All of which brings us around to the real watchspring of Amityville and the reason it works as well as it does. The picture's subtext is one of economic unease, and that is a theme that director Stuart Rosenberg plays on constantly. In terms of the times--18 percent inflation, mortgage rates out of sight, gasoline selling at a cool $1.40 a gallon--The Amittyville Horror, like The Exorcist, could not have come along at a more opportune moment.  
       This breaks through most clearly in a scene that is the film's only moment of true and honest drama, a brief vignette that parts the clouds of hokum like a sunray on a drizzly afternoon. The Lutz family is preparing to go to the wedding of Kathleen Lutz's younger brother (who looks as if he might be all of 17). They are, of course, in the Bad House when the scene takes place. The younger brother has lost the $1,500 that is due the caterer and is in an understandable agony of panic and embarrassment.  
       Brolin says he'll write the caterer a check, which he does, and later he stands off the angry caterer, who has specified cash only in a half-whispered washroom argument while the wedding party whoops it up outside. After the wedding, Lutz turns the living room of the Bad House upside down looking for the lost money, which has now become his money, and the only way of backing up the bank paper he has issued the caterer. Brolin's check may not have been 100 percent Goodyear rubber, but in his sunken, purple-pouched eyes, we see a man who doesn't really have the money any more than his hapless brother-in-law does. Here is a man tottering on the brink of his own financial crash.  
       He finds the only trace under the couch: a bank money band with the numerals $500 stamped on it. The band lies there on the rug, tauntingly empty. "Where is it?" Brolin screams, his voice vibrating with anger, frustration and fear....  
       Everything that The Amittyville Horror does well is summed up in that scene. Its implications touch on everything about the house's most obvious and insidious effect--and also the only one that seems empirically undeniable: Little by little, it is ruining the Lutz family financially. The movie might as well have been subtitled "The Horror of the Shrinking Bank Account."

NOTES:

A *watchspring* is what makes a watch work, move.

King suggests that the movie works because it symbolizes the economic problems of 1979; $1.40 a gal was a lot in 1979 (I looked it up online); the movie could represent our current economic problems as well

*hokum* means something that appears to be important but is actually ridiculous, silly.

The reference to Goodyear rubber means something that is genuine (like genuine Goodyear tires, which were considered quality tires at the time), so Brolin’s check may not have been any good.

The lost money example, which is the center of Brolin’s frustration, comes to a head when it seems as though the house itself has stolen or hidden the money.

The made up sub-title (“The Horror of the Shrinking Bank Account”) is funny; it’s also a reference to another horror movie—*The Incredible Shrinking Man.*