



THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHER: ROGER DEAKINS, A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract: The study analyzes the styles in cinematography adopted by Roger Deakins and attempts to understand if there is a signature style followed throughout his works. Roger Alexander Deakins is an English cinematographer known for his class and finesse in cinematography. Qualitative content analysis on the three selected films- The Shawshank Redemption, Blade Runner 2049 and Prisoners is employed to decipher the nature of various cinematic tools employed by Deakins. Comparison between the style of cinematographic techniques is also identified through the study. With changing technologies and change in modern aesthetic concepts, there have been different methods by which cinematographers have adapted and hence this research will explore how Roger Deakins have adapted to the contemporary changes. Two of the selected movies; Blade Runner 2049 and Prisoners is directed by Denis Villeneuve and the other i.e., Shawshank Redemption by Frank Darabont. The key findings from the research suggest that Roger Deakins has no style that he follows throughout his films but is his powerful way of composing each of the frames for the films remain constant. He focuses on the story more than creating a solid style to his area of work. The camera movements being steady and with little or no shake gives his frames a more structured look and feel.

Keywords - *Cinematography, Roger Deakins, Shawshank Redemption, Blade Runner 2049, Prisoners, Frank Darabont, Denis Villeneuve.*

I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cinema has been an art form through which moving images have explored reality. It is also considered to be the world's most recent art form as it was created in the tail end of the 19th century. It has values which consider it to be the world's most complex, collaborative, and costly artistic expression. As technical it can get, there's always the creative magic that flows through the roots of this artwork. Although the primary purpose of cinema has been to serve the social cause, nowadays it has taken its leap in entertainment as well. Within communities, it has always encouraged ideas and social commentaries within a wide audience with different perspective and certain common interests.

Stewart Redwine in article '5 C's of Cinematography' explains the key elements of cinematography by covering the important aspects of how to analyse a film in its most authentic manner. The study analyses the key elements of analyzing cinematography from the core processes and techniques employed. It explains the 5 C's concerning the ethics of filmmaking and hence has proved a widely accepted form of analyzing cinematography. This information is needed to understand ways of analyzing the movies by Deakins. This way there would be an understanding of how to analyze movie critically on the cinematography aspects. The authenticity of the research is added exponentially by following the root principles of cinematography (REDWINE, 2009).

Alex Ferrari in an article "Roger Deakins: Breaking Down the Master Cinematographer", has explained the many ways in which Roger Deakins has achieved his individuality over working on many different films with many different directors. Not only having worked just movies but also documentaries. This article pours intensive information on his way of lighting employed for various films (Hustle, 2018). Roger Deakins has photographed every Coen Brothers picture released, totalling eight films to date. Jared Juliano has analyzed this in a study on how Deakins adapts to their storyboard with a particular style that probably would only look different if approached any differently. Overlooking his angles and static movements would give a wide approach on how the simple and observational look to certain stories give it a surprisingly apt perspective (JULIANO).

Light is the essence of cinema. Light is the necessary condition for the existence of cinema: it makes the film shooting possible, and in the same way, it makes film projection possible. For these and many other reasons, light is one of the fundamental elements that must be taken into account when analyzing a movie scene (Pietro Piazzolla, 2008).

This research is an attempt to understand the patterns followed by Roger Deakins. It tries to understand his ways of filmmaking through three selected movies; The Shawshank Redemption, Blade Runner 2049 and Prisoners. This paper will also have an overlook on the use of color in movies as a whole and by analysing particular scenes, the researcher aims to understand how color adapts through emotions.

II. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis is employed to analyse the selected movies by Roger Deakins. Under that frame, the analysis describes the general sequence in a particular frame. Colour identification when necessary, was applied. Commendable camera angles was also identified through the natural attempt of analysis along with comparative analysis of the three movies. As the primary goal of this research is to identify if there is a style that Deakins follows through all his works or if he changes his style according to the director he works with. Through the analysis, an idea of how Deakins treats a movie by being the Director of Photography can be derived.

III. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1 The Shawshank Redemption

The Shawshank Redemption is a movie directed by Frank Darabont which was adapted from the Stephen King novella "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption". Starring Morgan Freeman as Ellis 'Boyd' Redding, Tim Robbins as Andy Dufresne, this had not done a successful run-in theatre originally but was acclaimed later when it was out to the general public which is mostly in the 21st century. Cinematographer Roger Deakins had done an exceptional job in making the film a cult classic. This movie emphasizes hope amidst the chaos in prison. Darabont on reading the novel thought that this movie has potential in bringing out the tale of an intimate friendship through the big screen. Roger Deakins had used an Arriflex 35 BL4S Camera and Zeiss Standard Speed and Super Speed Lenses. His favourite seems to be the 32mm ARRI Master Prime which is similar to the 50mm prime lenses on a Full Frame DSLR. For conversations, he used wide like 35 or 29 mm for natural proximity to the characters.

For Lighting, Deakins has used the HMI light (Hydrargyrum Medium-Arc Iodide) so naturally in a way that the audience won't understand if the light is natural or artificial. Deakins has used reflectors and lights through the windows mostly opposite to the camera so that the shadows fall in the direction of the camera giving a distinguished contrast between the dramatic essence of the scene. This was also done in this movie after a lot of thinking which implies to the dark side of the prisoners in the movie as a whole.



Playing with shadows also created a mood board so distinct from the movie. This mood board was aptly recognized by Deakins, this also puts him as a master of silhouettes and lights in general. He can make a scene look more like a painting through just lights and shadows. The beating of prisoners in a scene was shown in silhouette which shows the inhuman nature of the guards towards the prisoners.

Deakins has mastered lights in this movie in a way to emphasize the image of hope. This is where Deakins stands out from others, by doing the best in what he's good at. To have this explained, there are three different scenes where Morgan Freeman meets an official three times for his freedom and in the first, there is no hope and hence there are shadows in the frame which shows a dark nature. In the second frame there is a moderate amount of light entering which shows that there is slight hope and in the third frame, the sunlight seems to hit his face directly which shows a sense of freedom. In another scene where Brooks is in the dark, shows a fact that he wasn't happy with his civilized freedom. In another scene where Red was standing in shadows and Andy in light shows that Andy has his freedom revised and is believing towards it while Red was still in the disbelief and is hence standing in the shadows. As Andy moves towards the light, it shows his belief in freedom. Another scene where Andy is sitting in his cell with his face half-lit and when he turns his head towards the light, the scene depicts that he was too close to freedom. These are a few of the observations from the film which has changed the whole perception of the movie. Camera angles and camera movements of Shawshank Redemption are so simple and minimal but have such powerful impact on the audience which made it to the nominations for cinematography in the Oscars. When Andy was first entering the prison there is a low angle POV shot of Andy and in the next scene, the camera looks up at the towering prison, tilts back into darkness more and more as it was his last gasps of daylight. The shots of guards from the low angle show a sort of superiority of the power. In another scene where Andy was about to be pushed off the roof, it starts to show the film from a very high angle and to portait the unbalanced nature of the scene, Deakins used the help of blocking through an unbalanced line which separates the building and the ground.



There was a prominent difference in Brooks and Red's release from the prison - as the camera angles were different. For Brooks, the camera was placed outside of the camera facing him because he wasn't accepting his freedom. Brooks was also standing on the shadows of the jail bar which in turn meant that his freedom out of the prison didn't make a difference for him and he wasn't accepting it. As far as Red is concerned, the camera was placed inside the prison pointing outside which shows that he accepted the freedom. They've done a good amount of pushing in by charging with a dolly to have an intimate connection to the character.



Brooks



Red

When Andy played the music, the camera had a crane upward lift with all the prisoners in the sunlight to show a sense of freedom that they're feeling for a long time. The movie has a lot of transition in certain scenes which dissolves. Here, dissolve transitions are been used to signify the passing of time.

