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Visual Narrative Conventions ANGD 3315

Dr. Watkins

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Auter Shot Analysis: North by Northwest



1. This is a full shot with a subtle low angle as we can see the protagonist's entire body. This lets us see his acting through not only his expressions and reactions, but also his body language. In this moment, we see his frustration and confusion as Mrs. Thornhill lies through her teeth. This is also a two-shot framing focused on Mrs. Townsend and Roger as we look over everyone else's shoulder. This shows the isolation of the two of them from the group; Roger telling the truth about what happened that night, and Mrs. Thornhill weaving a web of lies. They are the only ones in this room that actually know what happened. There's an interesting power dynamic as the smiling Mrs. Thornhill holds this crowd's attention and Roger looks on angrily from behind her. As he moves to the back of the room on the z-axis, he is actually becoming even more detached from this group as he realizes they don't believe him. It makes him the smallest person in a frame to show that he is losing credibility and power in this situation. This is probably shot at a wide angle with a

camera focal length of 30mm because we are able to get a lot of information about the background and these characters in the scene. There is no blurring of the background as we are brought back into this same study.



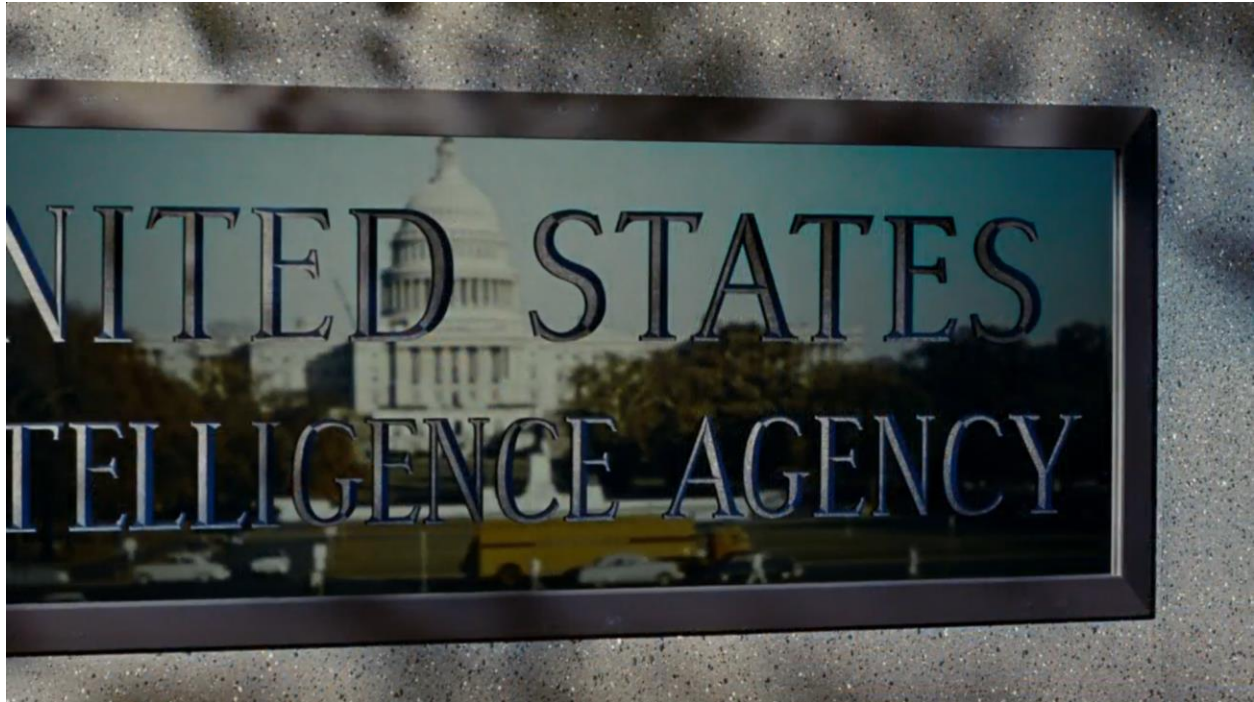
2. Here we have a medium size two-shot with a subtle low angle. In this interaction, Roger is seeking out clues to understand why he was brought to Mr. Thornhill's house. This is a clarifying moment where our focus is on just these two and this sudden flash. Over Mr. Thornhill's left shoulder, a flash goes off as they start talking. This flash foreshadows the knife being thrown at Mr. Thornhill in the exact same place. We are focused in on just these two, but the flash almost lingers as we watch this confusion unfold. We always see Roger in this neutral grey suit that almost matches the grey in his hair. It makes him neutral and ordinary as all the craziness just seems to happen to him and around him outside of his control. Here they are using a telephoto lens at 100mm because everything else behind Roger and Mr. Thornhill is in soft focus but is wide enough to show the blurry hustle and bustle around them. This interaction is particularly important compared to whatever else is going on as we have a deep moment of realization for the protagonist.



