FLM278 – NBB (Introduction to Film Studies)

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Assignment 1: Mise-en-Scene Analysis

The Godfather:

Introduction: Throughout the history of film making there have been a very few films that have been tested against the time, are relevant and have made impact on numerous generations. The film that I have chosen for this assignment is one of them. The Godfather is a film very close to my heart because it is one of those films that made me a “cinephile” and got me interested around the art of film making. The first time I watched The Godfather, I was taken aback and then I started to research more deeper about similar films and how are they made.

The film The Godfather is about a mafia family that runs in 1945 New York City alongside five other families in the same period. The director Francis Ford Coppola captured the late 1940s very nicely even though the film was shot in early 1970s. The film is an adoption of the 1969 novel by the same name, The Godfather. The story of the film goes as in the beginning, we enter the scene of Don Vito Corleone’s daughter’s wedding whose name is Connie. Vito Corleone has 3 sons and 1 daughter. The youngest son of Vito Corleone, Michael is not like his family and prefers to stay away from them. We can see that Don Corleone is a very powerful man, and a plethora of people approach him for favours. After this, we see that Virgil Sollozzo approaches Don Corleone for his help and expanding their business in narcotics, but Don Corleone refuses. This refusal of Don Corleone leads to an assassination attempt on him, but he survives. Michael then, rushes into the family business after he heard about the attack on his father. Michael is the one who kills Sollozzo and a corrupt police officer who was with him. Michael is then sent to Sicily away from all the enemies, there he marries a Sicilian woman who is later killed in a car accident that was attempted to kill Michael Corleone. After returning to United States, Michael marries his former girlfriend Kay Adams and gradually becomes the Don, the Head of the family and kills the heads of other families.

Section 1: The film The Godfather has a linear timeline, where Michael Corleone is the protagonist and throughout the film, we can see his transformation from a civilized war veteran trying to stay away from his family business of crime to being the head of the Corleone family. The main goal of our protagonist is to protect his family while keeping and maintaining their business. There are various difficulties that come in his way like the murder attempt on his father, killing of his first wife, killing of his elder brother and a member of family business being a traitor. There is not any moment of Equilibrium and Disruption in the beginning, the movie begins with the wedding of Connie, the daughter of Vito Corleone. There is not any time crunch in the film, but the fear of any attempt of assassination on any other family member makes the characters do their actions promptly. There is one moment of movement through space where Michael Corleone moves from United States to Sicily fleeing away from the attempts of enemies to kill him.

Section 2: Throughout the film, we can see that the filmmakers of The Godfather used very dark lighting and used concentrated source of light on the main person in that shot. For example, in the very opening scene of the movie, we can see the godfather who is sitting in his chair in a very poorly lit room, where an old acquaintance of his has come to take help. The shot we are talking about is very dark with emphasis given on the character of the godfather. Moving further, we can see that the director also liked using close up shots, and we can see numerous close ups of the characters when they had their dialogues to convey the emotion they were feeling. Overall, there was no particular use of low angle, high angle or wide-angle shots in this film, most shots in this film were eyeline shots. The lighting as discussed is very high key and realistic throughout the film. Moreover, keeping in mind the Italian American theme of the film, the director has used a lot of Tarantella tunes, for example in the wedding sequence of Vito Corleone’s daughter, and the theme of The Godfather which was composed by the father of director himself can be heard at many places. Overall, I think the director has used a very dark, eyeline leveled up-faced and Italian themed film to show and depict the dark crimes these people used to do, to convey proper emotion to the audience, and to make the audience indulged in the Italian theme throughout the film.

Section 3: I will do the Shot by Shot analysis of the scene where Michael Corleone shoots Virgil Sollozzo and the corrupt police officer, Captain McCluskey. The scene begins at 1:23:39, where the camera straight cuts to the Louis Italian American restaurant, in this shot we can see the car of Virgil Sollozzo arriving outside the restaurant. In this shot (shot 1), we can also hear a dramatic background music playing in the back. In the next shot (shot 2), we can see the camera straight cuts to the face of Micheal Corleone, and then the camera then straight cuts to all three of them going inside the restaurant, here the background music stops. I think the director stops the dramatic background music here to depict seriousness of the shot. The next shot at 1:23:54 (shot 3) is a wide angle shot of the restaurant. I think the filmmakers used this shot to set up and familiarize the environment and setting in which next set of events will take place. The scene then cuts to the next shot (shot 4) which is a close up of faces of Virgil Sollozzo and Michael Corleone, where they had a little chat in Italian and the camera keeps the focus on the faces of character who is speaking. I think the director used to the close up eyeline angle to show and depict the emotion and expression on each actor’s face. At 1:25:32, we can see at the next shot (shot 5) where the waiter brings some food to the table, but in the very next shot (shot 6), we can see that the camera has zoomed more on the face of Michael Corleone. I think the director did this to show the audience that conversation was getting heated up. At 1:25:42, we can see a shot (shot 7) from the side of the restaurant and then a wide angle shot (shot 8) of the entire restaurant. At 1:25:52, we see a zoomed closeup (shot 9) of Virgil Sollozzo just like the one we saw of Michael Corleone a few shots ago. I think the director did this to depict the conversation was getting more heated up. The camera then moves to and fro from being a close up to being a zoomed closeup. According to me, the filmmaker used the close up whenever a conversation was taking place, and he used the zoomed closeup whenever an important or heated point was being conveyed. Then, we see a shot (shot 10) where the camera follows Michael Corleone to the washroom, where he finds the hidden gun in the bathroom.

If I were to do anything different in this scene, I would show the facial emotions of Michael Corleone when he took the gun in the bathroom and was about to kill two people. I think this is a very critical moment of his life, which leads to him bring The Godfather, and the audience should have gotten to see what emotions he had just before this crucial moment.