

How the film is put  
together to generate  
meaning and  
response from the  
audience



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When we go to the cinema, we go for entertainment. But in order to enjoy the film we need to understand it. To do this an audience can look for the key concepts of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound. During this essay it will be these subjects that I investigate in order to find out how the film is put together to generate meaning and response from the audience. The Usual Suspects has an original narrative structure which is crucial to the creation of the enigma that is created in the film, and thus important in the role of gaining the audience's attention. The narrative structure is able to do this by altering the time line of the film by showing the audience the end of the film at the beginning, this instantly hooks the audience and makes them want to know how this situation arised and what is going on.

The film is able to indicate these times in time and settings through the use of captions, which anchor the meaning of any shot by telling the audience where it is and when it is. During the opening of the film the mise-en-scene attracts the audience attention as they want to know what is going on, who is this man Keyser Soze, why is the film opening up in a ship yard and what has happened to cause these deaths? One such part of the opening that creates meaning is that when the camera follows Soze it does not portray all of his body, instead it only shows his chest and legs, this is important as it creates an air of mystery and makes the audience want to know who this man is. Not only does the opening sequence based upon the boat create these questions but it also uses important cinematography that is essential towards the end of the film and so adds to the reward of realisation that the audience gains when they reach the end of the film. These importance shots can be seen when the camera zooms in on a large coil of rope (behind which

we later discover is where Verbal is hiding) and a shot of a porthole on the ship (behind which an important character in the identification of Soze is killed)! One of the key parts regarding the success of this film is how it is not until the end where we find the true identity of Soze, throughout the film the identity of Soze is made out to be that of Keaton himself.

The audience is able to read Keaton's role as being an important character as he is the first person whose name we learn and who is clearly seen on camera; this is why it is believable to the audience that he is Keaton. The reason that this narrative is such a success is that these expectations are later underlined as it is identified that it was actually Verbal who had the hidden identity of being Soze therefore it is the shock factor at the end of the film makes the viewing experience worthwhile. Throughout the opening sequence there are underlying conventions regarding the genre of the film that are illustrated to the audience. The importance of the genre film-noir is important to the audience as it helps them to understand how they should go and view this film, should they prepared to be scared or should they be in a good laugh to laugh and sing.

The idea of film noir though is to portray how evil people can be and to show the dark side of our characters dark being the operative word as in film noir the 'bad guys' are bathed in shadow and dark light. We can pick up on the conventions of the film noir genre and read their meanings. The first of these takes place during the scenes on the boat, the narrative is set at night, there are fires burning in the background and dead bodies are lying on the floor, out of the darkness comes a man Keyser Soze. How should the audience read this? Its hell itself, something very bad has happened here and the man <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-film-is-put-together-to-generate-meaning-and-response-from-the-audience/>

behind this evil is Soze, this is another enigma created at the beginning of the film in order to draw the audience into the narrative as they want to have these questions answered.

The second important feature of this film that creates its original narrative structure is the way in which a voice over is used to tell this story. This voice over is used during the film as the camera will cut from the events that are being described to where they are being described from, it is here where the film is able to create its second narrative structure and ending. The fact that there is a narrator, Verbal, is important as because he is the narrator or voice of god the audience believe that the events he is describing are all truth, at the end though the audience realise that this is far from the truth.

The role of Verbal as the narrator is also important as it illustrates the events from his own and the rest of the criminal's point of view, compared to that of the police whose point of view the camera will usually follow. Because of this the audience are drawn to go on the side of the criminals and see the police as the enemy, this theory is maintain during the readier of the opening sequence.

It's after the first glimpse of Verbal that we are introduced to all of the characters as it is here that his story begins. During this sequence, the audience is again told to perceive Keaton as the important character and the police as the " bad guys". This is done through the use of comedy such as jokes being made about the police not sleeping, the soundtrack also plays an important role though. It starts playing at the beginning of the arrest scenes and cuts when we reach the scene where Keaton is arrested.

