

The power of angles in citizen kane



The movie Citizen Kane depicts the life of the successful businessman Charles Foster Kane through a series of flashbacks derived from interviews of his acquaintances. Through these interviews, Thompson, a newspaper reporter, attempts to solve the mysterious meaning of Kane's final word, "Rosebud," and uncover a more private side of Kane. Moreover, during these interviews, the viewer better understands these relationships through sound, via the content of the interview, as well as through sight, via the varying perspectives and positions of the camera. These camera angles are especially impactful within scenes involving Kane and his wives, and are used to depict the more controlling and powerful person within the scene. The positioning of the camera gives the audience more insight into what situations cause Kane to be more dominating when in a relationship.

The strategic use of these angles works to emphasize the power dynamics between Kane and the women with whom he has relationships. During the film, there are several scenes between Kane and his second wife, Susan Alexander, in which the camera is positioned up towards Kane to signify his position of power over Susan. At one point, when Susan is in front of Kane and is having a hysterical fit over negative reviews written about her performances, the camera shifts positions three times. At first the camera is positioned so it is looking down on Susan while she has an outburst. From this downward-looking perspective, it is almost like Kane is a parent looking down upon a small child as she throws a temper tantrum in her shrill, childlike voice. The camera then moves so that we view the scene from Susan's perspective as she complains and almost pleads to Kane for answers. As Susan whines about her negative reviews, the camera looks up

towards Kane because he is believed to have the solution and the power to change the situation. Lastly, the camera zooms out to show Kane pacing around the room, standing as Susan sits on the floor, pouting. This image of both Kane and Susan reiterates their imbalanced power dynamic and emphasizes his superiority over her.

Kane is often placed at a high angle, in such a manner that the camera looks up towards him throughout the film. However, there are a few occasions when the camera looks straight onto him and others, implying a balance in power. When Kane and Susan first meet, they are sitting inside of Susan's apartment making hand shadows upon the wall. While they are both partaking in this childish act, the camera is at eye level with both of them, which implies a balance of power within their relationship. At this point, Susan does not know the power behind Kane's name, which helps to eliminate any hierarchies of power and control. Additionally, Kane, who lacked a childhood, is drawn to Susan's childlike disposition and feels as though he can be the most infantile version of himself. This is one of the few scenes in which Kane's playful side is shown and this exhibition of a gentler side of him also helps to lower him from his usual state to a position closer to Susan's, which is again emphasized by the angling of the camera so that it is directed straight at both individuals.

Susan is not the only woman in Kane's life who is able to interact with him eye-to-eye. Emily, Kane's first wife, was also able to interact with Kane on equal footing. She is the President's niece and a strong woman. There are several scenes in the film that depict Kane and Emily's morning breakfast routine, where the camera is positioned at a neutral angle so it is looking

directly at both of them, conveying their equal levels of power. As the scenes progress, tension grows between the two as they argue about Kane's obsessive work tendencies and what he publishes in his paper. Unlike Susan, who is very childlike but ultimately unsuccessful in getting what she wants, Emily is much more cunning. Rather than resorting to juvenile acts like screaming as Susan does, Emily chooses to be significantly more diplomatic and direct about what she doesn't like. Emily challenges Kane's actions rather than passively sitting by and allowing him to dominate her. Although Emily is able to voice her opinion, her assertiveness is not enough to change Kane's actions, preventing her from being able to exceed Kane's level of power, which is further emphasized by the straight-on positioning of the camera. Sound and content within a scene convey several ideas about these interactions and relationships between Kane and his wives; however, the positioning of the camera also serves to emphasize the power dynamics within such relationships.

When the camera is looking down on a character, such a technique implies a lack of control and demonstrates Kane's superiority over that individual. The reverse applies when the camera is looking up at Kane, signifying Kane's power over a woman. The changing angles show that as powerful as Kane is, there are several moments in his life and relationships with women when he is not dominant or in control, but merely equal.