**A Quiet Place: Visual Storytelling**

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As filmmaking techniques, styles, and movements have changed throughout the years, it is no surprise that silent films have somewhat gone out of fashion, except for the occasional silent film that is released in modern time. This type of storytelling had to deal with the limited capabilities of sound recording back in the day and tell stories with pure visuals. This is where most of our fundamentals of composition and camerawork originated. The era of silent film was truly a time to experiment and build a legacy that was to be remembered, and it is so wonderful that some filmmakers honor that golden era of Hollywood with films such as *The Artist*, *Blancanieves*, and most notably *A Quiet Place*, directed by and starring John Krasinski. The film follows a basic survival story, where a family must make it through a post-apocalyptic world filled with aliens. The twist is that these aliens are extremely sensitive to all sound, and because of this, the family must survive without making noise. While dialogue exists in this film, it is barely needed and usually confirms what the audience already has identifies within the characters. The film was very successful and popular because of its use of facial expressions, symbolism, and scenery to tell its story.

The expressions of the characters are a vital part to understanding their thoughts. The characters of *A Quiet Place* use sign language to communicate, which is accompanied by subtitles. However, in the scenes where the characters are separate, like when the mother, Evelyn Abbot, is going into labor while trying to hide from the monsters, facial expressions carry the plot forward. The audience know what is happening because via scenes of her water breaking and of her due date being written on a calendar. Most of the intensity of the scene is seeing her going through contractions and waddling towards a bathtub, not to mention when she is stabbed in the foot by a nail sticking out of the floor. All of this is done in complete silence, otherwise she is dead. The audience’s suspension is the product of facial expressions and body movement. This movie is different from other silent films because it is the story that inhibits its dialogue rather than real life limitations. The movie follows the rules of silent film somewhat loosely but can still be considered one because of its commitment to visuals. One form of symbolism in the film is the toy space shuttle, which represents the family’s youngest, who was killed by the aliens while holding the toy, which made lots of noise. The appearance of the toy within the film is used to remind the audience what they characters are going through and why they act the way they do around each other.

One part of the movie that is very effective in its scenery is the opening scene that establishes the post-apocalyptic world, featuring shots of ruined buildings and littered streets. Abandoned vehicles and trashed grocery stores give us enough context to know something terrible happened. The characters are introduced to be overly paranoid over sound, walking on sand with no shoes on, and doing everything they can to stop their youngest child from causing sound. We don’t know why this is the case until the scene of Beau’s death, the Abbot family’s youngest member. The aliens are not revealed until the final moments of his life, and the payoff to catching a glimpse of why this family must act so quietly is worth it. The setting of this scene is a peaceful forest and an open canyon, with a bridge the family starts to walk across. The warm colors are signs of peace and quiet when the characters appear to be keeping their head and ears on a swivel. This contrast builds interest in the audience as to what they are so concerned with, and once that is revealed, the peaceful forests turn into terrifying blankets, covering the aliens from plain sight. The family is always on alert, even within their own home. The opening of this movie will catch any new viewer off guard and introduce them to a unique story.

One notable thing about this movie’s environmental storytelling is the house itself. The couches are made of hay bales, the wooden floors are marked so people know where to put their feet, and the board games feature cotton balls and soft fabrics as playing pieces. The shelter that this family lives in is spruced up like a home so that their lives feel somewhat normal even if they’re living in a nightmare. This environmental storytelling is extremely effective if you pay attention. It shows intention behind the parents and characterizes them and their relationship with their children.

This film is an outlier when it comes to silent films, because it does use sound and some dialogue, albeit very rare. Once again, the dialogue does very little to progress the plot, only confirm the characters archetypes. Traditional silent films have no sound design or dialogue, typically music and cutaways of text. However, this movie utilizes sound effects for progression and tension building. Because of this, the classification of this film as truly “silent” might be a gray area for some people, but for most, this movie does just enough to be considered as such. All of the worldbuilding is done with visuals, and it’s the characterization and plot progression that is partially carried with sound effects, emphasis on partially. For example, the first real sound the audience hears in the film is that of a lantern shattering and a fire starting within the house. After being shown the rules of this world, the audience will jump to the loudness of this lantern, and because of the effective visual storytelling, the sound is given context, and the audience understands why it’s a big deal. Occasionally the monsters are shown to be present through the sound of their screeching, which does go against traditional silent films. However, when we are in the perspective of the daughter, who is deaf, the monsters can only be shown by entering the shot, and in most cases, that is how they are revealed. Once again, this movie’s story is what drives it to follow these silent film principles, but that does not make it an invalid silent film.

In conclusion, this film was a landmark horror movie for a lot of people because of its visuals. Many people were able to connect with the characters before they even spoke, and it’s because of this film that other storytellers want to branch out. Watching this for the first time is a trip and definitely a memorable experience. There is just nothing like it. It is also worth examining its storytelling techniques so that you can enrich your own. It is always refreshing to see a movie experiment and break the rules by taking away one vital element of film to see what you can do to compensate, that being the sound. This movie does a lot to compensate for its lack of sound and should be much appreciated by other filmmakers.

**References**

Krasinski, J. (2018) *A Quiet Place.* Sunday Night Productions.