Film Techniques And Key Symbols In Donnie Darko

How the movie is structured overall?

Donnie Darko encompasses more than one genre elements such as sci-fi, thriller, drama/fantasy, however, consider it falling under the psychological thriller genre to grasp the attention of the audience to this adventurous plot which in fact takes place in the tangent universe rather than the primary universe. The film first starts at equilibrium where everything is going according to how it's supposed to happen. However, after the plane crash, the equilibrium is disrupted which then created the tangent universe and set off multiple chains of events. As the movie progressed Donnie later realized that he is the chosen one to fix this situation and save the universe. Later in the movie, Donnie restores the equilibrium by sacrificing himself in the plane crash to save the others and the universe.

Key Symbols (Signified and the Signifier)

The essential symbol shown in the movie was Roberta Sparrow’s novel, The Philosophy of Time Travel, This novel is used as a medium to uncover important elements of time traveling. The chapter headings in this novel signifies the purpose of each event that happens throughout the narrative plot. In addition, the events that took place in the movie such as the flooding of the school and the plane crash are key events that are connotated by the novel and interpretations of these events are left to the audience to uncover. One of the illustrations of the chapter heading was called the manipulated living, this implies all the people who are connected to Donnie, the interesting fact here is that all these people have been helping Donnie subconsciously in one way or another. Every event in this movie has been designed to provide some kind of aid to Donnie to reach his destiny and save the universe.

Another essential symbol shown in the movie was the lifeline of fear and love, the movie shows a lot of binary oppositions which is a crucial concept in a structuralist reading, one of the literal illustration is seen through the lifeline where it is divided into fear and love. In the movie, Donnie argues that “life is not that simple and cannot be lumped into two things and there are other things that we need to take into account “. From this argument, the important thing to take in is that both of these are part of human emotions, but they play different roles in human lives. Fear is an emotion that has always been part of the individual from the very beginning, it is the only emotion that gives an individual their instinctive nature which protects and alerts an individual of any danger. Hence it can be said that fear is the emotion that humans express to protect themselves from danger. However, love on the other is also an emotion but the role it plays is far different from fear and it can also be considered as the emotion that humans express to show affection towards things that they like or fond of.

Film Techniques

Lighting

The most crucial film technique used throughout the movie was lighting, although there are

different types of lighting. One specific type of lighting that was used in this movie was low key lighting, where this type of lighting is mostly used in horror and thriller based films to create shadows and contrast. The interesting fact about low - key lighting is that it is usually used to either focus on a particular subject or to portray drama using the subject itself. Low-key lighting also minimizes any other external interferences and directs the audience's focus all towards the main subject show on screen. Often low key lighting is also used to show drama and mystery and especially in this movie. One of the prominent illustrations of low-key lighting is shown in this image right here, Donnie's face is shadowed using the low key light to convey the internal conflicts that he faces as an individual in society and by making use of this type of lighting Donnie's darker personality is revealed.

Special effects

The next major film technique used in this film was special effects, the main use of special effects is to convert a plot or story that being said in just one dimension but from a different location beyond earth, and it also evaluates the audience's imagination. Such as this one right here like in this image we see a portal in theater screen and the next one the mirror, all of these special effects help the audience understand the tangent universe and the illusion of time traveling, most importantly it helps the audience understand the plot is taking place in.

What world issues does the film connect to?

The display of the election scene that was shown was key to note since that display seems to be revealing two important aspects that can be analyzed. The first aspect being the direct depiction to Donnie's feelings and emotions as an individual and also his views and opinions on certain things. Finally, the second aspect looking at an election in general, it represents the uncertainty and shift in thoughts of an individual within a society. The political pressure that was shown between the Republican Bush and Democrat Dukakis, represented the disparity in the generation, the rivalry happening in society during that time period.

Connections Between Structuralism and the film genre?

Throughout this movie, there has been a lot of symbolic images presented to the audience.

The flashing images and vibrant colors bring out the sub-genre of the film which is sub-genre.

In addition, all of these images also help bring out the illusion of time and the universe looping round and round. These images, in fact, are connecting to one of the important principles of structuralism which is symbols that present the concept idea vs reality. These images do exactly that, they keep the audience in confusion whether this is the universe that this movie or is it taking place in an alternate dimension.