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Film

Drama production

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Question number: 1Title(s): River Queen (2006)Author(s)/director(s)/producer(s)/website(s): Vincent Ward (director)

## PLANNING

Production features

Scene: 2 min 32 sec

lighting

Camera shots.

Sound and old vlog

Witness

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In the New Zealand film "River Queen" (2006) directed by Vincent Ward, a key scene whose production features are significant in communicating key ideas - is the "clearing the land scene" near the beginning of Act 2 in the narrative structure. This scene last for ~~2~~ 2 minutes and 32 seconds. In terms of significant ideas this scene is pivotal because it repositions Sarah within the wider theme of political grievance. Until this scene, approximately 14 minutes into the film, the narrative has been concerned with Sarah's story - her plight as a young woman who has lost her child near the Wanganui River settlement in the 1860's in Taranaki colonial New Zealand. This has been her personal grievance story, her experiences which have brought trauma and heartache. Her son has been taken from her and for seven years she has looked for him. The "Clearing the land scene" moves Sarah into a different position as a character. She becomes directly involved in the land wars. Because of her determination to find Boy she demands that Old Rangī speak to her and tell her where her son is. Old Rangī looks as if he is attacking Sarah while this conversation is taking place and as a result Rangī is shot by Major Baines. Sarah's actions have cause huge changes in the escalation of the war. The production features in this scene, which help to create more tension and drama associated with this theme movement, are firstly the use of "end of zoom" shots where the depth of field distortions are used for special effect. Secondly is the use of camera distance, angle and position. Thirdly is the heightened use of amber light lighting for gloomy effects and lastly is the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound track. All of these

production features techniques help to reveal a scene of panic, despair and chaos.

During this key ~~scene~~ scene the Director of Photography, Alan Bollinger, makes frequent use of the "end of zoom" shot. Rather than a long distance shot, the "end of zoom" shot zooms in on a subject from a longer than expected distance. This has the effect of blurring the surrounding objects and the composition of the frame. It sets out the subject clearly but with a hazy background in the depth of field. There are many of these shots in this scene to emphasise the confusion and despair as the Maori people are "cleared" from their land by the ~~solid~~ soldiers. Wiremu (Cliff Curtis) in particular looks at the unfolding events which are tragic for him, as his father, Old Rangī, is shot and killed by Major Baines. Wiremu is filmed repeatedly with "end of zoom" shots. The emotions on his face are captured against a blur. He is also on horseback for most of the scene and a low angle camera position is used to film upwards making Wiremu look more important and critical to the action in this scene. The hazy effects in the depth of field also suit the fire background which is a blurred, raging inferno as the soldiers torch the whare of the people to make them frightened and make them want to leave. Through this does Sarah is looking for Old Rangī because she recognises in the people before her, his mark as the Tokunga Tamoko. The camera is positioned sideways on a dolly track to follow her making her way towards Old Rangī. This intensifies the film's theme of Sarah's journey, forever searching. She passes through the flames and the wrecked dwellings

again with the depth of field ~~being~~ blurred. She takes no notice of the danger she is in because as always she is totally focused on finding her son Boy. She sees Rangī standing under a shelter of trees.

As Sarah pushes forward the OT man there is a lot of shakes filming done with a hand held camera to add to the effects of being shoved and abused - An older kiwi screams at Sarah, "Our people bleed while you plunder our land". Sarah is still associated with the European army rather than the Maori Whānau. Throughout this "Clearing the land scene" there is a series of paired sequences where firstly the subject is Sarah moving towards Rangī, and secondly where the subject is Wiremu, fighting alongside Major Baines to clear the people out of the pa. The scene moves backwards and forwards between these sequences. The purpose of this is to show that soon, Wiremu will stand against the British Army and soon, Sarah will choose to leave the soldiers barracks and go with Wiremu up-river. This is why this scene is important. Sarah and Wiremu will change direction in life after this scene and it's ironic that Wiremu falls in love with the cause of his father's death. The fire which backgrounds the whole scene represents the violence of the land occupation and the resulting act of war when Baines shoots Rangī. To increase the sense of burning and pillage the amber light from the fire is made stronger throughout the scene with a 10,000 watt Fresnel light covered with an orange gel CTO, to make the ~~fire~~ <sup>fire</sup> glow appear to be very intense and dramatic. This amber light is positioned to the side of Wiremu and Major Baines faces to make the effect to appear like an orange half shadow.

Lighting Directors always use ambience smoke to fill the space they are filming in as it reflects natural and coloured light better than pure air. There is a strong sense of orange during this entire scene because of ambience smoke. Dry ice is also used for a heavier smoke effect in this scene to draw attention to ~~the~~ the burning of the pa especially as the scene closes.

The sound track for this 2 minute and 32 second scene is very interesting to analyse. The diegetic sound is the natural sound effects that are added in or heightened during the post-production phase in film making. In this case the following natural sounds are emphasised in the "Clearing the land scene". The background noises of flames crackling build up into a stronger ~~and~~ sound of flames licking and whooshing around wooden structures. Then there is the dialogue of the actors - Sarah, Winona, Major Baines and Old Rangī. Other human sounds of calling out, crying and shouting both in English and Maori add to the sense of confusion and fright. The gunshot crack which killed Old Rangī is heard quite loudly. Then there are the non-diegetic sounds which are unnatural and not part of the reality. These add another dimension to the scene because they highlight the ideas associated with the scene's meaning. Firstly there is voice-over from Sarah who comments on the effects of the action e.g. the fact that the bullet which kills Rangī has turned the clearing into a killing hence to war. Secondly there is the Māori flute, the Kōauau, which sound was hidden early in the scene and then comes through strongly with its mournful sound when Old Rangī dies. †

There is a fast zoom close up to ~~confirm~~ of a woman's who to impress upon the audience that Sarah is looking for the tattoo of Rangī in her ~~quest~~ quest to find her son. There is a synthesised pan flute sound which goes with the quick camera movement to close-up to confirm the importance of this idea. Finally there is some string music (violin, viola double bass) playing atmospheric, sustained chords which intensifies the sadness of Rangī's death as he lies in Winene's arms. This music also acts as a bridge to the next scene.

The production features, therefore of camera ~~lens~~ lens, position, angle and movement help to communicate the important ideas within this scene. The colour amber and the complicated sound track also play a part in the process of revealing meaning to the audience. The film "River Queen" directed by Vincent Ward is a very ~~powerful~~ powerful addition to New Zealand's film collection and is a worthwhile for students who enjoy film.

"With darkness ~~at~~ all around, only the heart  
can see"