

# Creating Meaning through Interpretations: A Mise-En-Scene Analysis of the Film '96

D. Ignatius Maria Joseph

*Student, Department of Visual Communication, Loyala College, Chennai, India*

**Abstract:** Cinema is a mass medium and it stimulates experiences in its pursuit to put across ideas and perceptions (Acker, 1991). Filmmakers adopt different ways to transfer their thoughts and perceptions to the audience. Elements like décor, lighting, space, etc., which can be collectively referred to as mise-en-scene, play a crucial role in creating mood and meaning to the shots (Barsam and Monahan, 2010). Specific scenes from the Tamil film '96, are identified to discuss each of the three elements and their importance in the storyline and its possible effects on the audience are analyzed using content analysis. The paper concludes that meanings can be created through the interpretation of these three mise-en-scene elements. A close observation and analysis of these elements in the film could lead to a much enhanced film-watching experience.

**Keywords:** Film, Mise-en-scene Analysis, Decor, lighting, Space, Content Analysis

## 1. Introduction

In Cinematic terms, mise-en-scene can be referred to as all the elements of a film that we see in front of the camera and the way it is arranged. Those elements, which include décor, lighting, space, have an important role in imparting a mood to the story and delivering a meaning to the visuals, thus playing a crucial role in signifying the director's narrative mastery.

The set and the way it is designed play a crucial role in creating a mood, interpreting the visuals, and providing an aesthetic appeal to the shots. There are several instances where the set designers had control over all the visual aspects of the particular film.

The key aspect of lighting is to focus on imparting moods and meaning to the scenes. The amount of light used to frame a subject or light up a room and the direction of the source from which the light appears can all denote a particular meaning and interpretation to the overall content of the scene. Variations in lighting is used to show change in time during the day or night and even to symbolize the character's mindset at a given juncture. Low-key lighting is often used to create strong contrasts and shadows in horrors and thrillers while high-key lighting would suit musicals and comedies that call for a brighter setting.

The mood of the scene or the characters in it can be explained by analyzing the placement of subject and the amount of space in the frame. The relationship of the Characters could be easily understood just by analyzing the space between them.

Cinematographer-turned-filmmaker C. Prem Kumar is known primarily for his work in Tamil cinema. He has helmed the camera department in a number of acclaimed movies, notable among which are the comedy-drama Pasanga (2009), the comedy Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha Kaanom (2012) and the comedy-drama Sundarapandian (2012).

In 2018, Prem Kumar made his directorial debut with the film 96, which he also wrote. A romantic drama, 96 starred Vijay Sethupathi and Trisha Krishnan in the lead roles.

## 2. Mise-En-Scene in Films

The use of mise-en-scene has a serious effect on the reading of the film. It can be extended to the whole film rather than a selection of scenes in order to create a feel from start to finish. The way in which the mise-en-scene elements are treated in a movie gains considerable significance.

Mise-en-scene involves a combination of what the audience views on screen as it is and the way they are invited to view it. It is all about the means of communication in the film and the ways in which they work out an expressive narrative pattern. I'll explain this through an example of lighting being used as an effective mise-en-scene technique in Alfred Hitchcock's 1946 film 'Notorious'. With the help of low-key lighting, Cary Grant is shown as silhouette and is made to sit with his back facing the camera. This allows us as audience to think from his perspective and share his viewpoints as Ingrid Bergman interacts with him. On the contrary, there are many instances where high-key lighting was used in films. In 'American Beauty', it was primarily done to show the glow on Angela's blonde hair as she appears as the seductress in the dream sequence. The high-key lighting technique involves the use of fill lights at par with key lights to make the scenes bright and devoid of shadows.

Three-point lighting is used in films to increase the depth of frame and make the people and objects in the background visible in certain scenes.

The set design is considered an effective mise-en-scene to give the audience a sense of place, mood and the character's mindset. It can be created inside a studio or filmed in an outdoor location. The set and the props used will have a specific theme to convey and will make the audience indulge in deep thoughts to develop interpretations.

