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In most all of Alfred Hitchcock's films, there is a definite role that the female characters seem to possess. That is, they share very specific characteristics when gender roles are traditional and working in a traditional manner. Those women, in the traditional manner, are often subservient to the men in many ways. They are vulnerable to outside forces – i.e. the villains that may capture them or the problems they may find themselves in where they need a man to rescue them. These women are supposed to conform to the male gaze. That is, Hitchcock renders them so that they are the object of desire that is looked at by the male. The camera, for instance, moves about in a way that is male and sees things in a male light – as are a majority of classic films. As for the men, they are traditionally masculine and seek to project onto the women a kind of fetish. As children, the then boys saw that their mothers were missing something that they had. They could only assume that their fathers must have stolen it from them. Now they must fight to bring “it” back to them. This means projecting something else to make up for the lack of having “it.” That “it” could be a number of different things like breasts, feet, high heels, legs, etc. In the traditional sense, the man typically plays the role of protagonist. In that light they are products of the normal oedipal complex unless something is wrong with them – i.e. lacking a penis (metaphorically). Problems usually string up when gender roles are manipulated and / or the male gaze interrupted, neglected, or switched. What is important, though, is that it is manipulated

for a reason that makes for an exciting story and is thus a positive attribute to the film. So is that a good thing? The “simple” answer is yes.

For example, in *The Birds* (1963), the character of Melanie Daniels, played by Tippi Hedren, seems to break the expectations afforded by the male gaze. The exposition scene takes place in a bird store, where the young Melanie Daniels works. The supporting male character, Mitch Brenner, played by Rod Taylor, walks in the store looking for love birds. Melanie Daniels: “Yes, what is it you’re looking for, sir? Mitch Brenner: “Love birds [...] these are for my sister for her birthday [...] she’s only 11 [...] I wouldn’t want a pair of birds that were too demonstrative [...] and at the same time too aloof.” It is kind of ironic that he uses the word “aloof,” as that is what could be said to describe his behavior. He is something other than a domineering patriarchal figure, totally unaffected by her presence, despite Hitchcock’s meticulous attempt at illustrating her beauty tenfold. She is glowing in just about every instance, and her eyes sparkle during a one shot of her when she is conversing with the other woman just moments earlier. Mitch’s encounter with her seems to be one of “blindness.” He is not really evoking a gaze onto her or captivated by her at all. And Melanie, on the other hand, seems to be the one projecting the gaze onto Mitch Brenner. Even though she is receptive of his actions and eventually is bothered by him, she still has a form of “eye sex” with Mitch Brenner throughout their encounter. Just the way her eyes move about, searching every crevice of Mitch as if she is “devouring him.” There is also a moment when Melanie holds a pencil in her hand, toying with it, and having it close to her mouth. This is clearly phallic imagery for Melanie saying, “I hold the penis.” This, of course, goes against the normal male gaze trajectory, and I think Hitchcock does this purposely for artistic reasons to enhance the story. This resonates with many themes of Hitchcock, most obvious, I think, is that it is a reminder that Hitchcock is the final mastermind,

the sole visionary, the gate keeper of the film. He is controlling all that moves on the screen: Hitchcock is the God in the machine.

In the article, *Tone and Meaning in Birds*, it points out some interesting happenings between the two characters Melanie and Mitch: “On recognizing [Melanie], Mitch in turn plays his own counter-practical joke upon Melanie by withholding the fact that he knows she is only posing as a shop assistant, before than going on to surprise her with what he asserts to be his epistemic superiority over her” (126). He tells her that “he knows who she is” in a strikingly forward manner before leaving. This can help contextualize some things within the story which in turn parallels the gaze switching and is a kind of justification for Hitchcock to do so. So clearly this works in a way that it is supposed to. It would be interesting to question, for the average audience member on a first viewing that is not attuned to serious film studies, how much they would notice this. Would it likely slip into their minds in an abstract, subliminal way? And if so, would that be the point intended on the part of Hitchcock? I think the simple answer is yes, as a filmmaker is first and foremost an artist longing to have an emotional effect on his or her audience. There is a kind of joy, one could argue, with sustaining disbelief and making the audience look where you want them to look and feel how you want them to feel; thus creating an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows that hopefully turns into an entertaining movie going experience. So this is a positive attribute, especially if it is systematic and respectful of the film’s overall tonality which in the case of Hitchcock it most always is.

To focus on another example of switching roles, in particular the male role, we need not look any further than *Rear Window* (1954). In this film, the character of L.B. Jeffries, played by James Stewart, can be said to be lacking something with his masculinity. It is very strange that he has this girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, played by Grace Kelly, who is arguably a very sexy female

