

Justice and other Arbitrary Things

Much that can be spoken in words can be more eloquently expressed through presentation. Ozu's films utilize a variety of filming techniques to convey plot elements as well as themes, but none shone as brightly to me as in *Dragnet Girl*. At the end of the film, Joji and Tokiko make their flight from pursuing police operatives. In doing this, they make their escape onto the roof of their home building. The cops enter to investigate their room, and a slow tracking shot reveals the pair intermittently illuminated by a light-up sign reading "Club Hamigaki" (クラブ歯磨). The uses of camera movements and lighting in this scene allow the audience to understand and empathize with what internal conflict the two main characters are having. Furthermore, this pairs perfectly with the two's external conflict with each other, in regard to what they deem to be the correct path to move forward on. In doing this, the audience should feel compelled to associate themselves with Joji and Tokiko, rather than the police officers, who are presented as aggressors/antagonists in the story.

The scene begins in Joji and Tokiko's apartment. Joji looks out the before-mentioned window, and the camera makes a straight cut to the streets below where three police officers are patrolling. From the actors' display of unease, we are let onto the idea that the two are about to be apprehended for their crimes committed in the previous scene. Although the most used form of displaying order-of-events in the film is by taking still shots and editing them together, in this scene we get multiple tracking shots. The first shot starts at one side of the apartment's room, focused on the table with the occupants' belongings adorning it. The tracking shot moves right to heighten the importance of the current state of the room and the table. The camera angle is also positioned close to human height, giving the audience a feeling of being a third-person bystander observing a space that feels "lived in." At the very tail end of the scene, and of the film, Joji and

Tokiko are caught, and the officers that had assailed their apartment leave. The action of the final officer leaving is done with a low angle shot, looking up at the disaster left behind by the combined effort of Joji and Tokiko's flight, as well as the cops' ransacking. The upward-looking shot is a means to separate the viewer from the shoes of a "human" observer. Rather than looking at this disheveled room from the eyes of an inhabitant, we can find ourselves empathizing with the space itself. The low angle shot leads into floor-level camera angles that present many of the previous tenants' articles scattered around in an unpleasant way that makes the room feel vacant. Along with expressing somber emotions through the space that the scene is shot in, this camera composition and editing expresses the cause and effect that has occurred throughout the story – namely, a change has come about Joji and Tokiko's life, and they have left behind their previous way of living.

At the beginning of the scene, as the two sneak out through the building's window, a light is reflected off of the open window panes' glass, intermittently flashing on and off. The camera pauses on this shot to attract the audience's attention to it, and the film then takes a straight shot to the source of the light, a sign reading "Club Hamigaki." This is an excellent presentation of categorical inclusion, where the reflection of the lights is used masterfully to lead the film to its next shot, looking out at the flashing sign. The tension of Joji and Tokiko's predicament is made all the more palpable to the audience when the trio of officers breaches their apartment room, and the camera performs a tracking shot moving backward as the cops move toward the audience's point of view. This gives the officers an imposing presence in the eyes of the viewer, and allows us to recognize them as the aggressors/antagonists of this scene. As they rummage through the protagonists' belongings, one of the officers moves to look out the window. This still shot of the officer leads into a tracking shot along the rooftop, which ends to show Joji and