The use of space is a very important element of mise-en-

scene as it influences the way a film is read. The depth of field, distance from one character to the other, size of the people, places and props within a frame are all factors that determines space.

There are numerous articles on the web, which gives a sample or two of the mise-en-scene elements using various films. However, a detailed analysis of all the mise-en-scene elements in a single film is hard to find. Considering the impact of mise-en-scene and the effect it could have on the audience in terms of their understanding makes it a very relevant topic for discussion.

### 3. Methodology

In this study, content analysis is used to analyze three mise-en-scene elements in the tamil film '96. Specific scenes are identified and elements like décor, lighting, space are analyzed in detail. This would help to explain the extent to which these elements combine to provide mood, meaning and value to the visuals.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

All the findings in the analysis part are interpretations of the researcher, which is intended to help the audience to have a better understanding of the film and add to the existing knowledge. Only the Period where Ramachandran and Janakidevi are together in the Present are taken for the Mise-en-scene analysis.

#### A. Décor

Décor plays a major role in bringing out certain key aspects in the film '96. In the film '96 Ram is a travel photographer and usually we may find a lot of photographs in a photographers house but the only photographs we see is some photographs of deities on the wall and his 10th Std school group photo. His house is filled with a no of old things which he may have used in the past For eg. There would be an old Taperecorder on his bedroom which he had in his house at Thanjore 22 years back, This tells about Ram and his Character, he still clings on to all his old memories and lives with them.

And throughout the film we may find Parallel lines running across the Frame, eg, Streetlights, dividers on the road, a view of two apartments from Ram's Balcony. The two lines Symbolizes Ram and Jaanu telling us that both of them are Parallel lines and could never join together at any point.

#### B. Space

Space, or the illusion of space, is incredibly important in filmmaking. With it, you control not only what the audience sees, but how you want them to see it.

There are a few simple ways of controlling space, the easiest to explain is the frame.

Positive Space – Space the subject inhabits on the frame.

Negative(White) Space – Space around the subject.

Space between the characters is one of the most important

element to handle in Films like '96.

The amount of space between Ram and jaanu has to be handled carefully as the distance between the two characters tell a different story.

For eg., When Ram and Jaanu meets at the Re-union They would be Standing facing each other in a calculated distance, The space between Two couples tells us something, The space between a father and a son tell's us something, The space between two friends tell's us something, There is no particular distance to be followed between people but the space inbetween them tells us about their relationship. Space creates tension and that tells us a story.

And most of the time the space in between Ram and Jaanu is filled bythe presence of Subha, She thinks herself as a barrier between Ram and Jaanu and Stops them getting too close.

And at the end after Jaanu leaves Ram would be standing alone With the runway as the background and empty chairs in the foreground. This negative space around him tells us he is filled with emotions and the empty chairs before him shows us how lonely Ram is at that moment.

#### C. Lighting

No matter the type of lighting you're using or location where you're shooting. Lighting subjects in a certain way will change the mood and result of the shot. Lighting conveys the subjects emotions directly to the audience.

When Jaanu calls out Ram's name and when he turns towards her The lighting would be all flashy and with different colours, This shows us Ram is not stable and various emotions are rushing inside him.

After leaving jaanu and while driving back from the airport the left half of the car where Ram is seated would be lighted but the right side where jaanu was would not have any lighting except reflections from above. This is a kind of Split lighting where the place where Jaanu was is now nothing but memories telling us Half of Ram is now gone. And after sometime the reflections would cover Ram's side too, this now tells us now those Memories and feelings of Jaanu have taken all over Ram

### 5. Conclusion

This paper emphasizes the role of mise-en-elements like décor, lighting and space, in understanding the mood and meaning of the film. The researcher discusses how these three elements were used in the film '96 to analyze the role of interpretation in effectively narrating a film.

Specific scenes are taken to discuss each of the Three elements and their importance in the storyline and possible effects on the audience are analyzed. The paper concludes that meanings can be created through the interpretation of these Three mise-en-scene elements. A close observation and analysis of these elements in the film could lead to a much enriched film-watching experience. This study is my interpretation and analysis of the scenes. And some of them are subjective and may vary from person to person.

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