**Multimedia Study of Horror**

**An Analysis of Sound & Perspective in *Scream (1996)***

Intro:

People flock to horror movies each year, usually to be scared. Another reason is to solve the question of “whodunnit?” Unfortunately, a lot of these horror movies fail to scare people or make the killer so obvious the audience gets bored. Occasionally, there are a few horror movies that stick out. *Scream*, directed by Wes Craven in 1996, is one of them. Wes Craven is always toying with the viewer's fears, always finding ways to scare the audience at every turn. He also plays with the viewer's head, and has them second-guessing themselves. How does he do it? Well, as one of the characters in the movie exclaims, "There's a formula to it. A very simple formula. Everybody's a suspect!" This paper will discuss how Craven uses sound, camera shots, and mise en scene to scare the viewer and keep them guessing as to who the murderer may be.

Body paragraphs:

In horror, sound is an intricate part of the movie. *Scream* is no exception. From the very beginning of the movie, sound is present. The movie starts out right away with creepy music in the background as the Dimension Films logo slowly comes out of the darkness. It is followed by a rumble, as if several doors are being shut. While the eerie music is still going the title of the movie is stretched out and comes back together with a loud crash. This is followed by a phone ringing, a heart beating rapidly, a terrifying scream, a knife slicing into something, and finally followed by more screams. The ringing phone ties it into the first scene. The caller picks up the phone and the music, the beating heart, and the screams vanish. This is all done within the first twenty seconds of the film. Craven has already played on the viewer's senses. There's the apprehension that something bad is going to happen. Another example of sound is in the beginning, when Drew Barrymore's character hangs up the phone for a second time from the mysterious caller. The scene changes to the outside of the house where the camera is focused on some tree branches. There's the sound of some crickets, frogs, etc. In those noises, a creaking sound is heart. The camera travels downward and the viewer sees that it's a swing swaying back and forth that's making the noise. The rope is rubbing against the branch. It creates a feeling of tension because amongst these peaceful night noises is this odd creaking noise. It also leaves the viewer wondering perhaps, is there someone in the tree? Wes Craven is setting these small elements up to scare the viewer.

Yet another example of sound being used is when Drew Barrymore (Casey, as her character is known) is talking to the mysterious caller. The caller had already threatened her. She tells him that her boyfriend is coming over and that basically, he'll beat him up. The caller responds with, "His name wouldn't be Steve, would it?" Casey stands stunned as a loud boom follows. This sound emphasizes the last comment even more. The viewer realizes that this call is not a silly prank. Wes Craven is adding layers to the scene. With each passing moment, more tension is added. He's scaring the viewer little by little. Then, when Casey is being chased by the killer, she goes outside and all the viewer can hear is her breathing. Her breathing is rapid, full of gasps and sobs. This again creates more tension, as well as fear for the character’s well-being.

Later on, in one of my favorite scenes, Sidney, the main character played by Neve Campbell, goes to the closet to get a bag. There's some music playing quietly in the background. When she opens the door to the closet, the volume increases. It makes a swooping sound. It sounds like a mixture of voices and instruments. It's really eerie. It makes the viewer think that someone might be hiding in the closet. She closes the door and viewer realizes that no one is in there. Wes Craven is again playing with the viewer’s anxieties and fears. He never gives the viewer more than a couple of minutes to relax. He always has the viewer wondering what's going to happen next.

Finally, one more sound effect that should be mentioned takes place in the principal's office. The principal angrily lectures two students for running around at school in the costume that the killer wears. He finds it insensitive that they joke about this when their fellow students have been brutally murdered. He takes the scissors out and they make a "clink" sound that is obviously added. This effect sounds very much like a knife slicing into something. Foreshadowing, perhaps? The principal viciously uses the scissors to cut up the costumes. All the while, the viewer hears the slicing sounds. One of the students complains that it's "not fair" when the principal suspends them. The principal retaliates by holding the scissors up to the students. The viewer can hear lots of clinking sounds, like knives hitting each other. The principal holds the scissors up to one of the boy's shirts and says fair would be to "rip your insides out." When he says rip, there is a ripping sound, although the principal doesn't rip the shirt. These exaggerated sounds make the principal seem capable of being violent. This makes the viewer wonder for a second; could he be the killer? Often, when watching a movie, people don't pay that close attention to sound. The subconscious is aware of it and picks it all up. Wes Craven knows this and uses it to his advantage.

