance of the important role of perspective occurs in *Rear Window*. Perhaps one of the more innovative and odd sets used in Hitchcock’s work, the entirety of the film is seen as if through the window of the protagonist. As we see the stories of the other people living in the apartments unfold, we see it all framed by their windows. This gives a strong feeling of being on the outside-- separate from the goings on of these people. And yet it is that almost constant feeling of exclusion that gives a certain shot its ability to have such a powerful and frightening impact. We have been viewing everything through Jefferies’ window and standing on the outskirts of the story until we are brought abruptly into the world of the film by a short and

simply choreographed shot. This occurs as Lisa is discovered by Thorwald in the act of searching his apartment. As Spoto describes,

When she gamely climbs into Thorwald's apartment, she finds his wife's wedding ring and slips it on her finger, proudly displaying it to Jeff as he watches through binoculars. But this gesture gives her away and endangers Jeff, for Thorwald notices what she's doing and glances from her finger to Jeff watching -- that is, straight out at us -- and this is the single most chilling moment of the film (at this point, a collective murmur is heard from the audience when *Rear Window* is screened). (221)

This sudden inclusion is what creates the sudden spike in tension the audience feels as the film begins to reach its climax. Had it not been contrasted by the feeling of being on the outside that carried through the rest of the film, the impact would not have been nearly as great. "*Rear Window*," Hitchcock stated to Spoto, "was structurally satisfactory because it is the epitome of subjective treatment. A man looks; he sees; he reacts. Thus you construct a mental process. *Rear Window* is entirely a mental process, done by the use of visual." This film, as well as all of Hitchcock's other works rely on just that: the visual. Without the use of perspective, this visual would not be nearly as impactful, and Hitchcock's signature would not be the same.

These techniques created to manipulate perspective can be found reflected in many different directors' work internationally. For example, these techniques (as well as others that will later be discussed) can be seen frequently in the works of French director Claude Chabrol and Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni: both successful directors who are known for their appreciation of and inspiration taken from Hitchcock's work. The films of these directors, though produced in different countries and different time periods, exhibit many of the same perspective techniques that were key to Hitchcock's signature style. The mirroring of Hitchcock's techniques in these filmmakers' work is no simple fluke either. Chabrol and Antonioni were producing films in an era described as the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, in turn. During these periods,

filmmakers began to develop the idea of the auteur, and Hitchcock (along with several other American Hollywood directors) was one of their most respected examples of a director with a strong auteurist style. Chabrol himself wrote several reviews of Hitchcock's auteur style in the popular film journal of the time, *Cahiers du cinema*. The filmmakers during these periods displayed a great amount of respect for these original auteurs, and looked toward them for inspiration for their own works. The inspiration taken from Hitchcock's work specifically is, with little question, clearly present in the works of these two filmmakers.

The *Vertigo* dolly-zoom, for example, (paralleled in countless films following its invention) can be seen in Chabrol's *La Femme infidèle* (1969). This film depicts the story of conflict between a husband, Charles, and an unfaithful wife, Hélène. The dolly zoom is used in the final shot of the film, as Charles is led away by the police and the structure of the already fragile family is permanently damaged:

We are placed subjectively (in effect) in Charles' position as he is led away, watching Hélène standing with her son Michel among the shrubs Charles had been pruning. As the camera moves back, the zoom-in towards Hélène slowly begins and gradually gains ascendancy over the pull backwards: the effect is that while the husband is *physically* led away he is *emotionally* reaching back towards wife and family. (qtd. in Boyd)

Here, a French filmmaker has taken a technique directly from Hitchcock to use in his own work. Though the effect is not the same, the technique would not exist had it not been pioneered by Hitchcock. Chabrol was one of the first to mirror this technique which would go on to be used in countless other filmmakers' work.

