

The Sixth Sense: Opening Scene Analysis (Bedroom)

Directed by M Night Shyamalan, The Sixth Sense (1999) is a carefully constructed horror story that practices a suspenseful style of film-making. The Sixth Sense is a ghost story with a rather quiet approach to build anticipation and fear in its audience. Throughout the film there are precise uses of specific production techniques, its these same techniques that give The Sixth Sense maximum impact on the audience. Using every scene to pull out every fright for all they are worth.

Camera work:

In the opening scenes, Shyamalan's technique for creating frights is made obvious. He uses carefully chosen static shots and a rather unstable camera to create a sense of anticipation and fear. There are only three camera angles used in this scene, close up, medium and the point of view. All of these angles are shot from eye-level so that the audience feels like they are in the room with Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) and his wife Anna Crowe (Olivia Williams). This camera technique puts the focus on the situation and the characters in the room, making the audience pay attention to every action and word said in this scene. Then finally when Vincent Grey (Donnie Wallberg) shoots Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) the audience gets a birds eye view of Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) bleeding out on his bed, then the screen fades to black. Meaning that Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) has been killed.

Sound

In the opening scene music plays a key role in the sequence, introducing itself at a moment of revelation, this technique is commonly used to create suspense and draw the audience in. Instruments commonly used in this technique are found within an orchestra, where you have the combination of high pitched string instruments and a huge collection of brass and woodwind instruments for the lower pitch. Combine these with a specific score and you have a sound that is guaranteed to create a suspenseful sound. However the opening scene is never quiet, there is always something going on, it could be anything from a phone to dialogue. The light use of sound effects keeps the viewer's focus on the dialogue. This scene has no voice over.

Lighting

The energy of the room is sincere, stimulated by golden firelight playing over the darkened gloom of their house. As the scene shifts towards the first moment of real tension the lighting becomes much colder and harsher. In general the room is quite dark leaving the viewer uncomfortable. It's this same darkness that makes shadows pop when a brighter light comes into the scene e.g. the bathroom light.

Editing

In the opening scenes, Shyamalan's uses carefully chosen static shots and a rather unstable camera to create a sense of anticipation and fear. The scene constantly cuts to different angles increasing the intensity and drawing your focus to whoever is talking in the scene (This technique is commonly known as a jump cut). When Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) is bleeding out on his bed the screen fades to black. Intending that he has been killed. This scene has no flash forwards.

Acting

The opening scene is intense, it utilises body language, facial expressions and tone. When Anna Crowe (Olivia Williams) first discovers the broken window, you can tell by her body language and tone that she is scared. This is then followed by a high pitch squeal, intensifying the scene. Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) covers his wife Anna Crowe with his arm, protecting her from the danger. Then the audience meet Vincent Grey (Donnie Wallberg) and the tone changes completely as Dr Malcolm Crowe has a conversation with Vincent Grey. Their conversation is filled with different facial expressions and hand gestures. Then the scene hits its peak, ending in Vincent Grey yelling and eventually shooting Dr Malcolm Crowe.

Visual composition

Visual composition is important in film to set the tone and mood of the audience as it captures everything within the scene. In the opening seconds of the bedroom scene the mood instantly changes from a romantic theme to a thriller, it's this exact scene that sets the tone for the rest of the movie. This is quite hard to do and is done almost perfectly as the whole audience is left on the end of their seat within seconds.

Setting

The scene is set in a bedroom, this is normally associated with a sense of safety. However, the audience is shocked to discover that Vincent Grey (a former patient of Dr Malcolm Crowe) has broken into their bedroom. This sends a psychological sense of fear to your brain without you even noticing it, this is because your brain views your bedroom as a safe location. This is commonly used in horror movies as it evokes a sense of fear.

Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) Anna Crowe (Olivia Williams). Vincent Grey (Donnie Wallberg)