that men would die for. She is perfect in every way, though that is not satisfying to L.B. Jeffries since she's "too perfect" according to him. Doesn't he have any superficial tendencies like every normal man with testosterone? So here we have another example of how Hitchcock uses his power as director to manipulate gender roles that seem to defy the oedipal complex. It is just so annoying when the both of these characters are together. Why can't he just count his blessings and embrace this woman? The reason is because if he were to do that, in this context, it wouldn't make for as interesting of a story. Though with this example, there is something in the respect of the male gaze as L.B Jeffries "gazes" at his neighbors out his window with binoculars – especially one he calls, "Miss Torso." Okay, so that seems normal. We have an attractive woman who is doing stretches and it catches his eyes. But why on earth is he ignoring his own girlfriend who is arguably better looking and actually real to him? One reason is that it makes for a compelling story. If every one was content all the time and doing what they should be doing you would have a very boring story – Hitchcock, the master, understands this. How does he understand this one might ask? The reason is because most of the time Hitchcock was the ultimate voice behind the project. The film was his creation, and this is made clear in the article, *Hitchcock's World View*: "...[Hitchcock] controlled the filmmaking process from inception of the idea, through screenwriting (regular meetings with his writers who, like the actors, existed only to do what they were told), through the casting, costuming the leading lady, shooting the film, editing the film, adding the music, and the marketing" (Vincent, 4). This is not to say that Hitchcock did not have his battles with top Hollywood producers, namely David O. Selznick in especially his earlier years. This brief factoid is important to note because it can help people to understand what a battle it is to do it all and try to leave a significant mark. Life is always going to be about politics and there will always be people who disagree with you. Yet Hitchcock has

proved time and time again that he could do it all better than the rest and so created exceptional films like *The Birds* and *Rear Window*. So how does Hitchcock's mark on *Rear Window*, the film just mentioned, deal with women and patriarchy in a way that is most obvious? Answer: through dialogue. There is a nice scene when Lisa comes to visit L.B. Jeffries one evening. She is very flirtatious with him, kissing him, etc. So she seems to fit the quintessential female character of many Hitchcock films; attractive, sexual, etc. Yet L.B. Jeffries is still so occupied with his ideas about what may be going on out his window. Lisa says: "When I want a man I want all of you." Jeffries: "Don't you ever have any problems?" Lisa: "I have one now." Then Jeffries ends the conversation with "So do I." Right after Jeffries says that, there is a moment of silence. After a moment, she asks him to tell her about it and he starts talking about his intrigue into the events across the street. But besides this fact, I think Hitchcock hinted towards something sexual. I think he was alluding to the oedipal complex and Jeffries "lacking a penis." It works and it even feels logical as Jeffries is a man confined to a wheelchair with a likelihood of no movement "down there." So how does this make for a positive attribute to the story? For one, there is good chemistry between both characters in the sense that their dialogue builds to a crescendo. By crescendo, we mean traveling "higher and higher" where the tension builds up little by little. So we can say that there is an invigoration about Jeffries and Lisa's relationship. Hitchcock is following good filmmaking conventions of protagonist meets antagonist. For if we remember, the definition of protagonist and antagonist is not necessarily hero / villain.

To discuss this matter further, we saw how this was the case in another Hitchcock film, *The Wrong Man* (1956). I have argued that the real antagonist to Christopher Emmanuel "Manny" Balestrero, played by Henry Fonda, was not the obvious characters people would suspect – i.e. the police or the real robber, but rather his wife, Rose. She was the person (in

Hitchcock's fictionalized rendition of actual events) that was coping with the issues and bearing the weight of this man's major problems. Their family and whole lives were at stake with the events that unfolded, and so Rose was receiving his actions every step of the way. In this, Hitchcock played gender roles more traditional which allowed for simplicity and perhaps a subliminal response towards audience members in their realization of protagonist / antagonist. It is so obvious, too obvious that she was supporting him and on his side, but yet she has a break down in the end, assaults him with a brush, and winds up in a mental hospital despite the fact that problems for Manny became erased. It is clearly a critique on the uncontrollable factors of life; the fact that anyone can have a break down, or have malicious tendencies if their buttons are pushed far enough at any time. Slavoj Zizek, in the article, *In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is With Large*, talks about Hitchcock's manipulation of the film: "The Wrong Man becomes somewhat clearer: the film does render the experiential foundation of 'Hitchcock's universe', yet this foundation simply lacks the fantasy – dimension – the miraculous encounter does not take place, reality remains 'mere reality', fantasy does not resound in it" (Zizek, 2007). So does this mean that Hitchcock is unsuccessful here? I think the answer is no because he was going for a very specific style with this film and so accomplishes it. As we've mentioned, with women and patriarchy, Hitchcock is traditional here. For instance, during the scene when Manny first comes home to find his wife in bed, the male gaze is at work as Rose is sort of put on a pedestal with her sex appeal; Manny is the quintessential masculine character and Rose is the quintessential feminine character. It is quite clear Rose is the object of desire to Manny, who can't resist kissing her while talking to her. Their encounter with each other feels very natural and what you would expect a real husband and wife to be like. So Hitchcock's characterization and overall

rendition of this film is consistent. It follows a Neo Realist formula that works systematically and specifically within the confines of the film's tonality.