In the last scene, Andy is been shot from an angle on top to have an effect of giving it a perspective of heaven feels to it. The rain signifies to wash away his sins. He comes out dirty and with the freedom he's clean with the help of rain in the shot. Close up and slow zoom to the character indicates the intimate connection to the character from a formal perspective.



3.2 Blade Runner 2049

Blade Runner 2049 is a movie directed by Denis Villeneuve starring Harrison Ford, Ryan Goslin, Sylvia Hoeks and Jared Leto. Roger Deakins being the director of photography won an Oscar for this movie. The soundtrack was given by Hans Zimmer which in itself is a complementary factor that has garnered a lot of appreciation for the movie. Blade Runner 2049 come under a neo-noir sci-fi movie. It's a sequel of Blade Runner, which is another cult directed by Ridley Scott. It was inspired by Philip K. Dick's novel. Main aspects that attribute the cinematography of this movie are the landscape shots and the use of lighting. Deakins has won an Oscar for this movie and this can itself prove a lot on fact that he is one of a kind when it comes to visual beauty by portraying the essence of light through techniques that are simply based on camera and set knowledge. Colours in this move played a very major role in narrating the story according to the situation. As we know the movie shows a world that posts the modern technologies. It conveys on how humans have destroyed land, atmosphere and all the other elements that make the world sane. A minimalistic approach to cinematography is probably the hardest of all as it requires the tiniest detail to be finely displayed on the screen and Deakins has achieved that throughout the film.

The cityscapes in this movie convey a lot about the setting of the script and hence had to be done the way Deakins had portrayed it. With the audio that Hans Zimmer has provided in the movie, Deakins has complemented it with the right amount of visual beauty.



Villeneuve's approach to a sci-fi movie of this sort needed it's the amount of technicality as it is shown in the first chapter in 1982 directed by Ridley Scott. One major challenge was that the director had to make it look as futuristic as possible. Deakins has helped him portray this beauty by applying the knowledge of the rule of thirds through the film. He has used contour lines as a way of a professional and ethical approach to certain shots. The concept behind Blade Runner 2049 is that the planet is seriously damaged.

Man with his innovations and out of the box thinking has done serious damage to the planet earth. This has depicted throughout the movie by giving the dull look of a dark era. The fog throughout some shots shows how the air is polluted and is unbearable. The constant amount of colour produced which keeps a particular colour balancing shows the impact of climate change and how certain geographical areas are contaminated by radiation. And, to show climate change on a drastically uplifting way, the movie shows walls that have been built to protect the city of Los Angeles from an inundation. The approach in which Roger Deakins has uplifted this condition of the uninhabitable world is by his foggy shots with a minimal composition which shows a texture of a world that is forbidden. The very particular colours used to show fog depicts the kind of air the character breathes. Colour temperatures show the cold and unhealthy air that is present throughout. Following the rule of thirds has been a key element throughout this film. This observation has been noticed with the kind of composition that has been followed throughout. The use of wide-angle lenses has been focused on in the movie by observing the landscapes in the movie. Use of wide-angle lenses has been used to show a sense of inhospitality. As the sketch of the location shows an empty big space, we can conclude on the eccentric use of wide lenses. As much as we're focusing on landscapes, the characters are often placed in the centre of the frame as shown in the frames.

Roger Deakins cinematography has been famous for the use of silhouettes and the wonderful minimal compositions. Each frame is commendable for that factor. Silhouettes give a meaning that can only be felt and not explained and that has been present quite sharply throughout. The connection of the layers of a frame has been brilliantly executed through such minimal way of composition.



The complete philosophy behind minimal composition is "Less is More". This means that when you see a minimal frame, there is so much more meaning than you can cultivate mentally which is stunning. The space filled through minimal composition gives a feeling that is deprived of meaning but filled with emotions. When a frame is filled, people tend to lose focus on many aspects in a frame because of the abundance of detail. This movie has eliminated that and hence has provided a space to breathe throughout the film.