Tokiko's legs as they huddle in a corner of the building. The decision to end the shot by showing only their legs and feet builds onto the tone of the scene, which is, the two are currently trying to be sneaky and hide from the authorities as best they can. Joji makes the first move to attempt to jump from the building, but Tokiko remains reluctant. For the duration of this part of the scene on the rooftop, the light of the "Club Hamigaki" sign will be regularly be applying light to the scene and also drowning out that light by cutting off regularly as well. As Joji and Tokiko start to make their differing actions, the film takes a straight cut to the "Club Hamigaki" sign. After pausing on this, the scene cuts back to the two, with Tokiko trying to convince Joji to let the two of them turn themselves in. Very notably, the Japanese term "Hamigaki" means to brush one's teeth. In a figurative sense, the presence of this sign is meant to express the crossroad that the pair has found their selves at. Should they choose to adhere to the life that they had been living up to this point, constantly running from punishment without ever cleansing themselves of their past wrongdoings, or should they try to gain a fresh start by admitting to their crimes. It can be speculated that the flashing on and off of the lights is to express this consternation in making a decision. The flashing also does greatly to accentuate the imperativeness of the situation, both externally, with the impending threat of the police, and internally, with both Joji and Tokiko's inner struggles of how they want to live their lives moving forward. The lights also create the "illusion" of time progressing although the camera shots of the "Club Hamigaki" sign are still. This presentation of syuzhet keeps the film's narrative moving forward and also sets the tones of the scene – urgency, consternation, and an impending change that will affect the lives of the characters. As tensions rise on the rooftop, camera shots switch between both Joji and Tokiko together, and a shot of Tokiko in the foreground is shown, with the light from the room's window viewable in the background. Just as the light of the "Club Hamigaki" sign does, the light

pouring out from the room is intermittently met with the shadow of one of the police officers, in order to duplicate the sense of time progression and urgency that the sign conveys. The view of the officer's shadow bobbing in and out of view is only visible to Joji, who is parallel from Tokiko. Tokiko is framed to be looking at the camera, which gives the audience the feeling that they are seeing the world through Joji's eyes. The actors' respective expressions of calm concern (Tokiko) and urgent panic (Joji) create a third layer of storytelling along with the shot composition and background. Through adding all of these manners of film presentation, it is quite possible to say that Ozu did not want the anxiety of this climactic scene to pass any viewers by, and that Joji and Tokiko's emotions towards the scene's conflict were meant to be the main focus.

At the very end of the scene, Joji and Tokiko continue their flight from the police officers on foot. As they make their way up and down the streets, officers are shown either in long shots, or with the actor quickly darting across the camera's field of vision in a way that emulates Joji and Tokiko's point of view. During the pair's final dialogue before being caught by the police, Tokiko repeatedly reaches to hold Joji by the arm in order to keep him in place and to convince him to turn their selves in. Joji parrots this in an aggressive manor when he grabs at Tokiko and attempts to drag her along with him to escape. During this part of the scene, and especially throughout the entire film, Joji remains with a stoic, hardened range of facial expressions. It isn't until after Joji finally agrees with Tokiko to give up on running that his hardened expression breaks, and he softens up. The camera then switches to show a long shot of one of the police officers approaching from far away. Right before Joji and Tokiko are put under custody, the camera shows the two shots of the pair embracing each other, with the police officer's hand reaching in from out of the camera's point of view to bring each of their hands down to handcuff

them. It is certainly worth noting that the officer is also wearing gloves during this sequence. As far as the film's fabula is concerned, it would have been fine for the officer to have been in the camera shot, or to have even not been wearing gloves. However, I believe this to be the director's method of focusing the story in on the main characters' situation through syuzhch, rather than to focus on the story's general fabula of "the two main characters were apprehended by the police." If the camera were to focus more on the police officer, this may take away from the main characters' acceptance of change to their lives, and in the worst case, it may have undermined Joji and Tokiko's decisions towards the end. The following camera shots and angles shown of the ransacked room left behind by the officers further allows us to feel empathy for the pair, by presenting a visual queue of what the pair's decision would mean for their current livelihood.

Dragnet Girl could very well have been a story told through more dialogue or with just more focus on fabula. However, the syuzhet presentation gives the audience a look into a greater narrative than just some "mob drama" flick. Joji and Tokiko's conflict in the story's climax provided many film elements to allow the audience to share the two's anxious emotions. The two are filmed throughout this scene in a manner that doesn't focus in on the fact that they have committed a crime, but rather helps us to empathize with their struggle as they are met with a crossroad in life. Camera angles, camera shot distancing, and lighting helped to characterize the officers as a looming threat, but without dehumanizing them. Through these forms of presentation, the scene can convey to the audience the importance in valuing a criminal's human traits. For whatever crime a person may commit, they still have the aptitude to change and become better through that change.