Another example of Hitchcock's perspective technique can be seen in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966). In a sequence reverent of the glasses-reflection shot in *Strangers on a Train*, Antonioni

uses a reflection to alter the perspective of the scene and make the viewers feel like outsiders, though in a slightly different way. The shot shows what is, apparently, a dead body but is actually the *reflection* of the body in Plexiglas. The audience is only made aware of the fact that they are seeing a reflection when another character in the film touches the Plexiglas, causing the image to vibrate. Though the reflection is presented in a different way than the image in *Strangers on a Train*, it has a very similar effect: the audience is forced to be intrigued by an image they would normally look away from because it is presented in such an interesting way. Antonioni and Chabrol's parallels to Hitchcock do not stop there, however. They and countless other directors also take inspiration from a more specific kind of manipulation of perspective that Hitchcock is well known for.

Certain camera perspective techniques that Hitchcock uses in his films create an important theme of voyeurism that is an essential element of his signature. Thomas Leitch is right in stating that "Hitchcock is fascinated with voyeurism from the very beginning of his career" (358). The trope of voyeurism is something apparent in many of Hitchcock's films, whether it be that the audience is seeing it happen or being the voyeur themselves.

In several films, Hitchcock uses a shot of a voyeur in the act to jar or disturb his audience. This can be seen in early films, such as *The 39 Steps* (1935). As Richard Hannay talks to the farmer's wife inside her house, the audience is suddenly alerted to the farmer's presence outside of the window. After a shot of him approaching the house, Hitchcock shows a shot of him peering into the window, the lighting and contrast causing an emphasis on his glaring eye. The image is disquieting in a way that few other types of shot can truly accomplish. The audience members

themselves can feel the eeriness of being watched from afar, because they are seeing this image in such a jarring and impactful way.

A similarly jarring sequence can be seen in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). As Marion undresses in her room, the viewer sees Norman push back a painting and begin to spy on her through a hole in the wall. While this image is disturbing enough, the perspectives that it is shot from increase this feeling. The audience is first given a view of Marion framed by the edges of the hole in the wall, as if they themselves are looking in on her. This shot is followed by an extreme close-up on Norman's eye looking through the same hole. What stands out again in this sequence is the image of a voyeuristic eye. As writer and film critic Béla Balázs states, "Close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances" (118). This is what is accomplished in this camera portrayal of Norman. The audience already has some understanding of his disturbed intentions; however, the feelings produced by seeing the action themselves and then watching him do it so closely increases the feeling. The discomfort brought on in the viewer by being a voyeur him/herself is then heightened by this close look at Norman's eye and into his unsettling personality. As Spoto writes, "the viewer of the picture is of two minds, and this Hitchcock establishes with a relentless exploitation of audience identification through point of view" (318). The viewers are both forced to identify with and to look upon the actions taking place: they see the action happening and, at the same time, are implicated in the voyeuristic gaze that Norman implies. In a sense, the audience is forced to also violate the sanctity of Marion's privacy.

As seen in this particular sequence, Hitchcock is able to give the audience the impression that they themselves are being watched (heightening the fear for the character who is being looked in upon), but is also able to use visual techniques to make the viewers feel that they themselves are the voyeur. As earlier discussed, *Rear Window* has this effect. The framing of each of the neighbors by their windows and the shots that appear to let the audience see through the lens that Jefferies uses give an intense impression that the audience is looking in on something taboo, yet something they cannot look away from. This perspective is also effective in increasing suspense: being an onlooker like Jefferies, the audience feels the same helplessness as they watch the murder committed across the courtyard through Thorwald's window. These feelings and types of shots can be paralleled to the shot earlier discussed in *Strangers in a Train*, when Miriam's death is shown in the reflection of her glasses: the audience is again watching something from afar that they are disturbed by, but cannot easily look away. At the same time, the particular feelings given by these two shots are not entirely the same. During the *Rear Window* murder, the audience is given the feeling of hopelessness, but also the feeling that they are looking at something not meant for their eyes (due to the earlier mentioned framing of the shot). In the *Strangers on a Train* murder, the audience again feels helpless, but also like they must not look away because the way that the shot is framed is at the same time beautiful and intriguing. Had either the *Rear Window* or the *Strangers on a Train* murders been shot from a simpler or direct perspective, the scenes would lack the same intense, mixed feelings of suspense, helplessness, and either intrigue or voyeuristic guilt that Hitchcock has created in order to manipulate the audience into the emotion-filled, memorable viewing experience that he wishes his films to be.

