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Dr. Watkins

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Watch with Purpose #2 – Fight Club

Act 1:



This shot is a medium-full, over-the-shoulder, crowd shot from a low angle. Two of the protagonists are cut off at the knees in this particular frame but it's still a cowboy shot. A cowboy shot can typically be used to show weapons like in the showdown in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Here it serves to do the opposite. We see all these men in the support group disarmed as they hug and cry together. The crowd shot helps us understand how Ed Norton as the Narrator embeds himself into this group. This scene is then interrupted by the introduction of Marla. This low angle is actually at Marla's eye level. She's the smallest one in this group of men but all the attention, even of the audience, is taken control of from her low angled eye-level. Looking over Marla's shoulder here gives us some perspective of what it would be like to walk into this room like Marla. Walking into a room full of men hugging and crying feels too intimate, like you've seen something you shouldn't have. Marla doesn't let that stop her from entering anyway. In this frame, Bob is the largest person in the room but Marla is closest to the camera. This actually makes her the tallest person in frame. It shows that the power has shifted to her and the Narrator's insomnia coping mechanism is compromised. She stands apart from this group in every way but is still the most important in this frame. The lens is a wide-angle lens with a focal length of 30mm because we can still see the background characters' reactions as well as see their

environment. The F-Stop is f6 because it's not a deep field of view. We can see most of the background characters' faces but not the ones furthest away, because they're not what's really important anyway. We want to be able to understand the scale of the group and the scene Marla has just walked into. But the only reactions the audience really needs to pay attention to are the Narrator's and Bob's, not the slightly out of focus other characters. The first thing I noticed was that no one was really wearing full dark black except for Marla. The support group becomes a mass of hugging as they are all dressed in muted colors. Marla comes in with a huge black fur coat, dark sunglasses, and a lit cigarette. It shows how much Marla stands out in this crowd but also in this world in general. Brad Pitt's Tyler is put in red a lot and Marla is put in black, especially when she is most estranged from the Narrator. In this frame, they've also placed this open gym door flooded with light on a line of thirds. This draws our attention to this square of light, but also to the two characters separated by it; Marla and the Narrator.

Act 2:



This is a medium-close, dirty-single shot from a low angle. The only face we can actually see is the Narrator's. The doctor is left anonymous, and Brad Pitt is just an out of focus Tyler Durden blob in the background. So, while we see Tyler's face, we can't see any discernable expressions or features. This gives most of our attention to the Narrator. We can only see to about his shoulders; just enough real estate to observe the blood on his shirt. We are looking up at the Narrator ever so slightly, looking up even more at Tyler in the background. It shows this internal power struggle of who the Narrator is and what his own alter ego is projecting. Here the Narrator is talking about how sometimes Tyler would talk for him, but as we later find out, it was always him. In this framing in particular, we can see how Tyler just represents his subconscious thoughts, or that little voice in your head telling you how best to respond. I also believe the doctor in this case is like the angel on one

shoulder stitching him up, and Tyler is the little red devil on the other side making up excuses like, “He fell.” Fincher uses these bright lights all throughout the film to show which Tyler is really in control (along with many other signs like color, perspective, and framing of course). Whichever one is closest to the light in frame seems to be the one making conscious choices like when Brad Pitt is centered under the kitchen light in the lye kiss scene. Here in Act II, the doctor’s work light serves to show us that the Narrator is still in control here. The lens here is slightly longer than the support group shot sitting at around 45mm. The focal length is long to see these three people in the room but not enough to really show their environment. That’s because it’s not really important, all we need to generally understand is that they are in some kind of emergency room or hospital room. The F-Stop here is at f4 because the depth of field is so shallow. Again, this is done to focus attention on our Narrator while still knowing that somewhere back there Tyler is pulling strings. Pitt’s Tyler is in his classic coded red here. The red is bold, powerful, and still stands out if it’s blurred into the background. It reflects the rebellious, dangerous, unrelenting side of Tyler. The Narrator is usually dressed in light blues and muted tones to really show his neutrality as what we assume to be an average guy. That red has started to seep into the Narrator as we see the blood drips down into his shirt.



This is a medium-full single shot from a high angle. This shot is also over the shoulder with the use of a prop lens. We see enough of the Narrator to understand how aggressively he is brushing his teeth, putting his whole body into it. He’s angry with Tyler and Marla and feels uncomfortable in this space. The angle isn’t high enough to be visceral, but it is high enough to give this ominous perspective to the Narrator. We have this villain underlighting too. Here it doesn’t necessarily read villain, but it does feel intimidating and angry for this character. Our view of the narrator is skewed in a lot of different ways here, making it a very unique single shot. We are looking over the Narrator’s shoulder into a prop lens to see the

dirt clouded expression of his face. It speaks to the skewed emotional reality of the Narrator even as we see him “alone” with his thoughts here. Again, we also have this harsh bright light pointing at him. This part of Tyler is still in control because the alter ego Tyler is off on autopilot with Marla, while the Narrator stewes. He’s in the light and Tyler is just off camera, audible but not visible. This vanishing point of this frame actually vanishes in the direction of Brad Pitt Tyler Durden. We try block out the sound of Marla and Tyler much like the Narrator focusing only on the task at hand. But the audience’s attention is nagged to look away with the dripping of water into the pot, the blue light spilling out from screen right, the openness of the hallway as compared to the confinement of the sickly yellow bathroom. The lens’ focal length is shorter, giving us this slightly distorted hallway at around 15mm. The camera also has a larger F-Stop of f10. Not much light is being let in except for that super bright spotlight we have pointed up at the Narrator. Here we see a change in the Narrator as Marla and Tyler begin to form some kind of relationship. Now he is in red. The Brad Pitt part of Tyler that unashamedly wants to be with Marla is suppressed and taken out of the spotlight. We also have a frame within a frame. The Narrator is seen through a small dirty mirror. Only the reflection of his head is in the mirror. His mind is what’s trapped in a small dirty frame.



