Nicholas Rossler

Professor Lisa Tervo

DFP-331

9/15/2024

Symbolic Imagery in *A Quiet Place*

The movie *A Quiet Place* (2018), directed by John Krasinski, is not a silent film in the traditional sense, but contains minimal dialogue due to the circumstance. Due to silence being essential for the purpose of the plot, the story is heavily dependent upon visual communication. Due to this problem the shot choices, lighting, set design, and the characters action need to commit more to the understanding of the film. Throughout the movie there are many scenes that are accompanied by music, but the effect of the visual choices can still convey what the scene was made for.

In the opening scene, there are a series of shots of a town in an unkempt condition. The first shot is of a traffic light laying on the ground with overcast weather adding a greyish tone to the scene. The mood this creates a feel of isolation. The following shots show the town lacking in movement or life. Very early into the movie there is an apocalyptic feel, the intro to the movie displays text saying “89 days.” The overcast in addition to the fall leaves on the ground create an eerie feeling to an empty town. One of the others shots in the sequence is of a bulletin board covered in missing persons posters. This adds some mystery and fear of what has happened to explain the condition of the town.

Immediately after the opening sequence it transitions to the family moving through the market grabbing supplies, the store is in disrepair and abandoned. As the time goes on, they make their way to leave and the youngest kid is last to walk up to the group. When the family comes into focus, they all stare with concern of what he is holding, the dad slowly approaches the kid and grabs a battery powered space shuttle toy from his hands and he slowly goes to remove the batteries. The tension and worry of this scene are the first instance of how dangerous sound is in this environment. When looking at this scene, without the context of “89 days”, it hints at how long it has been for this family and that they understand how to survive.

Sometime after the opening scene, it moves to the father inside a basement area filled with audio and radio equipment, spread out on a desk are newspapers and local papers that all have headlines that are about the alien threat and differing levels of doom in each title. This establishing shot of the context of the situation lets the audience know just how wide spread and dire the problem is. Another visual element is the stacks of radio equipment, the mess of wires and audio cables gives some context to what the dad has been working on, it is learned that he is working on a hearing aid for his deaf daughter, but what this scene also shows, is that the dad has been researching heavily on audio dynamics. A white board in the scene has a list of known and unknown attributes the aliens have, the visuals in this scene tell the viewer that there has been some time for the family to create a way to survive and how the dad’s relationship with his daughter is to the point of spend tons of time and resources to give her a chance to hear.

Nineteen into the movie the kids are playing monopoly on the floor, after a short while, the kid accidently knocks over a gas lantern that breaks. The dad immediately rushes over and covers the flames in a blanket, the entire family stops to listen with intense looks of fear and focus, the dad very slowly moves about the room to listen and a very cautious manner. Visually throughout this scene, there is emphasis on the very worried looks of the family and of what the fallout could be. The very intense listening and slow movement of the actors creates tension and dread. This also conveys how dangerous simple noises are in the reality of this movie.

Approximately 37 minutes into the movie, the pregnant mother is seen emptying the washer and loading the clothes into a sack, as she climbs up the stair from the basement, the laundry bag gets caught on a nail and causes her to stumble. She freezes and shows concern about the noise she made, after a brief pause, she continues out of the basement. The next movement of the camera goes to focus on the nail on the steps, the camera slowly pans down and stops on the nail in the center of the frame for a few moments. This decision creates a sort of foreshadowing or “Chekov’s Gun” to have the nail be used later in the movie. This leaves the audience with a sense of dread to how the nail will resolve.

In conclusion, there is some great examples of visual story telling within *A Quiet Place.* The scenes throughout use methods of camera manipulation, facial expressions, or set design to help the audience understand what is wanting to be told and how the audience should feel towards the characters and their decisions. The use of the environments helps with creating good context to where the story is taking place, as well as keeping the audience’s interest even without compelling dialogue.

After looking at the use of visuals in *A Quiet Place,* there are many aspects that can be carried over to other film projects. The way this was produced and the techniques that are used, are great inspiration to find ways to expand on how visuals can be used to sway an audience to feel certain emotions, all scenes that are filmed have a purpose, whether to simply show the context or passage of time, or to make an audience have a certain feel to a scene or character. The look through how visuals can work, can be perfect for a short film format, where it could be harder to get resources, have a great way to tell the story without dialogue can help a lot with getting past hurdles in production.

Reference

Krasinski, John, director. *A Quiet Place*. Paramount Pictures, 2018.