These frames give the feel of a painting than of it being just digital art. This makes it look aesthetically pleasing for the viewers and is a signature of Roger Deakins filmography. Since Roger Deakins was also a painter, he focuses on such aesthetically pleasing factors of cinema as well. Viewers eyes are not distracted by superfluous elements which give the viewer the pleasure in his frames. By doing this side-by-side Villeneuve and Deakins have shown an essence of a dangerous and a mysterious world. A lot of shots are portrayed from an aerial view to show the land forbidden of life. Like in the last chapter they've used a helicopter shot that is shot in Iceland. The shot that's shown with California being a tag shows an immense amount of detail which shows the space between the detail giving it a look of no colour which in return gives an idea of the dull and lifeless world. The use of Orange or the shade of yellow has suggested a sense of mystery, exploration but also danger and action. There's a scene in the ending which is set in Las Vegas, a Ghost town which has a complete tint orange and yellow which gave a sense exploration to the viewers. It made the audience

want to more about that place that was the aim towards it. There's a surreal sense added to it by giving a sandstorm in the desert which alarms the sense of knowing and a way of clarity.



White is another important palette shown throughout the movie. It shows solitude, silence and death. With this, the frames had to mean everything that's pale and meaning worthy to be evoked. A minimal pattern of composition through the movie gave off a generic pattern of fluid state throughout the movie. As much as white had to mean every other thing, it also represents a state of limbo. Limbo being an idea of suspended places out of space and time. Grey being another important colour used, is used to show a dystopic dead future. It shows the heavy nature of lifeless conditions in the movie. As much as the movie shows an empty polluted space, all these scenes are set up with a heavy baseline palette of grey. Grey in a darker shade gave higher and deeper photographic meaning to the movie. With the intensifying pattern of grey with fog, it only gave away a wider perspective on the whole condition of the plot.

Blue-Purple is another colour used mainly in the palette. This colour sets the mood of the future but shows the colour of technology.



The whole idea of it is to represent something sci-fi. A sci-fi mood is again created through the use of neon lights throughout the projections in the movie. All the realities that the movie shows which might be applicable in the future emits a sort of blue-purple shade and it completely gives off a futuristic vibe. The city especially is laminated with this tint and the holograms that come out are conditioned by this colour. When there is less population of colour in a frame, the frame is clearer and the viewers set the image clearly without any confusion. Roger Deakins being the master of lights has shown his brilliance through the frames filled with shades of lights in the movie. The movie either sets a dark tone or a bright one. Deakins brings the dark tones in the pictures to make the holograms look futuristic. The dark tones helped in creating the contrast between dark tones and neon/holograms which gives a vibe of cold light. For a scene in Wallace's office, Roger Deakins used a circular apparatus with 286 moving lights mounted in two concentric rings. The incandescent lights create a dynamic lighting game in the scene. This helped him play with shadows and silhouettes. The Oscar winner Jared Leto plays the role of Wallace, the bad guy of the story.