In understanding the role of women and when they do conform to the male gaze, as was the case with Rose and Lisa, by and large, we can understand them to be side characters that are there to compliment the main character. Almost never are they going to be the main character in a Hitchcock film. In order for that to happen they would have to defy the male gaze. To back track to *The Birds*, the character of Melanie Daniels was the main character that most definitely defied the male gaze. She was the one projecting the gaze and because of it suffered a near fatal death at the end of the film. She was attacked by birds in the attic in what was one of the most chilling sequences in not only Hitchcock films, but all of film history. It was remarkable for how it utilized multiple shots from many different, especially tight, angles. It's as if Hitchcock's manipulation of the film and fearfully jarring attention to this particular sequence, called for a kind of repercussion because of her defiance toward the male gaze. But isn't playing around with the male gaze and switching roles a positive attribute to a film if it fits within the overall tonality? Yes, because this perceived "negativity" is supposed to happen in what is an artist's way of having a very specific effect on his audience; thus creating a heightened sense of unease that respects the interests of entertainment and satisfies through its non passiveness. It's the ingredients in the film that keeps us coming back for more. To give an analogy: if something "hurts us" are we not curious to know if it will continue to do so? It is kind of like how a person that has a sore tooth will often continue sucking it to see if it still hurts, still hurts, still hurts. With respect to film, if people laughed at something before, chances are they will laugh again. If they cried at something before, they will cry again. And if they jumped out of their seats, well, they may jump out of their seats again. Now we are not talking necessarily about experiencing

the exact same moment – as would be the case in watching a movie more than once. Rather, this means moments that are similar in the sense that they can be predicted based on a number of factors. Things like how it works within the context of the rest of the story. Does it have good non-diegetic music to compliment certain feelings? Does it utilize silence as opposed to music in some areas? There is not necessarily a right or wrong answer, as different kinds of film moments within different films can be targeted for certain markets. Most importantly, and with respect to Hitchcock, is that there is a market for people who enjoy suspense and Hitchcock knows how to keep them in suspense – he is the master of that no doubt. And when it comes to manipulating the women and patriarchy – whether traditional and following the male gaze or defying it in a revolutionary manner that pushes the envelop and plays with new types of “outcome stimulus,” Hitchcock is always clever enough to make it make sense within the confines of the rest of the story that fit well with pacing, tonality, and especially a kind of rhythm.

To further elaborate, if Hitchcock was a part of most all the processes in the making of the film, than certainly he must have had a lot of say in the editing room. Editing is probably the most important part of the filmmaking process and can really alter a film’s mood. Editing works in a special way, not unlike music or poetry. It just has to feel right. A lot of times if things move too quickly, for example, it can make things seem a bit campy and forced. If that is what the director is going for and if it fits within the rest of the film that is fine, but if it is supposed to be for something more deep and more real – like suspense usually is, than it is good to know when to slow things down so that we are forced to wait for events to unfold; waiting, of course, one of the most important aspects and definitions of Hitchcockian suspense. It is like the difference between a bomb going off surprisingly and watching the countdown and knowing when it is going to go off. With the latter, you actually have audience involvement and Hitchcock always

said it is better that the audience knows more. This allows audiences to be more actively engaged by things, which in turn creates a more enjoyable movie going experience for them. And I think audiences tend to pick up on things when something is slightly off as far as women and the patriarchal order are concerned. They may not know exactly what it is, but there is something inside them, I believe, that just doesn't equal out. This was the case in *The Birds*, as we saw, with how Melanie and Mitch were practically switched gender roles. On the surface you are still seeing man and woman, but what this "switching" does is kind of force us to look deeper inside them and try to understand what it is exactly that is making them do what they do. We may find this comical, we may find this nerveing, and we may find this strange. But if it is done in a meticulously planned about way, it will be able to be believable because our disbeliefs and pre conceptions are sustained for the moment being. And sustaining disbelief is one of the tasks at hand for the filmmaker because at the end of the day it is all a big illusion anyway.

To summarize, Alfred Hitchcock is very clever in his building suspense. He knows what is going on and when he is breaking a gender convention. You also have to remember that Hitchcock's films came out before the women's liberation movement when woman and men had clearly defined roles in society. Audiences back then especially had certain expectations for the men and women. And if gazes were switched and the men had feminine tendencies or women masculine tendencies, people would subconsciously receive this in a way that was a bit unnerving, I think. A lot of times you go to the movies and are sympathetic to a character. If you are a man, for example, you might sympathize with Mitch over Melanie. And when you watch him play out you tend to be at unease because you are expecting a kind of behavior out of him that goes without question. So what this "gaze switching" does is make things seem slightly off, but just off enough that keeps things understandable for us, contextually speaking. It is the same

idea with a roller coaster ride or looking at a cup sit very close to the edge of a table. That uneasiness is what enthralls us, keeps us locked in our seats and attentions grabbed. That is what suspense is and Hitchcock does that purposely to grab us in not only the obvious suspense, but this “subliminal” form of suspense that then plays out throughout the film by way of this manipulation of the women and patriarchy and what we expect - and most importantly do not expect, but learn as we witness with our own eyes.

If we think about gender roles and the switching thereof through a direct manipulation on the part of the director, than we can also think about its effectiveness in keeping us attuned to the film for the two hours of our life. Again, the key word is “effectiveness.” If something is truly effective and if Hitchcock’s system is effective than doesn’t that make it a positive attribute to the film? After an in-depth analysis of digging below the surface, the “complex” answer is also yes.

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