A similar phenomenon occurs in many shots that are not as often discussed as these famous instances. Often when panning across a scene, the camera will frame the scene in a way that gives the impression that the audience is looking in on something that they are not personally a part of. In these movements, the camera will glide behind staircase railings or just behind desks or tables, almost as if the viewer is peering over and between objects to see the scene unfolding behind them. In *Dial M for Murder* (1954), the camera glides behind the desk and arm chairs in the living room as Tony convinces Captain Swann to commit the murder of Tony's wife. In *Rope* (1948), the camera frequently passes behind the large chest in the center of the room (with a dead body inside) and behind the backs of the room's occupants (who are unaware). This feeling of looking in on something is often associated with an eerie feeling that the viewers are not welcome or that they have no control over the events they are seeing. This lack of welcoming into the world of the film creates a feeling of unease, and this lack of control creates a feeling of anxiety: more emotions Hitchcock manipulates the viewer into feeling, simply by showing them images in a certain way.

The theme of voyeurism is, of course, not something unexplored by other filmmakers; however, it is the constancy of-- some would even say obsession with-- this theme in Hitchcock's work that sets it apart from other director's work. Many directors may show shots of people watching others from afar, but few are able to capture the same jarring effect that Hitchcock's visuals produce. The voyeurism perspective is yet another visual technique that creates Hitchcock's signature style and is admired by many of the filmmakers following him.

These signature techniques can be seen, like Hitchcock's other perspective techniques, paralleled in the work of Chabrol and Antonioni. Like many other filmmakers, these two international directors were inspired by the ways that Hitchcock shows voyeurs and makes the viewers themselves feel like voyeurs and use techniques very similar to his to produce similar results in their own work.

In Chabrol's work, both kinds of Hitchcockian techniques are used to create shots where characters appear to step into their own point of view, giving the viewers the same voyeuristic view that they get in Hitchcock films. An example of this can be seen in *La Femme infidèle* (1969). A shot of a garden is shown in what appears to be H  l  ne's point of view as she is going there to burn a photo of the man she is having an affair with; however, H  l  ne then walks into the shot herself, meaning it could not be her point of view. Seeing as there are no other characters present in the scene, the effect on the audience is quite a jarring one: they are given the feeling, like in many Hitchcock films, that they are on the outside looking in on a dark scene that they are, perhaps, not meant to see.

Antonioni also explores voyeurism in his films in a way that is blatantly inspired by Hitchcock. One of his most used techniques is the same as that in *Rear Window*, *Dial M for Murder*, and *Rope*: framing the scenes or letting objects pass in front of the moving camera in order to give the audience the feeling that they are on the outside looking in. Examples of this can be seen in *Blow-Up*, including:

door frames that frequently delimit the space of his characters [...], the clear and smoke Plexiglas sheets in the photographer's studios, the windshield of the Rolls-Royce, the fence and trees used to conceal [the photographer's] surreptitious photography in the

park, the fence around the tennis court at the film's coda, and the wardrobe rack that comes between the protagonist and the teenyboppers. (Boyd 160)

All of these different images are examples of how Antonioni separates his audience from the image in the same way that Hitchcock does, whether is it through framing, reflection, or simply having objects pass through the audience's line of sight. When watching Antonioni's films, the audience is given the same strange feelings that they are given by Hitchcock's films.

