Full Metal Jacket: Unique Approach Of Stanley Kubrick

In one of the most acclaimed war movies of all time The Thin Red Line, director Terrance Malick effectively incorporates the use of multiple film techniques, such as deep depth of field, change of lighting, as well as tracking shots which were integral contributions to the cinematic effects and underlying meanings within.

Throughout the short clip, it was clear that Malick decided to implement a deep depth of field. When the infantry lieutenant orders the scouts to advance, the scouts were hesitant to obey. When they stood up, two rapid gunshot flashes in the distance occurs, and the two scouts are dead. The use of a deep depth of field contributes to the viewer's understanding of the suspenseful and terrifying situations the soldiers found themselves in. As the infantry slowly advance up the hill, we could see the vast depth of the battlefield, stretching beyond the limits of eyesight. At that moment, the deep depth of field permits the viewers to understand that it was impossible to derive the position of the enemies that had just fired as well as the extensive distance the infantry must advance. The only indication of the enemy forces was the brief flashes of gunfire in the distance. The audience would not have been truly able to visualize the terrors of this battle with a shallow depth of field.

Malick also effectively utilizes the change of lighting to convey mood. At 46:55 in The Thin Red Line, there is a scene of grassland blowing in the breeze. The lighting at first was dark and gloomy, which sets the mood of the scene as negative. The dark lighting conveys a feeling of despair and defeat. The soldiers were hesitant to advance and appeared to be frightened. In an instant, there appeared to be a glorious shower of sunlight illuminating the field, as if it was a sign from the heavens. The transition from dark lighting to bright lighting induced a more positive mood and atmosphere. For both the viewers and the soldiers, the sunlight was an immediate morale booster, a sense of hope even. Men who previously crouched in fear began to push forward bravely, despite having just watched their comrades shot down before them.

The scene continues as the American forces begin to charge forward, despite their numbers being continuously decimated by enemy fire and mortars. Malick effectively decides to incorporate the use of tracking shots to capture the intense action of soldiers charging forward. The tracking shot effectively followed the soldiers as the camera began to move laterally at high speed to keep up with the action. Since speed is commonly associated with intensity, the high-speed tracking shot made the scenes highly invigorating. By employing this camera technique, Malick almost manages to put the audience into the shoes of the characters, enabling us to feel the energy of the exhilarating scene.

The phrase aestheticization of war refers to the depiction of war and violence as pleasing and idealized in film. The dilemma that filmmakers are often presented with is how to accurately depict the true reality of war. They must decide on the extent of transformation they intend to present, and carefully weigh the consequences such a transformation may invoke. If the filmmakers present war as too glorious, it could send the wrong message to particularly impressionable young people that violence and murder are acceptable. It can ultimately lead to the audience becoming desensitized to violence, placing them at risk for the development of aggressive behavior. Furthermore, by transforming the spectacle of war into an exciting and

impressive sight, the film is voided of the reality of war: a true sacrifice for thousands of men and their families anxiously awaiting their return. It is not the glorious bloodbath and honor that films sometimes make it out to be. However, many of us are under the impression that there is truly nothing fun about war. If a filmmaker was to approach the aestheticization of war too respectfully in comparison to reality, then the film would not be very favored among popular culture and wouldn't sell a lot of tickets.

In Apocalypse Now, the scene that most exemplifies the practice and process of the aestheticization of war is the scene in which military helicopters flew into the Vietnamese village, firing missiles and opening gunfire on retreating men, women, and even children. This scene is truly horrifying and disrespecting to the true nature of war. The choice of music was undoubtedly intended for the aestheticization of war, transcending reality and presenting the war in a dramatic and cinematic way. Valkyries was a non-diegetic sound blatantly edited in alongside the helicopters preparing to attack for cinematic effects. To the audience, the song is symbolic of a battle cry, associated with triumph and glory, and consequently foreshadows the imminent destruction to come. Furthermore, the heavy use of closeup shots during this scene was another intentional aesthetic choice. The closeup shots not only contributed to the heightens the intensity of the scene, but also emphasizes to the audience the face of bloodlust from the soldier on board the helicopter, relentlessly unleashing warfare on scattering civilians and blowing up buildings. The high angle shot taken from a bird's point of view also contributes to the dehumanization of the Vietnamese. To the soldiers in the sky, the physical distance between them and the Vietnamese on the ground makes the Vietnamese appear to be far less human and more like scattering ants. As a result, the movie fails to capture the dark side of the war from the loser's point of view, and highlights war from a superior force's perspective, almost like a game of relentless murder. The use of cinematic techniques in Apocalypse Now successfully transforms the excessive violence and slaughter into seeming acts of glory and patriotism.

In Full Metal Jacket, Stanley Kubrick incorporated a variety of cinematic techniques, such as low angle shots, tracking shots, handheld shots, and a shallow depth of field. Unlike most war movies, Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket utilizes a non-traditional narrative structure. The movie is essentially split into two parts, the first part which exposes the brutal training and dehumanization of recruits by the drill sergeant during basic training, whereas the second is drastically different in following Sargent Joker's struggle to retain his humanity while documenting the experiences of the Vietnamese War. Kubrick's choice of narrative structure and cinematic techniques compliments his vision of shocking the audience with the failure of military training and forces the viewers to rethink whether such treatment is ethical, even in the face of war.

In the opening speech of Full Metal Jacket, where the sergeant explicitly explains to his new recruits the reality of their fate, to be less than human until they are trained as a killing machine. When a recruit retorts to the sergeant, the sergeant beats him down and a low angle shot is implemented. Here, through the use of the low angle shot pointing up to the infuriated sergeant is symbolic of the power difference, the sergeant as superior and the recruit as inferior. The power difference is further emphasized through the sergeant constant use of profanity which establishes a clear class structure. Furthermore, in the jelly donut scene, the tracking shot was effectively implemented. The camera remains focused on the sergeant throughout the scene, following him as he moves. The constant spotlight on the sergeant emphasizes his speech to the audience. Additionally, as the sergeant forces private Pyle to eat the donut, the camera

shifts to a shallow depth of field, blurring out the background and emphasizing on private Pyle being punished. Lastly, in the infamous scene of private Pyle opening fire on his drill sergeant and then taking his own life, the use of handheld shots is vividly utilized from both the point of view of the drill sergeant. The handheld shot allowed the audience to experience the perspective of the drill sergeant: the look of pure hatred and rage on private Pyle faces, which were undoubtedly emotions manifested through the drill sergeant's inhumane treatment of his recruits.

Ultimately, in Full Metal Jacket, Stanley Kubrick successfully utilizes a unique approach in comparison to traditional war movies with the intention of presenting a unique experience and conveys his distinct vision of providing an uncensored look into the life of a soldier during the Vietnam conflict.