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FM1: Analysing Film Form: Written Analysis, focusing on sound and cinematography in Andrea Arnold’s *Fish Tank* 2009 looking at the kidnapping and the chase between Mia and Connor sequence of said film.

Sequence Length: 4 mins 41 sec
“What’s wrong with you?!”
“You’re what’s wrong with me!”

Written Analysis, focusing on sound and cinematography in Andrea Arnold’s Fish Tank 2009 looking at the kidnapping and the chase between Mia and Connor sequence of said film.

Fish Tank, 2009, directed by Andrea Arnold follows the story of the seemingly troublesome adolescent, Mia (Katie Jarvis) who is barely surviving in a world where it seems she has no one but herself. The title of the film came from Arnold wanting to create the idea that there is often a lot of life within a fish tank despite it being such a small space. As well as this, the film can be interpreted as a microcosm for a much bigger picture of adolescents being victims of their own circumstances rather than just being ‘bad’ people. A fish tank could also be a metaphor for Mia – and adolescents like her – being trapped in small spaces where they are made to believe that this is all there is to life, when in actual fact there is so much more and they just have to branch out and create their own destinies. The theme of not just accepting what we are given in life and instead fighting hard to discover much more than is on the surface of life is a theme running throughout Fish Tank; “Live, love, and give as good as you get.”

The sequence of Fish Tank that I have chosen to analyse is the sequence in which Mia kidnaps Connor’s daughter in a moment of sheer madness, through to the moment where Connor chases Mia in a dark field mad with rage.
I chose to begin my sequence when things begin to descend into madness and Mia distinctly shouts the line; “Stop. Running. Off.” The lighting is naturalistic and suggests that time has passed since Mia first took the girl and therefore hints at why Mia’s demeanour is becoming increasingly agitated. The camera movement is erratic as Mia and the young girl begin to throw rocks at one another, and the sounds of roaring waves, loud seagulls and harsh winds communicate a sense of madness and suggests that such sounds are so overwhelming for the characters that they are perhaps clouding their better judgments. There is also a moment where a shot following the young girl becomes extremely blurred (the shot continues to go in and out of focus) – perhaps symbolising the fact that Mia abducted the young girl in a moment of madness and only now is she starting to realise that she has no real objective and no real control over the situation – things are starting to slip away from her and blur. This creates a feeling of pathos in the audience because they feel sorry for the situation Mia has got herself in but at the same time fear the consequences that we know are inevitable.

During the shots where Mia is chasing after the young girl, the camera movement – much like the wind – changes due to higher levels of panic and desperation. The erratic camera movements and change of perspective in shots – gives the audience the impression that they are running with Mia – which creates a realism that evokes extreme panic and desperation in the audience.

There is a close up of Mia’s profile as she trudges through the field closer to the young girl where Mia’s frustration and inner conflict is clearly illustrated on Jarvis’ face. This short close up also shows Mia doing her best against the harsh weather as well as allowing the audience to hear her laboured breath – possibly from her desperation more than an actual physical reason. Following this, there is a fairly still shot – in comparison to the others – of the young girl stood near the edge of a small cliff as Mia approaches closer. This scene is extremely powerful as it gives the audience a chance to take in the young girl’s damaged clothing as well as the dull scenery around her – including terribly murky looking water that...
seems to stretch far in front of her. This murky water that stretches far in front of Mia as she approaches closer to the young girl could be seen as a symbol for the bleakness and emptiness that lies ahead for Mia if she doesn’t escape the fish tank that is her life.

There is also a moment later on when Mia has thrown the girl into the murky water and a perspective shot is used to truly envelop the audience into Mia’s situation. The camera moves from side to side clearly communicating to the audience that Mia may have lost the girl forever and this fills the audience will a feeling of dread and sheer panic – the raw emotions that Mia must be feeling herself.

Sound is an extremely important element within *Fish Tank* and for Andrea Arnold's films in general. Both *Fish Tank* and her debut film *Red Road* commence with the sound of a woman breathing. Such sounds create intimate proximity with the film's complicated female protagonist and throughout my chosen sequence, sound appears to dominate the scenes and we see what they see, and hear what they hear.

There is a short shot of the sea after Mia has rescued the young girl from the sea where the camera movement calms despite the sea harshly crashing against the land edge. This shot is perhaps symbolising a disaster averted and the sense of relief and catharsis the audience feels. Or it could be argued that the calm shot is eerily symbolising the calm that comes before the storm. Which asks the audience the question: are things going to get worse before they get better?
The sudden darkness of the night that follows the scenes that are lit by natural daylight provides an extreme and sudden contrast for the audience. The darkness also seems to give the audience a sudden reminder of the consequences that will follow – reinstating the feeling of pathos in the audience. The lack of detail that the audience is about to see – due to the dark – also makes the scene more genuinely tense and evokes the feeling of sheer realism (which is important in the Social Realism genre). The first few shots when Mia is returning the young girl home are almost silent – as if keeping alive the feeling of calm before the storm. This allows for a huge contrast when we watch Mia walking alone beside a main road, where the sound rises and again dominates the scene. Here all the audience can really see are the lights of the cars passing on the road and this increases the tense atmosphere due to the audience awaiting what they know are the inevitable consequences.
The loud screech of the car as it stops in front of Mia mixed with the sounds of Mia’s desperate and laboured breathing as she knows what is about to happen, evokes an intimate feeling of reality and fear which causes the audience to feel as if they are one with Mia – therefore raising the levels of panic and tension in the audience. As the running commences into the nearby field, the lighting becomes a little brighter – but still natural – and all the audience can really see are the silhouettes of Mia and Connor.

This is a really powerful image because it could be symbolising the way that Mia sees things – no matter what happens in her life; Connor is the silver lining in every cloud and all she ever really sees is Connor and herself.
Adding to the atmosphere that the darkness and lack of detail creates, the sharp shocking sound of Connor slapping Mia comes as a sudden blow to the audience due to the fact that they can hardly see what is happening. This stops the audience from being able to see what is about to happen and therefore enhances the closeness between the audience and Mia because they see and hear things at the exact same time as she does. Following this, there is a close up of Mia’s profile as she holds on to the side of her face – confirming what the audience already know and allowing the audience a moment to take in the full extent of the hurt and betrayal that Mia is feeling towards Connor.

During this close up, the lighting in the scene seems to brighten, thus illuminating Mia’s features. The source of the lighting appears to be coming from behind Connor and this could be suggesting that Mia still holds Connor in high regards despite all he has done, also
reinstating Mia’s theory that Connor is still the silver lining in the cloud that is her life. As well as this, having the light coming from behind Connor means that the audience find it harder to see his features and therefore it makes it harder to determine how he is feeling and this also enhances the attention we as an audience hold to how Mia is reacting.

Throughout the film Mia is a character that provokes both sympathy and repulsion from the audience in nearly equal measure, through the way she rejects others when they try to help her as well as the evident vulnerability that she possesses and displays in scenes where she develops a quick dependency on Connor. Despite the film perhaps evoking a negative feeling in its audience towards life and our inability to control what goes on around us, Arnold ensures that the film ends with a glimmer of hope when Mia decides to travel with the local boy Billy. No matter what our individual fish tanks do to us and shape us into it is always possible to stop playing the victim and create our own destinies.

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