3. This is a medium-close crowd shot of the elevator scene with a high angle. We are focused on Roger of course, but just behind him, we are able to see the reactions of some of the other people in the elevator. It's almost like a dirty single in the way all of our attention is on Roger even though there are other faces to look at. His mother has just asked these men if they really mean to kill Roger and while we have this very grim and serious reaction from him, everyone else is literally laughing behind his back. They just turn into a laughing mass as they are shown here in soft focus. From this high angle, he actually appears tallest in the frame. This reinforces the idea that even though everyone is laughing at him, he stands out above the rest holding on to what is true and real. This angle is just wide enough to capture the expressions of the crowd while still giving us this closeup of Roger with a focal length of 80mm. We also have a larger f-stop at f8 as this shallow focus highlights Roger's expressions.



4. As Roger tries to stay low in the train station, we get this wide, dirty single-shot from a slight low angle. The wide shot helps establish where Roger is in the station, but also where he is in the story. Everyone in the frame, including Roger, is moving screen right to left. Yet, Roger actually appears to be going against the flow of the crowd as he attempts to sneak onto the train. Even the shadows cast of people nearby help create this general diagonal line in tandem with the movement of the crowd that Roger just cuts through. He's supposed to be laying low for his escape, but his face is actually the only one we can really see here. It's ironic, but intentional of course as Roger is the one we need to be paying attention to. This was shot with a shorter focal length of 20mm to give us this wide angle. It's important to have this wide angle so we can see this crowd flow in this large location; we don't need a narrow angle of view on Roger or soft background focus to understand that our attention should be following Roger here. There is also a higher F-stop here at f/10 because again we don't need that blurring around our subject to see he's important here.



5. This is a clever establishing shot through a prop lens. We have a full view of the White House but we're seeing it through the reflection on the sign. Expositionally, this is great to hint to the audience about what's going on. Up to this point, we've been following Roger, trying to understand why all this is happening to him. After this shot, we meet the chief of the United States Intelligence Agency, also called Professor, who completes the puzzle for the audience as to why this is happening to Roger. In just this one shot, we can begin to understand the scale of this ordeal Roger has wound up in as well as some of the people involved. It's no longer just a case of mistaken identity, this is a government level operation with huge stakes. There are some motifs of law and order that this shot frames up as well. Later we have a sequence where the Professor talks about Roosevelt's big stick quote as he sits directly under Roosevelt's Mount Rushmore head. This shot has the same effect by having the USIA sign reflect the White House. The USIA is supposed to reflect the law and power of the government here.



6. Here we have a wide, low angle single shot of Roger as he makes his way onto the train. The wide shot helps establish Roger's relationship with this new place he finds himself in. A wide shot like this helps us understand the physicality of this character as he makes his way down the corridor. He's not slow and lumbering, he's fast and frantic to hide. The lines of the cabin doors and windows and hallway point toward him giving us no choice but to focus our attention on him in this space. Or rather the lack thereof, as this corridor feels rather claustrophobic to add to the tension of the moment. This was shot with a telephoto lens with a longer focal length of 100mm to give us this long and narrow angle of view. That's also why it feels like Roger has a long stretch of hallway to run the length of on this train as we have a deeper depth of field. This also means that the F-stop is low at f1.5 to give this effect, as we can see everything in focus aside from the foreground walls. And much like the train station shot from before, he is trying to lay low and blend in in this sequence, but the audience is meant to have all eyes on him.