It is not any of these techniques individually but rather Hitchcock's combined use of them that makes his films "signature," and makes them such an inspiration to other filmmakers. It is the combination of deliberate lighting and carefully orchestrated camera angle perspectives that gives the audience the feelings associated with his work: the anxiety as Johnnie (surrounded by shadows) brings the potentially poisoned glass of milk to Lina, the dizziness and terror as Scottie glances down the staircase, the feelings of watching and being watched in *Rear Window* and so on. The "master of suspense" creates these chilling feelings in ways that other directors do not: when the solution to a shot is easily done with a clichéd angle or lighting set-up, Hitchcock says, "I won't do it that way" (qtd. in LaValley 23): instead of putting Cary Grant's character in *North by Northwest* in danger by showing him "under the street lamp at night in a pool of light, waiting, very sinister surroundings, the cobbles [...] all washed by a recent rain," he instead shows him "in bright sunlight, not a nook or a cranny or a corner of refuge for our victim" (Hitchcock qtd. in LaValley 23). His films would not possess and be known for these same feelings of mystery and suspense without the way he treats each shot like a piece of art. When describing filmmaking, Hitchcock himself says, "The motion picture was the newest art form of the twentieth century and that is, its purest form, montage-- pieces of film put together, shall we say, artfully, and creating ideas" (qtd. in LaValley 27). It is not purely the dialog or the

characters that can create such feelings: “You see, many people think that a little dialogue scene in a movie is motion pictures. It’s not. It’s only part of it” (qtd. in LaValley 41). We would not feel the same aversion towards Bruno without the bars of shadow cast upon his face in the beginning scene, or the way he stands in shadow where Guy stands in light. We would not feel the same shock and anxiety as Thorwald turns to look out his window as if Jefferies simply said “He’s looking at us!” We would not get the same feeling of being watched had the farmer simply stormed in on Hannay talking to the farmer’s wife instead of being shown at the window first. And, of course, we would not get the same dizzying feeling the stairway shot gives us had Scottie simply stated, “Oh dear, I’m experiencing vertigo.” The language of visuals is universal, and Hitchcock has mastered it in a way that leads many to admire and take inspiration from his work. “Gallopings horses in Westerns are only photographs of action, photographs of content. But it’s the piecing together of the montage which makes what I call a pure film,” Hitchcock concludes (qtd. in LaValley 41). This “pure film” that Hitchcock creates has become a signature style like no other: “You can look at each individual title or at them all as a group, but either way, Hitchcock's oeuvre takes on meaning that comprises a fascinating and unique cinematic universe” (Bouzereau 159).

WORKS CITED

- Balázs, B. (2003). The Close-Up and The Face of Man. In A. Dalle Vacche (Ed.), *The Visual Turn* (117-126). Newark, NJ: Rutgers, The State University.
- Balcon, M. (Producer), & Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1935). *The 39 steps* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Gaumont British Distributors.
- Bouzereau, L. (2010). *Hitchcock Piece by Piece*. New York, NY: Abrams.
- Boyd, D., Palmer, R. B. (Eds.) (2006). *After Hitchcock: Influence, imitation, and intertextuality*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Cook, D. A. (2004). *A history of narrative film* (4th ed.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Génovès, A. (Producer), & Chabrol, C. (Director). (1969). *La femme infidele* [Motion picture]. France: Compagnie Française de Distribution Cinématographique.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1941). *Suspicion* [Motion Picture]. United States: RKO Radio Pictures Inc.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1948). *Rope* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1951). *Strangers on a train* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1954). *Dial m for murder* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1954). *Rear Window* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1958). *Vertigo* [Motion Picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1959). *North by northwest* [Motion picture]. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1960). *Psycho* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Hitchcock, A. (Producer and Director). (1963). *The birds* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.
- LaValley, A. J., (Ed.). (1972). *Focus on Hitchcock*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Leitch, T. (2002). *The Encyclopedia of Alfred Hitchcock: From Alfred Hitchcock Presents to Vertigo*. New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc.
- Millerson, G. (1991). *Lighting for Television and Film* (3rd ed). Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.
- Ponti, C., Rouve, P. (Producers), & Antonioni, M. (Director). (1966). *Blow-up* [Motion picture]. United States: MGM.
- Skirball, J. H. (Producer) & Hitchcock, A. (1943). *Shadow of a doubt* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Spoto, D. (1976). *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Sterritt, D. (1993). *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge UP.
- Ward, P. (1996). *Picture Composition for Film and Television*. Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.