

How technical aspects convey meaning in m night shyamalan's 'unbreakable'

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Technical aspects chosen by the director in a film, if used correctly, can generate meaning and create a response in the viewer by generating different meanings. The narrative and time can be portrayed or emphasized by the way a scene is edited and a soundtrack can create mood and atmosphere needed to make the scene appear as the director intends. Camera movement and position can also bring a lot to a shot that would otherwise be unnoticeable. I have chosen these three aspects to focus on and the film I am analyzing is Unbreakable (M. Night Shyamalan, 2000).

The sequence I have chosen to study is the scene at the train station when David (Bruce Willis) starts to have visions. This sequence happens just after David remembers what really happened is his car crash in college. It begins in semi-darkness as we are positioned in an establishing shot; looking down a corridor and a figure in shadow coming towards the camera. This moment is an effective establishing shot because it intrigues the viewer and holds our attention as we don't know what will happen next.

The only sound we can hear is a phone ringing and as the figure comes closer to us, we realize that it is Elijah (Samuel L. Jackson). This suspense and slow moving moment as Elijah comes into view creates suspense and a sense that something major is about to happen. The camera gradually pans down to his leg, then to the phone and then finally to his face as he answers, this reminds us of the situation that he is in and rekindles our sympathy for the character which helps us to understand his motivation. The close up on his face brings us closer to the action and takes the viewer in.

This is a common theme in the film which is used many times to give the viewer involvement and make it more real so they can relate to the character's emotions even though there are fantasy elements to the story. We then realise that there is a sound of rain coming from outside, this could act to bring the story back to reality or it could foreshadow what is about to happen. As soon as David tells Elijah that he believes him, the soundtrack starts to create effect and signal to the viewer that they should take notice of that moment as it is a pivotal one.

Quickly after this, the camera zooms out from Elijah showing on screen the comic books lining the walls. This fast panning motion also tells the viewer that something big will soon happen by creating suspense and grand imagery, which also reminds us what the film is essentially about. The colorful and 'over the top' images of the comic books also create contrast to the confused and unsure images we get of David to show that he is not the kind of exaggerated superhero that are found in comics but he is slowly coming to terms with his own potential.

The screen becomes black and then moves out to reveal David as the figure blocking our view; this is a very unconventional establishing shot as in another film, the scene would usually begin with a shot of the location it is taking place in. This could be to underline the fact that he has felt in darkness his whole life and now he knows what he has to do. Elijah's voiceover carries over from the previous scene, creating continuity and connecting the two scenes as one. The music also carries over for the same reasons.

As David moves, we begin to see that he is in Grand Central Station in New York, a landmark in the city the film is set in. A real location once again takes the audience back to reality. We see him from below, making his look taller and an almost god-like figure, making the story of a real-life superhero more plausible as we are made to look up in awe. He is wearing his security rain jacket which acts as a cape in this scene as with many comics but is something we recognise from earlier in the film making the scene easier to seize by the viewer.

As the voiceover comes to an end, the slow, sad music starts to become more upbeat and has an epic feeling following on from the epic theme of the voiceover. We then see more of the station as David moves into it, away from the camera. This music is used in many of M. Night Shyamalan's films as they help to create atmosphere and give the film more meaning through sound. This prepares us for what will happen next. The camera moves over his head to show the people at the station, they are below him, which shows his new position of power and knowledge. He now knows things they don't about the world and so he is no longer one of them.

It then cuts again to us looking up at him from the bottom of the stairs as if we are one of the people he is looking at, placing us within the crowd. We can see his face but it is partly obscured by his hat which shows that he partly knows why he is there but still has doubts. This image is used to convey his inner feelings through his physical appearance and dress, which lets the viewer temporarily, see inside his mind. As he walks down the stairs,

people pass him which destroys the illusion of him being greater and he becomes one of them once again.

As this happens, the music becomes louder and we see more of his face, showing he is more certain than before. The camera slowly moves from him and our view is obscured by the crowd which could reflect his feelings of being lost among these people in his everyday life. However, although we are focused on this one character, we hear the chattering of people over the music which keeps us grounded. As he begins to walk forwards, it is towards the camera but he is always looking past it to show that even though he is with many people, like us watching he isn't aware of any of them individually.

This is done to give emphasis to what will happen in the next part of the film when he 'awakens' to his calling and begins to help people and connect with his family again. A woman in bright red then brushes past him, where a flash cut is used to signify that something has happened to him; the woman stands out from the crowd because her hair and clothing have more colour than anyone else. These things are used to show that David has noticed her and give us reason to notice her too. This tells the audience that there is something significant about this woman and that she has a significant role to play for David's character.

When he first touches her, we hear a sharp, shocking sound which contrasts harshly with the soundtrack, to tell us that he has felt something significant and this sound is designed to make us jump or to get a reaction from the

audience. After he has seen this vision, we have an image of her walking away but she still stands out because she is wearing the same colour as she was in the vision; this makes us connect the two parts of the scene together in our minds, aiding the narrative.

When we see her walk away, the picture is speeded up for a few frames to show that time has passed. She is soon covered by the crowd again so the camera pans around to reveal David from the corner of the screen walking towards the notice board. Distorted perspective of the camera creates the illusion that he is taller than everyone else and no one at the station seems to notice each other. This gives him superiority once again and an enhanced presence on screen which emphasises the purpose of the scene.

He stops and the camera zooms in and moves down to view his hands which he outstretches, giving another image of a classic superhero, using his jacket to again create effect. The director does this to remind us of the main themes of the film and David's discovery of a deeper meaning to his life. After the second vision, we come back to the main scene on a close-up of David. This time we see his reaction which suggests that he is slowly realising his potential and waking up to the world that we have seen he has been asleep to most of his life.

The camera then quickly zooms out to reveal the station again, almost as if time is moving faster, as before. The camera pans around David as a group walk past and we see what he is looking at. He is then driven to the centre of the camera again, standing in the middle of the station; it cuts to show him

from behind as he is hit by the janitor. When the man breaks into the house in the vision, the scene cuts abruptly to the owner of the house lying in the basement with the sound of a scream.

This would make the viewer jump and create fear as the director wants us to care more about this than the other visions. Once it is over, it cuts to David looking up. We have been looking up at him throughout the scene and so this shows that this family means more to him than anyone else in the world and this leads to him helping them in the next part of the scene. Overall, this is a very significant scene in terms of the whole film and the director uses these features to accentuate the messages of this section. Each shot is chosen to create meaning in some way and convey information to the audience.

The audience is led to have very different reactions and viewpoints to the revelations for David and Elijah and this is achieved mainly through the way the characters are shot and the way the film is edited along with soundtrack and other aspects. Through these features we are led to the conclusion that everything that happens is because of Elijah and he is the architect of this revelation. As the scene progresses, the imagery slowly begins to align David with the comic books heroes and we as an audience are understanding the weight and importance of this single moment in the film.