FILM 2332 — Understanding Film, Discussion 1

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Question

How did The Motion Picture Production Code effect Alfred Hitchcock's use of suspense throughout his directing career? Namely, without the code, would it be reasonable to assume that his narrative style would be focused on direct action rather than through the suggestion of violence?

Commentary

The Motion Picture Production Code significantly impacts the film *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock. The film overall is tame compared to the subject matter it discusses. The film explains search for evidence of the murder of a woman by her husband, and yet throughout the film. It is inherently a violent topic, but in the film, Hitchcock uses suspense, making the audience ask the question of whether or not Thorwald killed his wife rather than explicitly revealing evidence of murder. In fact, any potential evidence is repeatedly shot down. The most violent act in the film towards a human are James Stewart's strangling towards the end of the film, however even the struggle between the two characters is unremarkable. The Motion Picture Production Code's guideline to "Crimes Against the Law" for murder prevent any more explicit scenes from being shown. Hitchcock's treatment of suspense thus throughout the film, can be seen as a necessity of dealing with violent content without violating the Motion Picture Production Code.

Rear Window also has a noticeable lack of diversity. No characters of color are featured throughout the film. While the setting is in an urban environment in a middle class neighborhood, there are no African-American or otherwise non-white characters featured through the entire film, even as a minor character. While race is not addressed in the subject of the film, the predominant whiteness seen in the film is jarring, and is unrealistic for the setting in which the film takes place.