

Inside man is anyone else here smarter than me essays example

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In any film, the mise-en-scene is important (mise-en-scene being the combination of visual elements that make up the visual space of a film); Spike Lee's 2006 thriller Inside Man is no exception. Lee uses varying visual elements to create a slightly unconventional (and even darkly comedic) film about a bank heist, making it equal parts thrilling and hilarious. In one particular scene, in which Dalton (Clive Owen) intimidates the crowd through one hostage who will not give up his cell phone. The use of close-ups, panning and ironic juxtaposition allow the small details in this scene from Inside Man to contribute greatly to the feel of the film.

Many elements of the cell phone scene contribute to its feeling of tension. For one thing, the costume choices clearly set apart the robbers from the hostages; the robbers are mostly in white and large bright vests, their faces obscured by white bandanas even when Lee places them in stark closeup. When Dalton approaches Peter Hammond, Peter's and Dalton's face are in extreme closeup, showing their terror and fear. Dalton's ' mask' helps to convey the terror, because the audience cannot see what he is thinking, whereas Peter's face is an open book for us to read. Lee chooses to pan the camera past a sea of terrified hostages whenever he is searching for Peter's cell phone, showing the fear in their eyes and establishing that they are part of the stakes as well. Otherwise, the camera rarely leaves Dalton, making him the overt protagonist of the journey, and the subject we are meant to follow in the scene.

The character of Peter Hammond receives a whole character arc in the course of three minutes thanks to this scene and Lee's deft use of mise-en-scene. His open, shaking fear and innocent eyes make us believe him when

he says he does not have a cell phone; furthermore, Clive Owen's cold demeanor makes us fear for him, as we believe that something bad will happen to him because he plays hero. Dalton's repeated threats and polite requests add to the 'coiled-snake' feel of Dalton, creating a potential energy in the scene the audience is just waiting to see released. However, when Dalton reveals that Peter was lying all along, the scenario is turned on its head; suddenly Dalton has brought harm to himself for not playing by the rules, and his claims turn out to be outright lies. In this way, we both pity Peter and are frustrated by him, since he could have avoided this situation by following Dalton's orders.

Perhaps the most interesting moment in the scene is Dalton's move to actually find Peter's cell phone by calling it from one of the other collected cell phones; the wacky ringtone choice (playing the rap song "Gold Digger") is a small bit of levity, as it plays with the tense mood of the scene and also provides comedic juxtaposition (by having a stuffy white guy have a rap ringtone). At the same time, this comic moment also spells doom for Peter, and so with this choice Lee effectively toys with our emotions and creates complex reactions to events in the course of the film. Lee also delays the inevitable by having Dalton calmly reassure him, then go into the adjacent office. The frosted windows of the office permit us to see what Dalton is doing, but not very clearly – this builds up suspense to what he is doing, and allows the audience to see Dalton's internal thoughts without making them explicit. When Dalton drags Peter into the office and beats him to death, the fact that the audience cannot see Peter during the beating effectively erases him from the narrative – it also creates a sense of mystery, allowing the

audience to fill in the blanks with what they imagine is happening to him.

When Dalton comes back out, Peter's unmoving legs framed in the doorway, and asks "Is anyone else here smarter than me?" the audience (and the hostages) effectively understand his dangerous nature.

In film, details are everything - this is why the study of mise-en-scene is important to watching and analyzing film. In Inside Man, the use of small details like ironically comedic ringtones, the varying methods of obscurity for Dalton and his crew, and more add to the sense of tension that pervades the film. During the cell phone scene, the use of close-up and panning camera movements creates a dizzying, claustrophobic effect that adds to the terror that we assume Peter is going through. The plot-related twist of Peter having the cell phone the entire time also plays with our expectations of who is trustworthy and who is not; it creates an intricate puzzle that has to be solved in the mind of the viewer, and these elements constitute the pieces. The result is a highly thrilling and charged scene that establishes the threat of Dalton and the palpable danger the hostages feel during the heist.

Works Cited

Lee, Spike (dir.) Inside Man. Perf. Denzel Washington, Clive Owen, Jodie Foster.