Kelly’s Diverse Use Of Camera Movement And Shots In Donnie Darko

I rewatched the movie to find the POV shot, but I couldn’t find it. There is one scene that got close and made me think that it could be it, which was when Donnie sees Frank in the bunny costume for the first time. It’s so creepy, and the reason we think it could be the POV is because when Donnie is walking to the door, the camera panned up to the chandelier, but when it panned back down, it was already closing. But at some point, the audience is suddenly seeing everything Donnie sees, which looks like a giant rabbit, a very strange one.

Low and high camera angles are used, most of the times you see odd angles that combine with the film’s “strange” mood, also to give the illusion of traveling through time. There’s a scene where we’re introduced to Donnie’s high school, and the angles are from everywhere, it’s in fast motion when it’s transitioning, it does an entire 360 degree spin to follow to the other person Donnie was seeing, while still in the hallway.

The director and cinematographer decided to use the Panavision PanaStark camera package with primo anamorphic lenses. Steven Poster said “When you shoot anamorphic, you don’t need as much coverage. Because it’s the perfect format to be able to shoot a close-up and have someone else in the frame at the same time.” That’s what makes the movie different than the others that followed, at the time. You can see that in the scene where we see Donnie’s high school as well.

In the beginning of the movie, there’s a scene where Donnie is sleepwalking from his bedroom to the golf course. It’s a long shot, and then they switch into this out-of-focus medium close-up of him from the front. As he walks into the camera’s depth of field, he becomes clearer, but the background doesn’t. That creates tension, because you can see his face, but you can’t see the background, it is unfocused. And that’s for us to wonder what could be there, or if something was about to happen.

They were very specific about exposure and quality of darkness. There were no front light in this movie. It was all heavily backlit so that you could force the image down deeper and darker and still have it look like daylight. And that goes pretty much throughout the whole film.

They use a lot of slow-motion and fast-motion (ramping).

They had this one scene with four remote heads and there was also a Dolly move in that shot. It took 5 hands to operate it, one turning the camera, two panning and tilting, then there was a handoff to another operator. That’s because in 2001, ramping was still a physical act, considering it was before the digital camera revolution.

Examples of editing that are seen: montage editing, cross cutting and also time compression editing.

There’s a shot in the film that is asymmetrical: The flag on the right and the thing in the center are evenly spaced, but the screen-left area is empty, which makes the right side of the frame

feel “heavy,” as if weighed down with content. Shot-reverse shot sequence and reaction shot, one example was that first dinner scene with the quotable “Go suck a fuck!”, the editing is amazing, you see them talking all over each other and suddenly the camera seems to be “outside” or even like behind what we are seeing, because we are only getting reaction shots.

The whole movie is about time travel, quantum physics and alternate universes. It is supposed to make you confused, though, that’s why you only understand the whole story at the end (if you are lucky), when you combine everything together.

I personally love the dialogue so much. The whole script was very well written, and some of the dialogue is weird, funny, and most of the times, doesn’t even make sense. But it’s so smart.

To me, the most iconic scene is the final one, once Donnie dies and everyone is outside his house trying to understand what happened and “Mad World” starts playing. It is such a sad, beautiful song, and the lyrics make so much sense to be put at the end of the film. It is dark, just like the whole idea of the movie. “And I find it kind of funny, I find it kind of sad, the dreams in which I’m dying are the best I’ve ever had”. The soundtrack is one of my favorite things in the film.

There is one scene that Donnie is setting fire to a man's house, and right after, it shows the family of the man at the ballet. They combine these 2 scenes with Janis Joplin playing in the background, a “sign that Donnie’s trajectory will always inspire balking and fear”. Also, at another moment in the film, Donnie tries to push Frank, but he can't. We get a thwop and electronic ripples, kind of making us think Frank’s existence is some sort of alien kind. There is a lot of sound effect in this film, some not so subtle.