3.3 Prisoners

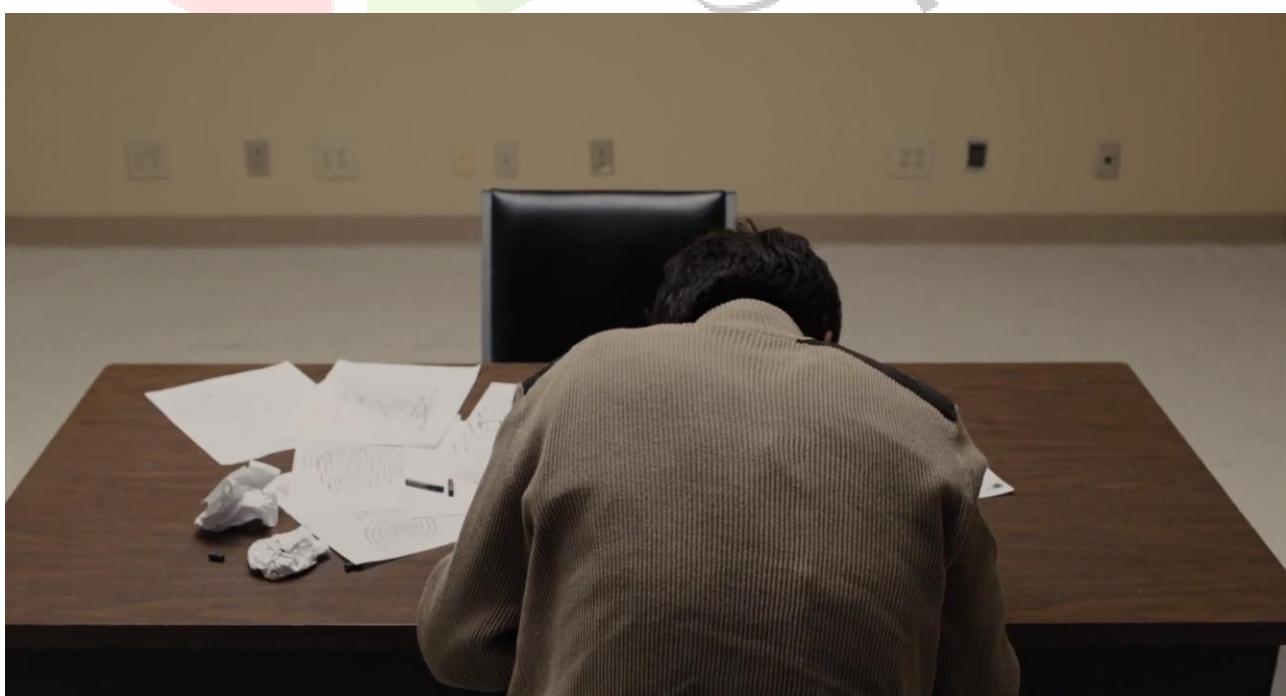
Prisoners in a movie directed by Denis Villeneuve which is shot by Roger Deakins. Aaron Guzikowski has written the story beautifully enough for the movie to be structurally organized. Denis had Roger Deakins aboard on this project like some of his

previous ones. His relationship with Deakins has a classical touch to the movies as well. Most of the time the approach towards what they do has a similar structure and their equation goes hand in hand. This movie shows a tale of kidnapping and their approach to finding the kidnapper. It has a very cold touch with regard to keeping the weather and temperature. Deakins shows his brilliance through lighting and his minimal framing techniques. Deakins method of minimal but powerful framing helps the viewer connect everything to the story. Deakins as said in one of his interviews he is a man who believes in the story. He shoots the film to make the audience stay put with the story and not just the aesthetics. Deakins shot *Prisoners* with an ARRI Alexa Plus with Zeiss Master Prime Lenses and he also used ARRI Alexa Studio with Zeiss Master Prime Lenses. Deakins starts off the movie with an establishing wide shot of the woods which is very typical of him from a long time. Most of his movies have an establishing shot in the beginning to show the kind of location and set up of the movie.



Most of the shots that are seen on Deakins' frame has been framed with something. A wide flat shot of the house and the family with the road in the foreground gives a depth to a normally flat-looking scene. Deakins uses a lot of shapes because he frames houses in a way that the triangle fills the space and doesn't leave any empty vague spaces. These wide frames are supposedly shot on a 24mm lens.

His focus shifts in this movie create a very detailed meaningful approach to the scene. Deakins frames the cross in a silhouette form by exposing the bricks in the background and give the girl the focus by giving the frames different meanings. Meanwhile, he has framed with all the tiny details which will subconsciously allow the viewer to understand the perspective of the scene. Shooting a



particular scene within a glass window made the viewer connect to what's happening outside through an inside perspective. Clever blocking of this sort leads to the character's face being revealed in the mirror as the character turns around. This in itself speaks about

the frame within a frame method of Deakins. He has also used subtle reflections in particular scenes to provide the natural raw outlook of the happening. The reflection produces a subconscious effect on the audience that the set is almost real.