7. Roger makes it onto the train and has this first conversation with Eve after she helped him misdirect the police. This is a medium close single shot from a subtle low angle. We are just close enough to see his expressions and interaction within his reach, in this case to take a drink. Proceeding this frame, the back-and-forth shots of this conversation show Eve and Roger in a medium size shot. It's when Eve says she bribed the waiter to sit Roger at her table that we move in closer to this medium close shot. It's more intimate and we are able to see the shift in Roger's expression. The subtle low angle is more common and natural for the audience, giving a moment of rest in the story as he has meets Eve. This shot also has a shallow depth of field as everything behind Roger, and Eve, blurs into the background. Nothing else at this moment is important except the exchange of these two characters. It was shot with a neutral focal length of 25mm, close to that of the human eye. It lets the audience view it as though we get to be a part of this interaction as well.



8. Still in the train sequence, the shots of Eve and Roger have been mirroring each other (which happens often for interactions between these two). Here we also have a medium close single shot from a subtle low angle. The difference is, we've shifted to the side profile view to see this moment in their interaction. He lit her cigarette with a match, and she drew his hand in closer to blow it out. We've gone from a medium shot to medium close shot moving in closer as the conversation becomes more intimate. Now she is literally drawing him in closer, by the hand, as they flirt. It also shows that something is a bit different about her here. She's observant and independent and in this moment, she is able to disarm him and take control. Blowing out the match signals to us that she has become the more dominant one in the situation, and it signals to Roger that she is willing to let him in. I'm not sure if it's the camera quality from 1959 or intentional, but Eve also seems to have this soft glow around her all the time. Roger is a sturdy and constant presence with his solid grey suit and hair. But Eve is striking with this soft focus as well as the contrast between her light hair and dark dress in comparison. It makes her seem almost ethereal and their conversation continues to be their own little world. Again, this is achieved with a shallow depth of field with focal length at 25mm and f-stop of f5.



9. Here we have a wide crowd shot from a low angle. This wide shot sets the scene for this interaction between Vandamm and Eve at the auction. All these people are looking towards the stage that we can't see, so it's not what we as an audience should consider important. This is a crowd shot, but interestingly enough, you can't really see anyone's face too well. They're not that important. What is important to us is this tense moment between Eve and Vandamm where we better understand the power dynamic. You can see it in their body language. He has this almost predatory gaze and movement where she is tensed up and small. You get this creepy moment where we can see him gripping her neck from behind, basically claiming her as his own in among these people. The two are already at an elevated level from the rest of the crowd, but we are actually looking up at Vandamm and down on Eve like the rest of the crowd. This is shot with a wide angle with a focal length of 35mm. It's wide enough to understand that even in the large group of people Vandamm is dangerous enough to stand above the rest.



10. This shot is going to be a wide dirty single from a high angle. I call this a dirty single, because we can't see Roger or anyone else's face for that matter, but we are meant to be watching him. His face isn't important here; understanding him in relation to this huge intimidating estate is. He decides to save Eve, and his opponent is intimidating and dangerous, much like the setting he finds himself in in this shot. There is this amazing effect Hitchcock achieves here with the rim light to give us an outline of this character without just putting a spotlight on him. He is sneaking into Vandamm's house to save Eve and in doing so is hidden in the shadows. They've put him in these pure black screen shadows, but the rim light highlights his silhouette so well, we can understand the difficulty Roger has to sneak up these rocks undetected. Again, undetected in the story, but plainly highlighted for us as viewers. There is also a shift in Roger's character here. The whole movie he is running away from Vandamm, from the danger of being taken out. Now he's heading for the danger to save Eve. In doing so we see Roger abandon his trademark grey suit for just the white shirt underneath giving him this white knight in shining armor effect. This shot with a wide-angle lens with a focal length of 35mm to give us this view of the mountain side that dwarfs Roger in comparison. The f-stop on this shot is larger at f16. The aperture must be small enough to give us a wider depth of field, but large enough to let in enough light from a night scene.