

Film study: the shining



Film is an important part of culture, because it combines aspects such as song, story-telling, art and expression. The scenes of a film come together to create harmony and to express an idea. The Shining is a film that expressed Stephen King's novel in a cinematic way. In every scene from this film there are indications of formalist techniques, when viewed all together as a movie, the idea of this movie being formalist is ensured.

The movement of the camera when we follow Danny down the hallways, the creepy soundtrack and the editing when Danny sees the two girls; every one of these make up a formalist film. Formalism in film is described as manipulating techniques and making the manipulations evident to its audience. In formalist films, the audience can sense the presence of the artist; they can detect the style and character of the director. In the scene where Danny rides his tricycle through the corridors of the hotel, the camera's presence is made evident.

It isn't a subtle movement that can be found in a classical film. For example, in Hollywood's new Premium Rush where Joseph Gordon-Levitt's character and Dania Ramirez's character are talking on Bluetooth while riding their bikes, the camera is simply side scrolling or facing the character head on. In the shining, the camera as a human feel to its movement, this creates a spine tingling feeling for the audience. The technical use of the steadicam creates a feeling of a supernatural presence in the room.

It gives the camera more purpose than just to show the film, it makes the camera part of the film; it is an extra character. On set, the steadicam is following Danny, but in the movie, the haunted essence follows Danny, and this mood is created by using a formalistic camera technique. When this

technique is used throughout the film, we know that something supernatural is about to be discovered. With this in mind, we anticipate the next scene of the film, we anticipate the moments where the haunted essences will visit Jack and his family.

Film isn't only about what we see on screen, it is also about what we hear. The sounds from the film can be diegetic, meaning the source of the sound is from the environment of the film, or non-diegetic, meaning the sound is coming from the cinematic experience or the outside world of the story. In *The Shining*, the non-diegetic sounds become very important in identifying the film as formalist. I am talking about the screeching noises that appear whenever something bad or supernatural is about to occur.

Usually, we are exposed to more classical musical instruments such as pianos, guitars, flutes, etc. Though, in this film, they used a more unique sound; this music could have been created by a waterphone. The piercing sounds become irritating to its audience, and it is evident that the characters in the film do not hear the sound, because they would be covering their ears if they did. In classical films, the director would choose more subtle music to accommodate the scenes, but since this is a formalist film, the director used this annoyingly piercing music.

These sounds are put into the film for the audience's experience, they aren't part of the on screen story, but they are part of the film, like an additional decoration. This technique makes the audience question what could happen next, so the audience anticipates horror when they hear this music. This is something we don't usually see in classical productions. In *The Shining*, the

music ties into the haunted essence; it tells a story. Anticipation will be felt simply by hearing the music, and this is a strong cinematic technique.

In *Stand By Me*, when Gordie asks his mother where his canteen is and his father answers it is in his deceased brother's room, Gordie goes into the room and there is a great feeling of sadness in this scene. This film used more classical instruments, and you can notice the difference between the classical film and the formalist one. Though, if the director decided not to play music during this scene, we might not have felt the same amount of sadness, and this would have been more formalist.

Music affects us incredibly, and the absence of music does too, so it is vital for the director to choose the film's music according to what emotion they are trying to achieve. In *The Shining*, it is always the feeling of suspense, and the bone chilling sounds of what might be a waterphone creates this feeling in an eerie formalist way. As you can see by the previous paragraph, the movie is not done once the filming is done; there are many things to be added such as the music. Another essential part of making the film a success is its editing.

In *The Shining*, Danny finds two girls in the hallway and he sees what massacre they have been through and this scene is heavily edited with different shots. During this two minute scene, there are 19 shots. Classical films don't cut to different shots this often, because it is sometimes irritating to the audience. Although, Formalist directors do what they think will work best for the film, and not the audience. If they don't understand the cinematic techniques, the director won't change their ideas to please the

audience a certain way. They put their emotions and creativity into their films.

The way Stanley Kubrick edited this together created harmony. It told its audience this is what Danny is seeing, even if the flashes of the murder image are irritating, gruesome and unexpected. This image is what's being planted in Danny's brain, this bloody murder scene of the two girls. This technique makes the audience feel uneasy. When the dead girls appear, it's a scene so gruesome that the audience doesn't want to see it again, but it appears as a flash again, and again, and again. This makes the scene even more repulsing and creepy. Also, by cutting so quickly from shot to shot, this scene shocks the audience.

Editing shots like this is a good technique if you want your audience to experience a lot of emotion at once; it also puts the audience in Danny's head. The flashbacks to the murder scene are happening in Danny's head and on the screen for its audience. These editing techniques make *The Shining* a different experience, and definitely a formalistic film. The reason why *The Shining* is such a strong horror movie is because of its film techniques (and not to mention story). The use of the steadicam, the music incorporated and the editing create a complex film. These three techniques work to create harmony.

These three elements are formalist, and when they come together, they create a formalist film. The harmony of this movie really comes from the feel of the steadicam cooperating with the music and editing. The steadicam created a creepy haunted feeling, and the music added emphasis to the creepiness and the editing made everything more anticipated and anxious.

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When these elements are combined, you get a horror film. Nothing in this film clashes with the director's idea of it being a horror. All the techniques are used for horror and aspects surrounding horror such as anxiety, creepiness, suspense, eeriness, etc.

The movement of the camera created a supernatural feeling, the music made the movie creepy and suspenseful and the editing made the images much more potent and horrifying. If the movie only contained one of these three cinematic techniques, it might not have been considered formalist. Though, this film contained three major formalist techniques (and many minor ones) and that dominance pulled the film towards formalism instead of classicism. Stanley Kubrick makes mostly formalist films, and they are definitely different; there is no arguing that.

He has a style to his films that can't avoid being formalist, he's just a formalist kind of person, he doesn't follow the mainstream. This may be why he decided to incorporate the steadicam in *The Shining*. It may also be why he chose screeching instruments for his diegetic music, and it may also be why he chose to edit his scenes the way he did. Altogether this created a formalist horror film that experienced much success. I wonder if he were still alive, would today's Hollywood classicism change his style? Or would he still be the same formalist director he was for *The Shining*?