FILM 2332 — Understanding Film, Discussion 5

https://iniyanjoseph.com | iniyanijoseph@gmail.com

Question

Effective lighting and large backgrounds were difficult to manage through editing at the time, as seen several moments in *North by Northwest*. To what extent did this change the settings in which movies were shot? Namely, were movies preferentially set indoors (barring the settings readily available in the Hollywood area) over outdoor settings for the sake of visual effect?

Commentary

In *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959) the standards for the set and costuming is jarring compared to those of today. As far as costuming, with fashion, in many instances, the fashion, especially for women is strikingly different. The hairstyles which the women in the film wear are virtually absent from today's life. Additionally the clothes which both men and women wear are entirely those of formals clothes, even for simply leaving the home to travel on short journeys by train. The set, while convincing at long distances faces fairly obvious mismatches in lighting. As we see the light around characters faces while they sit in the cars driving or as passengers, it seems unrelated to the lighting and movement in the background. While standing in the cornfield, as we see him dive, the lighting also seems to change despite the mismatch. Compared to *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), the effect of lighting is less convincing, however it still conveys the effect which they would like it to, especially in combination with the different shots employed to limit the amount of the set which needs to be showed.

In *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) editing is used to convey a sense of panic or horror. In the shower scene, when Janet Leigh's character Marion Crane is murdered, editing is used to convey a suspense within the scene. Its strategy of only partially depicting the stabbing through its odd camera angles and closeups plays a dual role. Its first most transparent goal is to hide Leigh showering, Being released in 1960, the film was still bound by the production code of film (although it was degrading by this point), and so partially hiding Leigh was necessary for Hitchcock. The more interesting use of editing in this scene is to mask the psychopath Bates's true identity. Being unable to see Bates's form clearly as the stabbing occurs causes a lingering question throughout the film: who killed Crane. More over, during the stabbing itself, the various shots used to show the stabbing disorient the audience and distracts them from the identity of the murderer.