Psychological Analysis of Alfred Hitchcock’s Movies

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Abstract

Alfred Hitchcock is a British film director famed for being the master of suspense and presentiment. In this study, suspense and presentiment are psychologically investigated by analytical and descriptive methods. We show that Hitchcock creates suspense, and increases presentiment in his audiences’ feelings using filmic elements of motion such as filming, structural motions, rhythm, and film elements. The point is that the most of items in Hitchcock’s movies are adapted to the arousal in psychology. The Frytag Pyramid structure of Hitchcock’s movies are conformed to the inverse U function which is used to explain the relation between arousal and behavioral capability. Hitchcock provides a simulated situation on the foundation of meticulous arousal for his audiences. In this research, we further indicate that Hitchcock uses provocation and anxiety to excite the audiences. Finally, arousal causes attention and concentration in film. This way, Hitchcock dominates the human psyche, and imparts his message to them. Whatever the message is, it goes through the people’s unconscious via identification.

Keywords: psychological analysis, Hitchcock’s movies, suspense; arousal;

1. Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock is an English director and born in August 1899 in London. He allotted to himself more than fifty movies. The year 1934 was a splendid outbreak for Hitchcock, since he procured his international fame on mastership of thriller type movies. During this period, he reaches to marvelous stage of suspense dramas and achieved the pre-eminent director's place in England (Katz quoting Ropzbahani-Farasati, 1997, 17) Suspense in works of Hitchcock plays an important role; suspense is any kind of non-assurance and non-awareness of the result and anticipation (Qaderi, 2007, 71). The manner of applying that toward an addressee’s attraction is considerable. Now, a question arises as in what way he has made use of suspense and entertained the addressee and conveyed his message. The answer to this question concealed in real knowledge of human and his motives. The New Wave of French cinema knows him as a discoverer who guides to depth of metaphysical anxieties. He, amongst all film makers, probably is the most conscious individual in having knowledge of general audiences.

The ability of Hitchcock in capturing the public thoughts, opinions and manipulating the feelings of the audiences becomes a byword. However, the audiences come to watch the film because they expecting arousal, and in his movies the expectation is fulfilled (ibid). Indeed, how Hitchcock could fulfill this anticipation and what techniques

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he used to penetrate the internal depth of addressee.

In this research, such ambiguity would be cleared and this question would be answered. Of course it needs to mention that much analysis in the social, physiological fields and cinema structure has been presented on works of this famous director. Here, it is not planned to assess physiologically all movies individually. This research has a unity which will decipher the truth of arousal and suspense. Without any doubt, this research would be an effective help for those whom trying to make thriller movies.

2. Method

The current research has been conducted with analytical and descriptive methods. Since this research is subject to analysis from physiological point of view; is approachable as well. To accomplish this objective; arousal, suspense and the relation of these two with the addressee's anxiety will be considered. Also, to what extent the Hitchcock movies are based on physiological science, will be assessed.

3. The purpose of the Research

In this study, the research goal is to explain suspense and arousal of Hitchcock’s movies and its relation with anxiety of the addressee.

4. Results

The Hitchcock movies contain two main aspects.

1- Cinema Techniques in Image Creation and Inspiration from German Expressionism Method

Alfred Hitchcock in his movie making is influenced by two schools of German Romanticism and Expressionism; the expressionism cinema itself came to existence after World War II (Ulrich quoting Taheri, 2005, 410). The life stories of the great expressionists is a testimonial on creativity, nihilism and their suppression: some committed suicide, some jailed and/or passed away in the concentration camps of Hitler and Stalin and some others killed in various accidents like criminal stories. They, with their fast and convulsive existence, applied modern art and expressed their anguishes and secrets (Sayed Hosaini, 2005, 705). Hitchcock, in an interview with Cahiers du cinema magazine (1959) stated that; he uses all techniques of dialogue, play, scene, color and space and his movies are presented in a good visual look (Farmani-Farasati, 1997, 595).

2- Inner- Emotional Feelings of Images – and Use of Terror and Fears Themes

Alfred Hitchcock believes that his deep logic of his movies is for "tormenting" the audiences (ibid). At this rate, in creation of his works; he is after excitement and elevating the anxiety of the audience. Contents like chase and escape, imagination, temptation, suspicion, treason, love and other meanings of this ilk verifies this subject. Kiomarce Vojdani (1964) considered deterministic and self-knowledge themes and love relationship as a part of Hitchcock's works. He believes that anxiety in Torn Curtain movie is the result of consciousness and subconsciousness's clash of human mind (Farasati, 1997, 504). For this clash he makes use of suspense and arousal of the addressee. Hitchcock has observed dominant “Cause & Effect” structure in his works. The scenario and dramatic trend of film correspond to Frytag Pyramid construct (figure.1).
Frytag Pyramid construct consists of five sections. Frytag starts the plan from introduction and then reaches to inciting moment which results in complication. At that moment action stage comes to rising action and goes to climax at the top of the pyramid. After climax, the downward curve starts that two elements can be observed; one is the falling action in which denouement happens, and the other is conclusion which rests in front of introduction (Qaderi, 2007, 53). Most of Hitchcock movies to some extent conform to Frytag construct. The audience is always waiting during the movie time. If the audiences could get an answer to a question, they will face to another question. This matter would increase the arousal. The same subject will promote anxiety and simulate negative and positive experiences for the audience. Therefore the movie could be corresponded to figure 2 that indicates the assumed relationship between cue function and the arousal level.

