

# Mise en scène in cinematography essay

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



## **Introduction**

Mise en scène is a literal term that is used to refer to almost everything that is done in the composition of a film, including the composition itself: This encompasses the camera movements, characters, lighting, general visual environment and sometimes even sounds. In other words, this term is used to define the articulation of the cinematic environment or technically, space ( Bordwell & Thombson, 2012).

Other scholars define this term to include everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement. This involves lighting, costumes, actors, props, composition and by extension, sets and movements in the shot. These are issues that can be manipulated by the film director in the communication of quality in the film.

In order to specifically understand this issue, we analyze the aspect of mise en scène of two drama films. The selection of this genre of films is informed by their nature which will be an important aspect in helping to understand the making of a film and the work that goes into it, in making the final product.

Film directors use different aspects in the production of a film which defines the quality and content of a film. These various aspects that go into the production of films is what is referred to as Mise en scène in cinematography. In order for us to be able to analyze the mise en scene for the films, we have to consider the following aspect of the films, which define the quality of the films.

The films that shall be looked at are Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (2006) and The Lovely Bones (2009). The first film, Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (2006) is a thriller that was written by among others and directed by and is based on a 1985 novel, named perfume which was written by Patrick Suskind. The setting of the movie is the 18th century France.

Our second movie of analysis is a multiple awards winning American supernatural film that is directed by Peter Jackson. It was first released in Newzealand in the fall of 2009 and then later released globally in January 2010. Its story was seriously criticized but received many praises especially for the set and acting.

We shall look at these two films because they present a near perfect production set up and design, which should provide learners with a clear understanding of the different aspects of cinematography, while appreciating the efforts that went into the production of these films and especially the Mise en scène.

## **Analysis**

Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (2006) is a richly visual France set drama film that revolves around a young man whose sense of smell, rather than sight dominates his interpretation of the world that surrounds him. The film narrator, at the onset explains that the putrid smell of the 1700 Paris, where the child was born, surpassed anything that the modern world could imagine. He goes on to explain that as a result of this putrid smell, perfume makers were revered in the society. We follow the story of the boy as he loses his mother in a very cruel manner and grows up as a near mute digger of

ditches. The boy later has a revelation moment soon after catching the scent of a young beauty.

The boy is however quite inexperienced in matters social and therefore their encounter soon ends tragically setting a period of suffering. The young man is therefore obsessed with capturing a similar scent and so he goes to a local perfume maker who teaches him the art, after noticing his talent to identify smells. The young man offers his skills in exchange for instructions on how to capture and make scents, therefore helping the perfume maker to reclaim his lost glory. The perfumer informs the young man of a city, Grasse where perfumes originated and the young man goes there to realize his ambition of becoming an excellent perfumer. While there, the young man is enamored with the smell of a local beauty in high society and is obsessed over the capturing of her scent for the finishing touches of his master perfume.

The Lovely Bones (2009). In 1973, a 14 year old Susie Salmon living in Pennsylvania with her kin, is asked out by a young man ray Singh and they agree to meet the following Saturday. On her way from school, she meets a neighbor, George Harvey who tricks her into accompanying him to an underground den that he claims to have built for the neighborhood children.

While there, Susie gets uncomfortable with Harvey's presence and wants to leave. Harvey holds her hands in protest and she kicks him, freeing herself in to the street. While there, she tries calling her parents in vain, the parents also get worried that she has not managed to come home and are out searching for her. When she gets home, she finds Harvey soaking in the bath tub. A series of events happen that remind her that she didn't actually

manage to escape, but was actually murdered by Harvey. She is then pulled onto the ‘in between’ which is neither on earth nor in heaven.

Most striking in the first film is the way Tom Tykwer, the film director manages to translate the characters to visual medium sensory input. We are informed of the boy with visual cues, framing and fast cutting with the aim of giving us, the audience, a sense of his experience. The location of Paris and Grasse are rendered beautiful with the mood of each city emerging as discrete characters in the film. The grimy and dirty imagery that is prevalent in the film is a very effective mise en scene that ensures that one remembers how society functioned and smelled many years ago.

One element of the plot that has been very controversial is the pace that keeps up and stops periodically works very well in depicting a chronicle of the boy’s life. The cast is effective, but is placed second to the visual intricacy of this film, in a deliberate move. Ben Wishaw gives the most impressive performance in the entire film with his romantic protagonist. His is a largely physical role that requires him to use mostly body language, nose, and expressive eyes. He however never really loses his inner humanity and mortal obsessions (Zahedi, 2011).

Other element of mise en scene is the setting, which is France in the 1700s and this gives the film an authentic meaning, where perfumes were a priced commodity and perfume making a revered career. This gives the perfect setting as the French as known for their Paris elegance.

Lighting- Much of the impacts of images in this film is manipulated using the lighting. The city of Paris for instance is portrayed as being brighter in contrast with Grasse which is rather laidback and shadowy. In a particular instance where the boy's mother dies, the images are grayed and shadowy, depicting the director's desire not to display the images out rightly.

In the second film, the elements of mise en scene are quite prominent. The setting of the film is perfect for a 1973 Pennsylvanian city with modern structures and infrastructural network that depicts the scenes of the period.

The composition of the film, including the characters give the impression of a society that is transitioning to modernity in matters social and cultural. The close family set ups in the film indicates timing when the family unit was still one, which contrasts the present society where the family unit is not held with priority.

The lighting of the scenes has enabled the director to create a visual balance that allows viewers to relate the happenings of that particular time with the venue or timing of the day. For instance, in the underground den, the director manages to manipulate the lighting system thus allowing the viewers a lesser visual ability compared to the open streets.

Generally, the lighting key is moderate, as most scenes in the film are not brightly lit, although there is not much shadow either. There are also not much contrasts of light in the shot. This fits this type of genre.

The camera is also strategically set to capture even the finest details. A movement of the actors is set at normal throughout the movie, but of course in areas that require a more swift action, especially when Suzie escapes from

Harvey. The camera is set at different angles depending on the activity and this allows the director to communicate the different messages using different camera angles throughout the film although the dominant view is neutral.

## **Conclusion**

Looking at the analysis above, it's evident that the directors of the above films invested a lot in ensuring that the final product met and exceeded viewer's expectations. From the script to the acting and then the production, the above films paint the picture of a well composed work, a very intelligent selection of the setting and cast, coupled with the technical expertise of the producers to ensure a mise en scene that allows the viewer to fully understand and enjoy the composition.

## **References**

Bordwell, D. Thombsen, K (2012) Aspects Of Mise-En-Scene - Film Art: An Introduction

Zahedi, V (2011) Perfume: The Story Of A Murderer (2006). Adopted from <http://righteousfilm.com/2011/11/perfume-the-story-of-a-murderer-2006/>