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Film Studies

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Film Techniques in Saving Private Ryan

In the legendary film, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a story unfolds about the sacrifice of brotherhood as a military squadron embark on their war-torn journey to rescue a soldier. Much of this film is set in the French battle fields of World War 2 and follows Capt. John Miller (Tom Hanks) and his crew. This movie is known for its graphic portrayals of violence and resounding message of self-abandonment, striking straight to the heart. The director, Steven Spielberg, used a plethora of cinematic techniques in order to captivate and immerse the viewers. Without his incredible innovation in this area, *Saving Private Ryan* would certainly have lost a great deal of its potency.

Camera movement played a large role in helping this movie come to life. In the beginning of the film, an action scene takes place at the shores of Normandy beach. Spielberg mostly avoided the use of quick cutting, as many action scenes would have. Rather, panning shots are used to follow the soldiers in their most frightening moments. Spielberg also gives the audience a mutual sense of confusion and shock that a soldier might have felt stepping onto the battlefield in his tracking shots. Although he does use smooth tracking shots in other scenes, during the Normandy beach scene, he films movement as though you were looking through the eyes of a soldier. There is excessive back and forth motion, like somebody frantically trying to figure out what to do and where to go. This is a profound example of how well Spielberg maneuvered the camera.

The sound effects in *Saving Private Ryan* greatly assist the viewer to feel a part of what is occurring on the screen. We often hear the sound of bullets whizzing past in close proximity, bomb explosions, and the high-pitched ring associated with one who has been near a bomb explosion. Spielberg deliberately invokes our adrenaline this way. One interesting way that sound gave us further perception into the character’s point of view was when a few of the soldiers began listening to Edith Piaf’s, *Tu Es Partout.* The usage of this song, along with the fact that is it played through a record player, emphasizes the music culture during this time. These are both examples of diegetic sound used. The non-diegetic sounds used in *Saving Private Ryan* are also immensely crucial in the evocation of various emotions throughout the film. John Williams did a wonderful job composing the soundtrack as he intentionally used many military band instruments. In *Saving Private Ryan*, the combination of sound and image is vastly important to this film’s effectiveness.

Finally, blood is an extremely evident usage of special effects in this film. As a war movie, one would expect bloodshed. However, Spielberg takes it to the next level. His usage of gore is tremendously graphic and realistic. Many of the battle scenes involve amputated limbs and blows to the face. In the Normandy beach scene, the sea was pumped with gallons of fake blood to recreate the horrific massacre. Despite the overwhelming urge to cringe, Spielberg is successful in his attempt to uncover the true face of war, however ugly it may be.

In all, Saving Private Ryan is an incredibly insightful film. Spielberg maintains the audience’s attention as they lose themselves in the realistic world projected on-screen. It is through the many film techniques developed over time that movies can resound so deeply within our lives.