He adds upon elements with one colour or one object with less reverence to fill in one particular frame by which he lets the audience to be drawn to the main happening. This way of blocking only lets the audience absorb more of the set. Most of the shots where he wants to show the characters with the surrounding used a 35mm lens. His use of establishing wet grounds in the movie helps on with contrast and helps the audience to be more attached to the story and the characters. He also uses stairs as a way of blur blocking which helps to create a depth within the frame. An abundance of soft light sources is used to justify the realistic nature and to complement the characters indoor.

The usage of children running through the empty spaces creates effective blocking to the frame as it adds on to many happenings in the scene which is natural in a house gathering. To gather a huge number of details on an ongoing activity he must've used an 18mm lens. Use of Steadicam being seen in while two characters move outside the street to reveal more about the environment. By this time of the film, most of the colour tones are mostly muted and desaturated throughout the film. Filling the background with just one single mass of colours give a lot more contrast to the characters. Frame within a framing point of view gives a very creepy approach to some scenes in the movie. Deakin is also seen filling the frame with a triangle angle which gives a very satisfying comfortable



approach to the viewers. He's seen to fill his frame with a lot of detail which makes it not evident throughout. This in return helps in making the viewer believe in the scene. His way of keeping a character being spoken to, on out of focus helps in creating depth. He frames darkness with light leaks which fill the frame with anticipation. This way of composing something has to be very thoughtful and hence is a very impactful way of filming.

His way of filming and composing lines shows how he wants to point at the character to keep the story intact to the actor. Focus pulls through his frame shows an unsettling meaning to the object and the whole surrounding and sometimes it's done so as to connect the object to the storyboard. Deakins fills a frame with lights all over and keeps the character with contrasting lighting so that the character is in focus on and the frame is kept intact. He makes the reflections on the frame with a wide-angle shot to show the source of light and to make a depth to the frame. The solid centre composition that Deakins gives to the characters always lets him make the viewers focus on what's required and also subconsciously be treated by the perfect minimal composition.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study is directed towards understanding or knowing the style of the cinematographer Roger Deakins through three selected movies. Shawshank Redemption was directed by Frank Darabont as opposed to the other two movies. Shawshank Redemption has prison set up and Deakins has shown that through the kind of lighting and shadows that he has created. Shooting mostly in shadows gives the brutal outlook of prison while comparing it to Blade Runner 2049, Blade Runner was successful in creating a special environment to narrate the story. As this observation makes a difference, we understand that Deakins has adapted through the change in the environment to support the movie plot. In Prisoners, Deakins uses a blue/cool tone throughout to give away the gloomy climate and condition of the place. This, as compared to Blade Runner shows similarity on how he adapts to a gloomy environment with similar desaturation and colouring the temperature close to the cool tones. His camera angle when compared to all the movies is of importance as it never fails to focus on the aesthetics but creates meaning with the whole frame. However, the meaning again directs to the story.

The key findings from the research suggest that Roger Deakins has no style that he follows through his films but the only thing that remains constant is his powerful way of composing each of the frames for the film. He focuses on the story more than creating a solid style to his area of work. He however has certain camera movements that he always sticks to. The camera movements being steady and with little or no shake gives his frame a more structured look and feel. He doesn't adapt to the realistic raw format of shooting

but is more inclined towards the stability of each of the frames. His lighting techniques are suited to align with natural light sources. He believes to interpret the lighting to be natural and hence leaves the viewer being not able to distinguish between what's artificial. Deakins is found using natural lights to give the movie a raw and cinematic look. With the help of prime lens, he creates a depth through the character. Deakins seems to use wide and prime throughout his work as they are the primary sources to create perspectives in his sense of cinematography.

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