

Analysis of Mise-en-scene and sound in the opening sequence of 'Silence of the lambs' (Demme 1991).

Throughout the opening sequence on Silence of the lambs the way sound and Mise-en-scene has been used to create a certain effect on the audience varies, many of the scenes use different settings and sounds to create feelings such as tension, terror or uneasiness that will be projected onto the audience watching.

At the start of the opening sequence the first thing that plays an important part is the non-diegetic music, even before we see a single image of the film on the screen the audience first gets a sense of what genre of the film will be and also what's to be expected. In this film the genre that can be detected from this piece of music is thriller, the unnerving tones and tension brought to the screen shows that the film will also have these features.

As well as the music in the opening scene making an assumption of what is expected from the film the first image that we see of the film also does, as we can see the setting at the start of the film is in the woods, the first thing that we can notice from the setting is that all of the colour seems to be beached out of the surroundings, the natural light has been exaggerated to create a serious mood that can be seen as unsettling, this is usually the type of setting that is used in horror films contrasting the setting that would typically be used in a happy romance/rom-com that is bright and sunny. The surroundings of the first scene are specifically set up to get a certain response from the audience and it's not just the actual surroundings that help to create a certain effect, as the scene begins to move on the camera is changed to a wide high angle where we can see the character in her surroundings for the first time, the way the character, a young woman, has been placed in such a vast surrounding adds to the suggestion of the genre.



The settings in the first scene use lots of different techniques to create a Mise-en-scene that's specific to the film, the way the camera angles are used in the opening scenes only allows the audience to see what the director wants them to, at the beginning of the scene the audience automatically creates the idea that the character is being chased through the woods, after all everything has been set up to perceive this thought, the music at the beginning creates the tension, the surroundings the character is in are those of a typical horror film just before something actually happens and the camera angles and set up to show specific shots especially the tracking shots, but as well as all of these signs there are also signs to show that this actually isn't happening, the way everything has been put together is just to foreshadow that the film is probably going to be like this. Foreshadowing is also used in another part of the opening sequence, as the sequence develops we see that the character runs passed three signs that have been specifically posted onto a tree, the signs say 'Agony' 'hurt' and 'pain', at this point in the film we already know that the character isn't being chased and in fact she is an FBI agent training on an obstacle course, although these specific



words will be used to motivate the agents in training to strive above the words, we have to remember that the signs have been shown in the shot for a certain reason, to foreshadow what's to come in the rest of the film, as the film is a thriller and is about 'Hannibal the cannibal' we can expect that the victims of Hannibal will be in 'Agony', 'Pain' and 'Hurt'.

Throughout the opening scene Agent Starling always seems to be isolated when she's around

other people, either when she's in a room or outside, when you see Starling going somewhere everyone around her seems to be going the opposite direction as if she's going against the tide, this isolates her as a main character and as a strong independent women, as well as this Agent Starling has been dressed differently to people that surround her, a lot of the people that are around Starling are usually dressed in the same uniform while she is dressed in something completely different, while she is dressed in a different colour so that she stands out she is also non glamourized contrasting the fact that the films main focus is typical women that attract men to them.



During the course of the opening scenes the Mise-en-scene and sound has been used to amplify Starlings persona and build up her character, one thing that we can tell about her character is that she is strong, she is always independent and going against the stereotype of a woman, a lot of the time the settings around her have been set up to create a main male dominance, this is shown when she is given instructions from male characters and when she is made to look smaller than them.

While male dominance is key in Silence of the lambs this is specifically set up in the scenes that have Hannibal in them, as the film gradually builds up to meeting Hannibal for the first time we can see that things start to change,



one key scene is where the Mise-en-scene goes from the bleached out effect to a darker light and red, this shows the danger in the film as well as representing blood, as well as the colour of the surroundings change so does the general setting, while we have seen agent Starling in a setting where she can break through and become the main character when she goes to meet Hannibal she suddenly becomes trapped, shown behind bars in the asylum her persona changes, although she is still the strong character that we know we find that she can crumble under the presence and touch of Hannibal, we soon see how unnerving Hannibal is, this is also amplified when we see that his cell have glass to close it



off instead of bars, this creates the effect that he is much closer to Starling and that it seems nothing is separating them.

The opening sequence of Silence of the lambs uses a lot of different techniques to create a feeling with the audience, Mise-en-scene is largely used to create a certain setting whether it's to show one of the main characters in a certain light or to show key points that are relevant to the rest of the

film, as the film goes on the sound that is used has a massive effect on the audience, this makes is what finishes the feeling of the audience and specifically creates a mood that couldn't be done with just images, this is specifically shown right at the beginning of the sequence and while Hannibal is in the shots, this shows the genre of film and what's expected, as the music is tense while the camera is focused on Hannibal it shows what he is like and that he is to be feared and that he is dangerous. Both Mise-en-scene as well as many other features is what help to create a film and the perception of it.