

Dylan Bollard ~ Week #4 ~ Walters ~ ENG 196

** (COMPOSITION) From the first frame we see a beautiful composition. The letters 1 2 3 4 are lined up from left to right, the chairs are in order and centered in the room, and the “doctor” has a perfect haircut. But there is one thing out of order and that’s the chalk board. (All along in the movie, we see chalk boards covered in blurred chalk like this, but later on I want to talk more about it.) When the men come into the room, they are both wearing suits, they both look perfectly normal and sit in the perfect chairs. The room in which Jim Gaffigan sits is perfectly square, with grey tones and non-intrusive colors. The director frames speakers in between doorways or various other symmetrical things to give balance to this world. In the case of the room where there are three people (an odd number), the director has the doctor stand in between them so that their heads are ascending from lower right to upper left. (I know my last paper was extensive about movement on screen, but this was important.) Given that this is considered the hardest moment on screen, the director has not only balanced the frame with a doorway, their heads in spatial order, but also eluded to the difficulty in the scene. We’ve seen the composition of the room as non-hostile, but now that this character must actually see the electrodes being attached to Jim Gaffigan, he has to look against a hard movement on screen, even though it’s not necessarily a movement. It’s fundamentally brilliant really.

** Three minutes in and the main character is already positioned in between his assistant and his assistant’s shadow in balance. He’s seen in this sort of frame when he’s surrounded by his work. The reason for this is to subconsciously show the grey area in which this character operates. Stanley Milgram is between but separated from what we see as humanity (his assistant) and what he sees as humanity (his assistant’s shadow). The fact that now he’s looking in the direction of

his assistant early in the film shows that he's hopeful to find the conclusion to his experiment to be a positive one. His assistant (humanity) looks upset by what it's seen. Given that the overtone of the film is that of nazi Germany, it could be said that his assistant, representing humanity, is aghast at finding that the individual responses of Americans are similar to those of the nazi's. The shadow, representing the negative aspects of humanity, sits in the background, given that the experiments did find negativity. The main, framed between them, is keen to find good, but ultimately finds the bad. The fact that he remains expressionless during the scenes is reflective of the non-fictional character, but also of his acceptance of both roles of humanity, given his familiarity with nazi Germany.

** Everyone is so square in almost every frame in this film. To continue the analysis of COMPOSITION, the next scene involves Winona Ryder riding (pun intended) (I know it's not really a pun but I laughed) in an elevator with a mirror. The director could have left negative space or he could have tightened on Winona but he chose to keep it at a medium shot for a few reasons I think. First, by having "two" people in the scene he's balanced the frame. Second, the elevator is not supposed to feel tight. This is where Stanley and Winona meet for the first time. It's a happy meeting and it's supposed to feel full. Third, which is the most interesting, the "humanity as it should be" facing forward and "humanity as it is" behind comes into play. But in this case Winona, and her reflection in the mirror, are looking away from each other as if they haven't come to terms with each other. Stanley, and by extension the shot, needs to be able to see both parts of Winona in order to see both sides of her humanity. This being another reason why it's not tight on the frame. When Stanley sees both sides of her, he still wants to be part of her life in that night. It shows his intentions and looming desire to be a part of both sides of

humanity. However, when Winona walks away and leaves behind her other half, he still wants to be a part of her life.

** In the next scene at the party, the apartment door frame once again provides balance to the literal frame. The man on the right of him is constantly there suggesting that his side of the frame is stable. One woman walks from left to right on Winona's side to show that things are changing or moving. This happens twice when she asks what he does for work and introduces herself to him. It suggests that her mood is changing or developing and his is not. He feels more comfortable in a social situation than she does obviously because he studies social relationships. When she goes on the defensive, there are two people walking behind her, eluding further that the change is happening is to her. It also provides an imbalance which leans to her side of the frame, shifting focus to her. When Winona says "social relationships", inquiring about his work, there is a woman behind her that starts reaching into a cabinet that is positioned so it looks as if this woman is reaching into her mind. When Stanley starts elaborating on what social behavioral studies really means, we see the woman start grabbing things out of the cabinet. Someone walks into his side of the frame when this happens suggesting there is a change developing in him as well as he is talking to Winona. It seems that the director is using these people in the background to act out what they're saying to each other. The reason I think the woman reaching into the cabinet is important is because in the very next scene, when they're kissing in bed, Stanley has his hand on her head, while she moves her hand from his neck down to his chest. Given that Stanley is a social scientist, it seems interesting that the director chose to have these images resound in the beginning of their relationship, showing that he is more obsessed with her mind. This happens a few other times in the film. Later on when they're in the coffee shop and he starts

talking about philosophy, he is the one who keeps saying that he chooses her. It also is suggested that she is part of one of his experiments when his assistant at University of New York says that she is.

** (16:42) Stanley is in frame between two windows, but there are two people in frame to balance. It's unbalanced but also balanced. By showing the scene this way, we see two things:

1. this man smoking, the experiment is almost part of the mind of the main. We see on the left window the man, and on the right window, the station where the "doctor" works. both are important, both serve a roll, but the main is in between them perfectly suggesting that he has given himself the power to operate outside of both of these things. Again, we see the relationship between two sides of humanity. Also, the wheel on the recorder from the "doctor's" desk is still spinning, showing that the main's mind is still spinning.
2. the second is showing how when they came in, everything was neat and in order, but now there still lies an order, but it's changed. It's become more complex and more convoluted just as his experiment has.

I've really only talked about a few frames from this whole movie but I think they're the most critical when it comes to creative cinematography. The director has shown in just a few scenes, an incredible understanding of displaying psychological stress and creating a realistic roadmap to be followed in the film. These aren't hidden in the film, and they wouldn't require the viewer to watch the film several times to understand what they are and how they contribute to the story.