This is a medium, low angle, two-shot. We come in closer here with a medium shot to focus on the gestures and interactions between the Narrator and Tyler in this moment. Up till this point, the Narrator and Tyler are still pretty much on the same page about the fight club. But we have this clever reveal of Tyler’s green arms and the passing off of the beer. From this low angle the audience can shift attention from the green paint and beer up to the characters’ expressions. You can see the confident almost boastful energy of Tyler coming down from the adrenaline high and the confused blissful ignorance of the Narrator before seeing the beginnings of Project Mayhem’s scale. After watching the movie all the

way through, the significance of this scene to the next is more jarring in this context than just what we see as an audience. Tyler has just vandalized a skyscraper; a dangerous and messy task. And then he walks into room with the other members watching the event reported on the news, calmly bringing in the beer. What this shot shows us is the passing of the consciousness from Tyler to the Narrator. The Narrator walks toward the light of the living room, and Tyler hangs back in the kitchen some more. The camera moves to follow the Narrator in this frame, but it still isn't a longer cut. This passing of the torch as I think of it is all about how fast Tyler is able to switch between these personalities to think that he is two different people. There are no crazy focal shifts or skewing here with the camera. The focal length is a wide angle of around 30mm and an F-Stop of f10. There is nothing out of the ordinary about this camerawork and that creates the calm before the storm. Up to this point we shouldn't suspect anything, the Narrator still isn't suspecting anything either. The subtle acting here grounded in ordinary camera work sets up the shock that is Project Mayhem's latest stunt with the skyscraper.



This is a full two shot from a low angle. The full shot helps us understand the state of the Narrator at this point. He's in pajamas, dragging his feet, lugging a huge container of liquor, and smoking a cigarette. This disposition seems more likely in Brad Pitt's Tyler, but we see the deterioration of the walls between Tyler and the Narrator. He is even wearing Tyler's blood red color in this robe. The low angle is subtle, but it gives a sense of the Narrator's dejection. In this shot we also see the face of one of the Project Mayhem members. All these members have to wear all black and buzz off their hair. It makes them one unified identity of Project Mayhem; that being the same reason they take everyone's IDs when they become a member. So, in this frame, even though we can see his face, who they are doesn't really matter. In this time of frustration, the Narrator just recognizes him as

another member in the way as he rakes the gravel behind his steps. As dejected as he is he is still in power over all the people in the house. In this moment, the Narrator is surrounded by lights, but none of them point at him. Following my logic about light before, we find the narrator here in the darkest of places lost even in his own reality and splintered consciousness; he is there but not quite anywhere. He walks up to the edge of the yard and right before stepping over that invisible line, he stops. Even as he talks to Marla, he stays within reach of the property, within reach of Project Mayhem. For this shot, the focal length is 50mm. We are able to see all of this busy movement of the Project even outside the house. That also means that the F-Stop is f7. Nothing is really out of focus until Marla and the Narrator start talking.

Act 3:



Here we have an over-the-shoulder, full, dirty single shot from a low angle. This is a dirty single because we can't see the Narrator's face. As the Narrator shoots the gun through the van, Tyler reacts immediately saying how crazy the Narrator is for shooting at a truck full of nitroglycerin. It's Tyler's reaction here that means more than the Narrator. We are seeing this part of Tyler protecting this van. Yes, as a means for survival, but also protecting Project Mayhem. We are looking past the Narrator's shoulder to see the full embodiment of this alter ego and his plan come to fruition. He knows the truth now of what Tyler Durden is, of what he himself is in all this, but he wields the knowledge very haphazardly at first. From this low angle we can still see the full body shot (minus the awkward feet cut off). We see this unstable stance he has shooting the gun; Tyler is the spitting image of confidence, and the Narrator has been running around in underwear. It shows us that even though he has taken power, he has not taken control. He cannot control himself, Tyler, this gun, any of it. The lens here looks similar to the previous toothbrushing scene with a focal length of 15mm and F-Stop of f10. We get this skewing/pulling feeling again moving from the

Narrator to his gun, past Tyler, and through the van. I believe the subtle distortion of the shortening focal length creates these diagonals that pull our eyes. The overall frame is tinted with this desaturated blue, a color motif following the Narrator much like Tyler's red. Their entire world (or the part of the world we see anyway) is blue now, this is the Narrator's reality. Even then, there is one red-coded man wreaking havoc in his mind.



This shot is a low angle, full dirty-single. Here we are at a low angle to look up at the way the Narrator does, though we really get that extreme angle up a few shots later. The subtle low angle here still gives us that affects while still establishing these characters in the setting. They have front row seats to Project Mayhem and it is back dropping this final showdown. The whole premise of this movie is like one big metaphorical dirty single; the Narrator and Tyler. The frame makes it seem like the end is near, Tyler has won as we look up to him. On a macroscale, this is the showdown between man-vs-society as they look out over the city they mean to change. But on a micro level, this is man-vs-self as we see the resolution of this struggle. The shades are harsh, creating this rim light that highlights Tyler's silhouette in this power pose. It also highlights the Narrator's submission in the moment within his inward turned knees flooded with the blue light. At around 40mm, the camera allows us to see both characters' silhouettes clearly while keeping the background cityscape slightly blurred, focusing our attention on their internal struggle. This shot is where we have the deepest depth of field in this scene at around f7 for the F-Stop. We can see the cityscape slightly in focus, but enough to take away from the protagonists. The vertical lines of the buildings do, however, create a sense of structure, bureaucracy, and rigidity, contrasting with the crumbling control the Narrator has over himself and his psyche.