The importance though is how the use of a drum beat is used to emphasise the importance of the arrests. Every time the arrest is finally made a large “boom” is heard creating a feeling amongst the audience that the arrest of these people is wrong and therefore the police are “bad”. Keaton’s importance in this film is again portrayed during this scene, as his section lasts the longest, it is separated from the remaining of the arrest scenes and has its own diegetic soundtrack. New characters are brought into the sequence including the chief police officer and Keaton’s girlfriend. The audience are again told how to view these characters as when they meet the police officer a point of view shot is used and so the camera looks up at the officer creating the idea that he is the one in power.

There is a clear significance of absence during this scene though and that is the fact that the audience are not shown Verbal’s arrest, this does not raise many questions during this sequence but later in the film questions are raised into just how much power Verbal/Soze had over the police. The audience is properly introduced to the characters during the interrogation scene, before which the audience learn something crucial to the remainder of the film about Verbal. The discovery is that he is physically impaired and so this shows him as being weak and therefore the audience do not consider that he could be Soze, they later discover that they are wrong. This point is particularly highlighted to the audience by cutting to a close up shot of Verbal’s legs shown shuffling along. This is in order to emphasise his disability so that the audience are in no doubt that Verbal is innocent and that he could not be Soze. But due to the use of media language there is an

alternative reading available and a different portrayal of Verbal's character is available.

This occurs as, as he is walked to the line out the light shining through the prison cell bars creates a pool of shadow across him. This shadow is shaped like the prison bars and so creates the idea that he is in jail, this could be read that he is the one in the wrong, which we later find out is true. The use of comedy is again shown during this scene and bonds are portrayed throughout the group due to the way the line up is established i. e. McManus and Hockney and Keaton and Verbal. The scene in which the lineout takes place uses the cinematography in the sequence to help tell the audience what the characters of each of the criminals is like.

This is done through the media language used in the form of the characters clothes. The line out is a clear use of visual cinematography as it is this image that the film has been renown for and so the audience would be able to relate to it due to its prior use (this can be seen as it is this image that has been used on posters, video cases and books). The image of the line out has been manipulated to appeal to the audience as it is simple. This is done by placing the characters in the fore ground and a white wall in the background so that the characters are able to stand out. To help emphasise this the characters are put into a symmetrical height order. The media language used is able to tell the audience about the characters through the different types of clothes used.

This can be seen as Verbal's weakness is demonstrated by his wearing of a cardigan which carries connotations of being weak and pathetic (this adds to

the shock value at the end of the film as his clothes denote him not to the powerful character whom Soze is made out to be). Whilst on the other hand there is Fenster who's loud suit is able to help emphasise the impression that his character is humorous and also relates to his foreign nationality. Aspects of both film noir and neo-noir are seen during the next sequence in which the interrogations of the "would-be" criminals take place. The use of the genre are seen due to the ways in which light and dark are used (a film noir convention as seen in "The Big Combo") and the way in which the police act during this sequence (this can be seen in the neo-noir genre, for example in "Kill me Again"). The use of light is important during this scene, as it is able to tell the audience again that they should see the police as the "bad guys" and the criminals as the good.

It does this by showing each of the characters in a pool of white light (obviously the interrogation light) and the police in dark shadow. This use of light creates the idea of innocence throughout the criminals and that the police are holding them there wrongly. The fact that the police are shown in dark shadows is not the only use of media language to show the audience that they are the "bad guys". The camera shots used also contribute to this feeling as due to their positioning they only show parts of the policeman whether it be a body or a hand etc.

This creates a feeling of unrest in the audience, that something sinister is going on and so the police are not all innocent themselves, this is a neo-noir narrative element. The camera shots used also tell us more on how we should view the criminals as the shots used are all at the same level which creates the idea that they are all equal. This changes when Keaton's <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-film-is-put-together-to-generate-meaning-and-response-from-the-audience/>

interview is shown as his shot is slightly crooked which creates the idea that not is as it seems regarding his character. His importance in the narrative of this film is once again shown through an extended scene where he is hit by a police officer again showing that they are the bad guys.

The idea of comedy is continued during this scene as the criminals joke about their innocence and how the police have “ made a mistake” and so the audiences view of them is growing; and so they are able to read that they are supposed to view the film in favour of the criminals.