

# How christopher nolan utilises multiple narrative structure and sound design



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In the film Dunkirk Christopher Nolan uses sound design and multiple narrative structure to convey the impacts of the Dunkirk battle and evacuation. These techniques help convey the emotions of fear and suspense that each and every soldier had felt during the war. By utilizing these techniques Nolan allows the audience to put themselves in the position of each soldier allowing them to feel the themes that they felt, thus forth conveying the impacts of the war.

Nolan creates non-diegetic tones to give suspense and panic to particular scenes in the film. Since the film is based on the war in Dunkirk involving the British forces, the audience is aware that attacks will take place whilst watching the movie however due to Nolan recounting the events, the characters within the film are unaware of what they will experience whereas the audience do. By adding a suspenseful tone such as a stopwatch, this gives the audience suspense, not knowing when an attack is going to take place to oppose to if an attack will take place.

Nolan also uses some authentic tones and diegetic sounds in the film, these being distant gunfire that slowly approaches a setting or becomes eventually distant. The whistling and piercing siren of the enemy's bombs being dropped on the soldiers heads convey the impact of the battle. It also creates suspense for the audience because they share the same feelings that each soldier feel as an attack slowly starts to approach them. By placing the audience in the position of each individual soldier allows them to create their own experience with the event, this forth showing the impact of the Dunkirk battle and the thrilling experiences that was implanted into each soldier involved within the war.

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The sounds of a stopwatch and the constant presences of the shepherd tone create the suspenseful tone that makes the audience aware of a present threat or that an attack from a threat could possibly take place. Because these sounds are used in the majority of all scenes where there is a threat the audience are prone to recognizing this and once the sound regains its presents, the audience knows that an attack will take place.

The diegetic sounds are the gunfire of enemy battles and the sirens of the enemy planes and bombs, these are sounds that the soldiers become familiar with and cause the audience to be placed in the same position as them.

Delving deeper into the twisted timeline that is Dunkirk, it is clear to see that sound is not the only thing Nolan played with whilst making the film. Nolan aimed to make Dunkirk as historically accurate as possible, he " Told the story from three points of view. The air, the land and the sea". Nolan states " To mingle these different versions of history, one had to mix the temporal strata. Hence the complicated structure; even if the story is once again very simple".

Explaining color to a color-blind person can be done but they will never truly understand. When Nolan was attempting to convey the full impact of the Dunkirk evacuation he knew he needed to show every aspect of the story even if it altered the timeline. By constantly changing time Nolan is always asking and answering questions for the audience. The shivering soldier is first seen in solitude on a upturned ship where he is rescued by Mr Dawson, this instantly leaves the audience guessing where he came from and why he

is in this situation? He is portrayed as desperate to survive and refusing to consider a logical objective. Later the audience sees a chronologically earlier scene of the soldier where he coldly denies helping desperate companions. The shift in perspective encourages the audience to examine their own judgmental nature. At times, these soldiers would have been lost, they would have had so many questions and the answers would only come in time.

Multiple story lines allows Nolan to convey the sheer scale of this evacuation as well as the importance every role played, he used the air, sea and land all in different time frames to show the impact of each one. The British spitfires were only in the air for 1 hour but when this linked to the land when they shot the German bomber the positive impact on the soldiers lasted days. The large difference in the time scales of the film assists to remind the audience that humans work with multiple time pressures in a crisis, the intensity of the situation can cause the sense of time to distort.

Through the use of sound and multiple narrative structure Nolan has strongly conveyed the impact of the Dunkirk evacuation. The constant build of the Shepard tone along with the stopwatch and jumping time frames keeps the audience on the edge of their seat. The feeling of anticipation and fear ensures the audience feels a part of the action and are influenced by the impact of the evacuation first hand.