

The visuals of music:
the effect of close-up
interaction and
lighting in whiplash...



A cymbal crashes in a room full of people. Everyone immediately turns and stares in interest. The incident starts and ends in a heartbeat, but the sound attracts an incredible amount of attention – one that can rarely be overtaken by anything else. Amazingly, in *Whiplash*, directed by Damien Chazelle, the drums fade out and personal interaction crescendos in. Portraying a jazz student, Miles Teller's character is physically and emotionally hurt by his professor, played by JK Simmons. In the film's initial rehearsal with the top ensemble, Chazelle uses close up/extreme close up shots and lighting effects to intensify the interaction between Teller and Simmons, paving the way for the core theme of hate and suffering as seen throughout the film.

One of the most obvious themes seen in *Whiplash* is the consistent union between hate and suffering. Professor Fletcher's constant hate is opposed by the suffering that Nieman has to endure. This theme is seen during most rehearsals and interactions between the two characters. The first rehearsal scene sets the tone for the theme used for the rest of the movie. One of Nieman's main conflicts in the movie is his struggle to survive as a drummer – his ideal career path. In order to advance his career, however, Nieman has to overcome (and suffer through) Fletcher's use of hate. As a whole, *Whiplash* is not a happy movie. There are far more instances of struggle/pain than triumph/success. The first rehearsal scene in the movie uses the close-up and extreme close-up zooms to develop the theme of the union of constant hate and suffering seen throughout the film's entirety.

Throughout the duration of *Whiplash*, a basic formula of zooming can be seen. At the start of most scenes, there is an extreme wide, establishing shot which allows the viewer to see the whole situation in context. As the scene

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progresses, the shots deepen; a shot of the whole room becomes one character; a shot of one character becomes one face; a shot of one face becomes one set of eyes. In the aforementioned rehearsal scene, this formula applies. The shot of the entire ensemble shifts to the rhythm section and eventually solely to Nieman (Teller) and Fletcher (Simmons). The brute evil exhibited by Prof. Fletcher is most vividly portrayed through the extreme close up view. While Fletcher is still incredibly present and fearsome in a body shot, the anger seen in his eyes is second to none. On the other hand, the extreme close up shot of Nieman works equally well. After Prof. Fletcher throws the chair at Nieman, the shot cuts to an extreme close up of Nieman's face. No lines are spoken. No lines are needed. The shocked and petrified Nieman is seen through a still face, wide open eyes, and a blank stare. Although the shot is the complete opposite look seen previously with Fletcher, Chazelle gets the same result. He doesn't use dialogue here because he doesn't have to; when Chazelle does include dialogue (i. e. with Fletcher's yelling) it is even more impactful. Overall, Chazelle's usage of zooming led to a greater conveyance of the film's overarching theme of the unity between hate and suffering and are one of several pieces (including lighting effects) that emphasize the theme.

While Whiplash is mostly a very realistic film, one thing that looks incredibly different and staged is the lighting. Seen in the first rehearsal scene, the lighting is unusually dark for a music rehearsal facility. Of course, there is solid reasoning behind this decision. Even before the plot starts to intensify, the dark lighting adds a bit of suspense and fear to the situation. Later, the dark lighting matches Fletcher's dark personality. Another large reason for

the dark background is that there are no external distractions. Viewers are forced to look directly at the character's faces. Even though this addition by Chazelle is small and subtle in the grand scheme of things, it helps establish the bondage of hate and suffering seen throughout the whole film.

One of the best ways to find out how someone is feeling is to look right at their face. Chazelle's use of lighting makes the viewer look straight at the characters' faces. When Chazelle zooms in at the faces of Nieman and Fletcher, the key emotions of hate and suffering come out; this helps develop the theme of the union of constant hate and suffering. The emotions conveyed by Nieman and Fletcher, while done in an outstanding manner, are emotions conveyed every day in common situations, but the people who convey these emotions are often ignored. Why? Often times, it can be too uncomfortable to talk to someone who is suffering. Even more difficult is condemning and ceasing a person who is splurging hate. Standing up to situations like these are ways that every person can help fight hate and suffering in the world. Sadly enough, people like Professor Fletcher do exist in the real world. As American writer Dale Anderson said, "[i]naction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage". The world needs more confidence and courage.