

Example of essay on camera techniques in french cinema rules of the game and chil...

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Early French cinema provided the art of film with many innovations, among them creative usage of camera techniques that allowed the medium to set itself apart from theatre. In the case of two of the most prominent examples of this genre of film – Jean Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game* and Marcel Carne’s *Children of Paradise* – the camera is used in intensely creative ways to indicate everything from the subtle humor of class conflict to the brutal and tragic accidental murder of a human being. These films are particularly influential in the use of camera technique to advance the story, relying not strictly on performance and staging, but image and composition as well.

In Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game*, the “*Danse Macabre*” scene is an elegant way to show the presentationalism of the theatre they are watching.

Beginning with a close-up of the player piano playing the backing music for the play itself, the camera pulls back to see a crowd of French aristocrats surrounding it, perfectly still, smoothly transitioning to a straight-on wide shot of the stage, upon which the ghostly trio of actors begins their play. This simple yet complex shot demonstrates the sheer oddness of French elite culture, as they focus on the piano while the real show is happening next to them. The use of the player piano involves the audience of the ghost play as ghostly figures, as no one is actually pushing the keys. The scene is then filmed straight on, like a play, while the actors dance and strut for their elite French audience – the class conflicts of the play being played out as theatre. The camera pans from group to group of people, all having different reactions to the bizarre troupe of actors, in a single shot, gauging their different reactions to illustrate the microcosm of French society.

In another scene of *The Rules of the Game*, the likening of French aristocracy

to puppet masters is made even clearer with the reveal of the music box by Robert. Filmed straight-on, in an even shot, the audience is placed in the room with the others who are meant to see this wonderful machine. The three statues in the music box are tiny compared to Robert, noting the performer's relative insignificance in the eyes of their rich audience. The camera then cuts to a close-up of a beautiful nude painting at the time of the music box, then a shot that pans across the statues as they clang bells and perform music, panning all the way over to Robert (likening him to just another part of the performance). This sequence makes clear that the rich often thought of their working-class peers and servants as entertainment, something to look at from a distance instead of relate to on a personal level. In Carne's *Children of Paradise*, these class conflicts and this love of theater is echoed even further. Shots like the wide shot of the Funambules theatre – panning up and up and up at the throngs of people waiting to see the show – give the concept of the theatre a grandeur that works well for the film's themes of class conflict. The aristocratic French elites waiting in the balconies seem to tower elegantly over the lowly actors, showing even more clearly how much of an advantage they seem to have. The aristocratic Arletty is often filmed in gorgeous close-up, the camera illuminating her beautiful features, to emphasize the appeal that she has to the four different men who love her. The shot in which she is in the bath, looking at herself in a hand mirror while she twirls about naked (except for a floral hat) shows at once her vulnerability and vanity. The scene in which Jean-Louis Barrault's mime character puts on a show for an audience on the street is filmed with his body in full frame, allowing the audience to see every nuance of his

performance. This demonstrates the film's respect and awe for the theatrical performer, even despite the class conflicts that wear them down.

Using these camera techniques and more, Carne and Renoir used the camera as a platform from which to visually tell the story of France's class conflicts. Both films feature the aristocracy and the working class attempting to relate to each other, often through the lens of performance or service. Both filmmakers depict the poor as sympathetic, forced to perform for the rich, who are uncaring and do not seem to view the poor as quite human. By showing these divides between groups of people through panning, staging and wide shot composition, Carne and Renoir acknowledge the plight of the working class while also demonstrating a love for the performer and his performance. The rich, meanwhile, are shown to be vain, unfeeling, and contemptuous of those who do things for them. The aesthetically pleasing and symbolically-charged cinematograph and camera techniques of these two filmmakers infuse the films with their subtexts about class, society and the individual.

Works Cited

Carne, Marcel (dir.) *Children of Paradise*. Janus Films, 1945.

Renoir, Jean (dir.) *The Rules of the Game*. Janus Films, 1939.