

SAMPLE ESSAY (SHOT ANALYSIS)

observation about the place of the shot within the narrative

An Instance of Direct Address in *Giants and Toys* (Masumura, 1958)

Rival company Apollo's factory has just burned down. In an attempt to seize their share of the caramel market, World has increased production. But the strategy's not working. Buyers aren't buying. World needs to push harder. World has to sell, sell, sell! Or at least, that's what World's president tells us. At this point in *Giants and Toys*, Masumura conveys the atmosphere of stressful cutthroat competition through a series of quick-cut montages: delivery trucks racing through the city, machines cranking out candy in the factory. In between these montage

OK, this shot is atypical!

sequences, Masumura inserts one shot that stands out. In an extremely brief take, we see the president of World shout, "Sell! We've got to sell!" Meanwhile, he aggressively taps that enormous primary-colored sales chart on the wall behind him and turns and points his finger threateningly in our direction, the whole time keeping his eyes locked on the camera. The entire shot lasts only a second or two (the DVD time-stamp places it at approximately 1:09:36-37).

description of the shot

thesis statement

Nevertheless, the shot's composition—structured around the president's direct address of the camera—and its placement in the edited film—between shots that are non-contiguous, temporally, spatially, and in terms of thematic action—renders the shot iconic, which is appropriate as the shot also crystallizes several of the movie's major motifs, caricaturing commodity capitalism as a producer of aggressive, shameless assaults on the senses.

The main element

The most prominent feature of this shot's mise-en-scène is the direction of the president's gaze. Everything in the scene works to make it the center of our attention. That the shot is in medium close-up limits what we see on screen to, in the foreground, the president's face and torso and, in the background, the sales chart. This chart—^{#2}itself a conspicuous element of the

#1

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Below, the author explains "how" everything else works to make the selected element the center of our attention.

office décor in previous sequences—here functions not just symbolically, illustrative of the company's fluctuating fortunes, but also graphically, as a flat backdrop of white with straight lines in red, green, and blue, against which the president's body acquires heightened dimensionality. ^{#3} Lighting emphasizes this as well: side-lighting from the left, landing on the president's face, helps “model” him (i.e., reveal his three-dimensionality) while flattening the background. The framing, lighting, and décor all contribute to the president's moving body being perceived as a dynamic three-dimensional figure and so ensure our attention is drawn to it. Now, of course, ^{#4} the actor's gestures focus this attention on the forward direction of his gaze. He begins with his torso toward the graph and his eyes turned back toward the camera—an unusual pose that emphasizes his contorted eye-line. Then, he turns toward the camera and points—the very symbol of directionality—in the same direction as his gaze, which is to say, at the camera and at us in the audience.

The shot is atypical in one sense...

In the majority of narrative films, direct address of the camera is rare because it disrupts the audience's voyeuristic relationship to the diegesis. *Giants and Toys*, however, is less dedicated to the task of constructing a self-enclosed, believably realistic diegetic world, and so, **...but it is also a stylistic feature of Masumura's film** Masumura frequently makes use of frontal staging, as part of a more general stance of quasi-Brechtian confrontation. See, for examples, the sequence in which Kyoko performs in the television commercial, approaching the TV camera and us, and the sequence in which Goda paces up and down between two lines of his employees, which are oriented parallel to the camera. **...still, it's different from other instances** In the shot at hand, frontality works a bit differently from the almost casual use of frontality in these earlier sequences, if only because here it is constructed so emphatically. Here, the direct address of the camera becomes an overdetermined element of the mise-en-scène, an active confrontation. This distinction in tone arises principally from ^{#5} the placement of camera. I have

#5-a (#1)

already mentioned how the camera's relatively close framing of the president isolates him against the background, drawing our attention exclusively to his movements. The other key

#5-b

element is angle of framing, which is canted relative to the vertical lines on the chart and quite low relative to the president's eye level. This has two effects: the slanting angle heightens the unreality (cartoonishness) of the scene and at the same time heightens its aggressive tone. The president, the figurehead of the corporation and a representative of no-holds-barred capitalism, towers over us, inducing us to "sell." The resulting image is thus both a caricature of a threat and felt as genuinely threatening. At whom is this threat directed? The line of the president's gaze suggests that it is in fact directed at us in the audience.

Conclusion

The implications of this are unclear. Because the image is aggressive but perhaps parodically so, its maker's ideological position is likewise ambiguous. Does Masumura intend to mock the desperate capitalist? Or does he intend to paint this monomaniac as a frightening monster? Are we supposed to laugh or be scared? Perhaps, such a hyper-capitalist milieu as the one Masumura is depicting is indeed both a frightening and a ridiculous proposition. At any rate, regardless of whether we laugh or feel threatened, we can say that what this shot does is produce a shock. The suddenness and brevity of the shot, combined with its confrontational composition, surprises us. This shock effect is in line with Masumura's proclaimed overarching project. As he writes in "A Defense: A Farewell to Sentiment, Authenticity, and Ambiance," what he wants to do more than anything else is to "jolt" his audience into an enervated state of consciousness, in which state they can reflect on their social situation and lead more active lives. This shot from *Giants and Toys* at least participates in the first part of that formulation: it jolts us; as a direct assault on our senses of hearing and vision, its impact is visceral and provocative. Whether that shock effect is then capable of encouraging active and reflective subjects remains up for debate.

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