Figure. 1. The Frytag Pyramid structure

Figure. 2. Hypothetical relation of the level of cue function with respect to level of arousal function
Donald Heb (1955) suggested inverted U-shaped function to explain the relationship between arousal and cue function (Hebb, 1955, 243-254). Let us take a look at figure 3. This figure shows the wavelengths of suspense in Notorious film presented in ten sequences.

![Figure 3. Suspense intensity versus different time intervals and sequence numbers in Notorious movie](image)

This figure shows related time for each sequence. Sequence No.1 two minutes, sequence No.2, seven minutes, and so forth up to sequence No.10 (Sakhai quoting Farasati, 1997, 563). Although the film itself is a complete Frytag pyramid, however each sequence has its own special suspense. A closer look at figure 3 displays the fact that Hitchcock repeats figure 2 in course of the film. Here, he isn't only content with a single construct of U-shaped function and constantly replays in each sequence as though the individual starts watching the film in a deep sleep condition. Few minutes of the film goes by and the audience sets in an awakening position with the first signs of suspense. The suspense is somehow that something in which added vigilance, interest and positive excitement in the individual are developed, it means that; the very moment in which clash of consciousness and sub-consciousness takes place and after a while the optimum level emerges. The difference between figure 2 and figure 3 is the optimum level; since as it is shown in figure 3, Hitchcock minimizes the optimum level. The increase of exciting disturbances and anxiety aims at the audience's psyche in the moment that the individual rests in the falling incline...
of figures 2 and 3. This is the time that for the reason of added increase in awareness, the individual is placed in a dramatic position and makes projective identification with the hero. He assumes himself as the hero and fights with opposed and evil forces which has been created by creator of the work. These are the same opposing forces that the audience has subconsciously inside of him and he does not know about. But he feels inside the need for fighting them. The viewers enjoy this battle and struggle but, he does not yet reach to tranquility that the figure 2 rehearses and the audience is invited to another dispute. This subject continues till the last sequence of the film.

5. Discussion

Alfred Hitchcock who has been entitled to the master of apprehension, suspense and fear, entices the audience to discern his unknown inner in a simulation over cinema curtain. Human, sets back his instincts for years; withholds sex and anger and wrap it in his inner depths where even is impenetrable for himself. But there is always probability of arising it in the society as a coarse event. Eruption of anger from sub-consciousness of Hitchcock's characters brings along murder, crime and often imagination, tragic psychic disturbances. Anyone might be involved with the condition of these characters in real world. Most of Hitchcock's movies create suspense in very first minutes of the show. The propensity to know arouses in him. He limits and draws attention of the audience to the film.

Barlow (1988) believes that limiting attention often leads to increase of arousal; this fact for its part causes the attention become much more limited. In his opinion, the more people concentrate on the signs of threat, the more they get excited and more arousal intensifies their inclination to focus more on threat signs (Barlow, 1988). In depth of such arousal; Hitchcock lays his hand on the audience's attention, direct it and convey his message to him. The audience receives the message and agitates when he perceives abyss of his own unawareness. Since the anxiety is an unspecified emotion of angst and concern in response to enigmatic danger. Anxiety is an intrapsychic and informs the person about an unknown and ambiguous threat and makes him to do a defensive action against it (Schultz, quoting Sayed Mohammadi, 2008,63-64). A question arises here, then why the audience feels positive joy and excitement during anxiety? Because deep inside of him he feels that this character is not a real of him but it might be him. Ultimately it is to be said that Alfred Hitchcock through calculated suspense during exact timing, causes to develop arousal and limits the audience attention to the film. By means of receivers’ attention and concentration, he conveys his message to the unvigilant depth of person. This matter increases anxiety and reduces the rate of “ego” activity and decision making and the individual experiences a negative feeling. He uses all elements in the film to get help in suspense and develop arousal. Dark spaces, long and fearsome roads, deserted places and empty of habitat, are signs and symbols which sometimes refers to unaware and its inner events. Making use of sharp-pointed lines and thorn-shaped edges in locations and shades, which are taken from Gothic style, makes the movies horror and terror. Hitchcock through increasing vigilance, guides the audience toward making a powerful "ego" against incidents which are mostly indicates determinism.

References