In film, different camera angles and shots give the viewer information about what is going on in the scene. Wes Craven chooses his shots carefully. For example, in the beginning of *Scream*, there's a full shot of Sidney from behind. She has just gone in the closet (mentioned above) and the camera follows her from behind. After watching many horror movies, the full shot of a character's back to the viewer can mean danger. Sidney is right in the middle of the shot, leaving both sides of her open and vulnerable. The murderer could jump out and tackle her. This shot could also be from the perspective of the killer following her from behind. Again, Wes Craven is preparing the audience for some sort of jumpy moment. Another shot is the close-up. When killer is talking to Sidney on the phone, she is shot from the shoulders and up. Sidney thinks the caller is a friend playing a joke on her. She's about to hang up when the caller says that if she does she'll "die like her mother." The shot then goes to a close up of Sidney's face. The viewer can see that Sidney realizes that the caller isn't a friend playing a joke on her. The viewer can also see that she's frightened. Close-ups deal with psychological effects. The viewer sees a character upset, therefore they will react to it. This close up just made things scarier. Finally, my favorite shot in the movie is an extreme close-up. The principal has just been stabbed by the murderer. The murderer wears a costume called "Father Death." As the principal lies on the floor dying, the camera cuts to an extreme close up of the principal's eye. In the reflection of his eye, the killer appears (in costume, of course). This shot is a really cool effect in general. I believe the purpose of the shot deals with death. The very last thing the principal sees is death looming over him. It's symbolic of the darkness that exists in this small, seemingly innocuous town.

The last of the elements this paper will talk about it is mise en scene. The way objects are placed carefully within the frame affects how the viewer views the scene. In the beginning of the movie when the viewer is with Casey, there's a wonderful use of the frame. Casey is on the phone with the killer. The killer threatens to kill her boyfriend, Steve, if she doesn't play a game with him. As he describes the game, Casey backs up into a space between the television and a wall. She's in the middle surrounded by objects. She's in a position similar to that of a baby in the fetal position. She's cramped in. There's the sense that things are closing in around her and that she's trapped. Another wonderful scene is right after Steve's death. Casey looks outside on the patio, where Steve is tied up. She sees that he's been killed. She shrinks down in the frame until her whole head disappears out of the frame. This scene is alluding to and foreshadows her death, which happens minutes after. Another example of mise en scene is when Sidney is on the phone with the killer. He threatens her and she locks her door. As the viewer sees her lock the door, there's just enough room to the right of her. This is where the closet is. A second later, the killer pops out of the closet. The viewer sees the killer behind her and if she doesn't turn around, she's going to get stabbed. Craven is adding more tension and more possibilities to be frightened. Finally, another great use of the frame takes place in a bathroom. Sidney is at school in the bathroom when she hears a noise. The camera focuses on the bottom part of a stall. There's no one in there until a big, black boot comes down, followed by another. Then, the robe of the costume that the killer wears falls gently on the boots. For each moment that the killer dons a piece of his costume, the viewer’s concern is heightened. We’re on the edge of our seats, waiting for something to bad to happen.

Conclusion:

The effective use of sound and perspective are just a couple of elements that Wes Craven uses to scare the viewer. He likes to toy with the viewer's emotions, making them question everyone's motive. But don't worry, it's just a movie. Or, as Sidney says to her boyfriend Billy, "But this is life. This isn't a movie." To which Billy responds, "Sure it is, Sid. It's all, it's all a movie. It's all one great big movie. But you can't pick your genre."