

# [Sequence analysis of the third man](https://assignbuster.com/sequence-analysis-of-the-third-man/)

10/7/12 The Third Man Sequence Analysis In Carol Reed’s The Third Man, the sequence in which the police and their bait, Holly, anxiously wait for the arrival of their target, Harry, is full of suspense and displayed through over 25 shots in less than 3 minutes. The sequence captures the anxiousness and suspense experienced by all the characters through its quick cuts of empty streets, destroyed buildings, and dark shadows. The score of this sequence heavily influences the mood and different thematic elements of the scene.

Through this nearly silent (almost no dialogue) segment, Reed brings the viewers into the scene through the perspectives of different characters surveying the empty, quiet and dark city of Vienna for the man they are trying to capture, Harry Lime. The first shot of this sequence is a fade-in of the cafe in which Holly is settling down while waiting for Harry. The signature zithermusicpicks up again to indicate the suspense of patiently waiting to complete a set-up that will allow the police to arrest a criminal.

It then cuts to inside the cafe where Holly anxiously sits and begins to look outside the window examining the ominous, empty streets of Vienna. This shot is a prime example of the unique askew camera placement used throughout the entire film. In this shot, like several others, the frame is angled quite awkwardly. This technique embodies the creation of a dark, odd and intense world in which noir films took place. The next shot takes us outside with a long pan from left to right. This shot puts us in the perspective of Holly as he slowly scopes out an empty street.

This zoomed in pan accurately conveys Holly’sanxietyof Harry’s arrival, as he attentively searches the street for any signs of Harry. This cuts back to Holly who is moving closer to the window in order to get a better look down the streets. Then a quick cut puts us back to Holly’s perspective of the street and yet again we see a vacant, dark street. However this shot is still and focuses on the Vienna statuary. The next cut is of a policeman hiding among these statues. The juxtaposition of these two shots is a prime example of Carol Reed’s montage and genius editing choices.

Holly closely looks at this landmark, which happens to be the police’s hideout. This allows the viewer to see the elaborate plan the police have created and be placed right in the middle of it. We are unable to see the police from the viewpoint of the meetings location but once zoomed in we can see them hidden in the depths off the shadows created by these large statues and columns. The shot of the policeman hidden along the statue cuts quickly to a shot of a still, dark street. The perspective then switches to that of the policeman.

The next cut shows another policeman, this time zoomed in on his face. This shot has much more light on the policeman’s face. It is a close up shot from a lower viewpoint. This allows us to understand the different placements and hiding spots of these police officers that are waiting to capture their target. This then cuts again to this policeman’s view of the street. This rapid crosscutting of straight shots juxtaposed with angled shots of the policemen and their vantage points, alongside the portentous strumming of the zither creates a very ominous and suspenseful setting and mood.

It places the viewer inside the set-up as if we too are silently and anxiously surveying the war-torn streets of Vienna for Harry Lime. This cuts to a shot that display’s Reed’s undeniable element of lighting. A police officer is placed in the center of the frame in profile. As he exhales, the low-key lighting picks up the fog created by his warm breath. This cuts again to the policeman’s vantage point down a dim alley. This cuts to another shot of a policeman with unique lighting. The lighting only allows the viewer to see the policeman’s nose and below.

His eyes and forehead are hidden by the shadow of his hat, until he moves his eyes. The lighting allows us to see the whites of his eyes as they move from right to left across the frame. Only seeing his eyes as they move force us to follow his eyes and look into his vantage point that is seen in the next shot of another empty road. This cuts to a close up of another policeman’s face, where again the lighting picks up and reflects off of the fog. This quickly cuts to another empty street view, which then quickly cuts back to Holly.

This shot of Holly is still angled awkwardly, only now we see Holly impatiently playing with his cup. The shot is important because it again shows us Holly’s fickle feelings towards the situation he is in. Throughout the film he has had difficulty deciding on whether or not to help the police bring in his friend Harry. This shot of Holly shows the internal debate he is experiencing in the mere three seconds it is seen. We then cut back to the first police officer in the statuary. His shadow is beautifully cast on the column next to him and our eyes are drawn to it.

We see his shadow move as he notices something. This cuts to his vantage point of a street that is finally no longer empty. A giant shadow is emerging alongside a building. The menacing shadow stands two stories high. This creates a strong feeling of suspicion and fear, yielding an expectation by viewers and the police that the shadow will be Harry. The sight of a humongous shadow approaching sufficiently increases the suspense of the sequence. This cuts back to the policeman in what proves to be one of the most significant and well-filmed shots of the movie.

It cuts to the same police officer who makes the first sound of the sequence; a simple “ pssst”. This is to signal that Lime is approaching to someone below. The camera pans down below the officer, and zooms into a dark corner of the statuary covered by shadows. The lighting of this shot is incredible. As the shot zooms in to its closest point, the lighting reveals the hiding Calloway and Paine as they merge from the shadowy depths of the statuary. Not only is this shot brilliantly lit, but it also displays the film’s mise-en-scene of corruption.

The two unscrupulous officers are standing underneath what was once beautiful religious statuary. Post-war Vienna is nothing like what it was and is now a depressing, crumbling, and corrupt city. Before the war, these officers would have been standing in beautiful religious architecture. Their emergence from the murky shadows represents the post-war ruin and corruption of the once beautiful city of Vienna. This then cuts back to the approaching giant shadow, as it closes in on the intersection, signifying the end of anticipation. The next shot is of a policeman leaning in to catch a view of to whom this shadow belongs.

This quickly cuts to a short shot of Holly also leaning in to try and get a glimpse. The shot reinforces the suspense and anxiety, and moral dilemma Holly is experiencing while waiting to set up his friend. As the shadow makes the final steps before being revealed, the zither tone changes from the usual haunting strumming to a comical, upbeat, high-pitched progression. It is then revealed that this shadow is a simple balloon salesman. The sudden change in music completely rids all previous tension as the balloon vender makes his way around the corner.

This shot symbolizes Reed’s fantastic visual language. All of the shots leading up to this leave the viewer with nothing but certainty that this approaching shadow will be Lime. We have chased him down before through his shadows so there is no reason to believe that the camera is playing a hoax on us. The viewer undoubtedly trusts the visual storytelling, due to Reed’s fantastic imagery and shots. Carol Reed’s rapid crosscuts are a unique tactic that delays the plot of the film, solely to shift all focus to the increase in tension.

The quick, oddly angled shots bring the viewer into the elaborate set-up, following each police officer and Holly, along with their respective vantage points of the streets of Vienna as if we too are searching for Lime. This sequence proves to be powerful and suspenseful, as well as a direct reflection of Carol Reed’s brilliance. He is able to intensify the suspense of the film significantly through his elaborate camera work, montage, lighting, mise en scene and sound. This short sequence proves to be a noteworthy piece in the cinematic world, and embodies the genre of film noir in just two minutes.