

Film, Television & New Media 2019 v1.2

Unit 1 high-level annotated sample response

August 2018

Case study investigation

This sample has been compiled by the QCAA to assist and support teachers to match evidence in student responses to the characteristics described in the assessment objectives.

Assessment objectives

This assessment instrument is used to determine student achievement in the following objectives:

1. explain the use of technical and symbolic codes
4. apply relevant terminology, referencing and written language conventions
5. analyse cinematography in the context of a film competition
8. appraise visual storytelling in response to a theme.

Note: Objectives 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9 are not assessed in this instrument.

Task

You will conduct a case study investigation on a previous Year 9 to 12 *Screen It* film competition entry and present findings in a written report format. You must identify a live action film, animation or video game 'case', research the competition theme for the chosen year and determine how the artist has addressed the theme and genre. You must then appraise artistry and storytelling evident in the case. Your final submission must include in-text referencing and a bibliography.

Sample response

This a high-level response because:

The student's explanation (right) demonstrates how the artist has drawn stylistic inspiration from the psychological thriller genre to challenge conventional narrative techniques and address the theme of mystery.

The application of relevant terminology, referencing and language conventions supports judgments.

Ideas are articulated and structure is controlled to enhance the communication of meaning.

The analysis details the technical and symbolic choices evident in the cinematography and appraises the artist's visual storytelling and artistry in response to the theme.

Introduction

This case study will analyse and appraise Extrasensory Perception by Tallulah Chong, the winner of the senior live action category of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image's (ACMI) 2016 Screen It competition. An analysis of the film maker's cinematography will be followed by an appraisal of her artistry and storytelling through a critical discussion of the artist's creative approach, visual style and technical skill in response to the theme.

Context

Screen It is a national moving image competition for primary and secondary school students. Each year Australian students are invited to meet the challenge of making their own videogames, animations or live action films in response to a theme. This theme is designed to stimulate ideas and fuel student creativity. In 2016, winning works were selected from 587 entries created by 2,521 students from every Australian state, who responded to the theme "Mystery".

According to ACMI, *Screen It* promotes artistry and storytelling as part of a curriculum-based learning program. Students are encouraged to use a variety of creative techniques and approaches to express themselves using the moving image. In *Extrasensory Perception*, Tallulah Chong from St Mary's School in WA, has drawn stylistic inspiration from the psychological thriller genre and challenged conventional narrative techniques to address the theme.

Analysis

The film's diegesis initially cues the audience to a cause and effect plot. The opening close up of the central character combined with the subtitle "Investigator Lyons ESP Unit" and the cut to a shocked expression of the antagonist as Lyons knocks on the door indicates Lyons is investigating a crime. The mise en scene is reminiscent of stereotypical confessional scenes in British detective dramas such as *Inspector Morse* – a solitary detective in a suit and a criminal with a cockney accent sitting opposite each other in a long shot revealing a bleak setting made colder with low key lighting. Cutting to a shot / reverse shot montage, the character under investigation gives his version of events. The continuous zoom into each character's eyes and the gradual cross face of dialogue with a cacophony of harsh audio is reminiscent of the opening scene of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, creating a dissonant sense of confusion. Close ups dolly around each character's head to create a sense of threat. Extreme close ups

emphasise the Investigator's gaze and signify his extrasensory perception as the criminal's dialogue morphs into dissonance.

The sequence cuts to a montage of what the criminal said he was doing, played in reverse and enhanced by motion blurs and distorted sound, signifying a return to the beginning of the story. In other words, he is changing his story. In this new take on the investigation, suspenseful music plays as the criminal strolls through a gritty urban setting common in TV crime dramas. Motion blurs are used as transitions signifying the passing of time. The footage has been colour graded using sinister and dark tones. The use of hand held footage tracking the antagonist combined with jump cuts in the style of Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* create a sense of unease. Shallow focus frames the character as cross cuts to the Investigator indicate that the story is being retold.

At this stage a third character, a young man, is introduced, framed as a close up of his shoes running through a street. Canted angles and an accelerated montage build the tension. The accelerated montage is then used to show the young man stealing a Mercedes Benz from an unwitting driver. A cross cut to the investigator taking notes as the antagonist speaks crossfades into distorted sound. At this point the audience knows that the dialogue they can hear is the truth but distorted dialogue is not.

Cutting back to the Investigator, subsequent footage showing the stolen car being delivered to the antagonist signifies the Investigator's extrasensory perception. As the truth becomes apparent dramatic match cuts between close ups of the young man, the antagonist and the Investigator increase in pace as the intensity of the music builds. As the investigator turns to the antagonist, a montage like the final shootout scene in Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* builds the tension. The Investigator, framed in a low camera angle, towers above the antagonist, as a series of reaction shots in extreme close up show each man's eyes as the truth is revealed.

Appraisal

The purpose of this section of the case study is to appraise visual storytelling in response to a theme. The criteria for appraisal will be:

- the extent that the theme of mystery has been addressed
- the incorporation of creative ideas and approaches
- the visual style
- demonstration of technical skills.

Extrasensory Perception by its title alone links to our fascination with the unknown. Despite the rejection of the field of parapsychology by the scientific community due to the absence of an evidence base, theory or proven results (Bunge, 1987), the concept of paranormal psychic phenomena has regularly featured in feature films such as *Dark City* (1998), *The Omen* (1976) and *The Matrix* (1999). Like many of these films, *Extrasensory Perception* has many mysteries embedded within it. Although it is implied that the Investigator is making inquiries into a car theft, the audience are given no information about the young man who stole the car and his relationship with the antagonist. No context is provided for any of the characters. Although the Investigator discovers the truth using his sixth sense, he leaves the antagonist's house without

taking any action. The audience are left as much in the dark by the end of the film about what the incident is and who is responsible. In this sense, the theme is evident.

The artist claims that *Extrasensory Perception* is a film which takes audiences on an emotional journey of confusion, suspense and realization. These themes are established from the opening title sequence which draws from classic crime B movie tropes by blending sounds and blurring the title to create an aura of confusion. This suspenseful tone foreshadows the repetition of motion blur and distorted audio throughout the film to enhance the sense of mystery that is evident in the narrative. The narrative itself departs from cause and effect logic and challenges conventional narrative structure in a similar way to Nolan's *Inception* (2010) where the story takes place between interconnected minds which creates a framework for the story to occur. In this sense, the artist has abstracted conventional narrative structure and links to European art films such as Antonini's *Blow Up* (1966) which explores perception through hypnotic images which exist in the mind of the characters.

The film's visual style contributes to the theme of mystery. Chong's framing frequently involves close ups focusing on emotion rather than providing other visual information. The mise en scene provides little information enhancing the mystery. The lighting, shallow focus and use of vignette position the audience as though they are spying on the antagonist. The low-key lighting creates an ominous mood enhancing the tension and the colour grading has created a look common to British crime dramas. The film's visual style contributes to the notion that Antonini explored in *Blow Up* that no camera can capture reality or show the truth which is a suitable approach to the theme.

Technically, Chong has effectively applied technologies to create a product that exploits and realises the potential of production practices. Extensive use of montage and cross cutting show the story that the antagonist is explaining is interspersed with almost subliminal information, often blurred, creating an aura of a European art film. The reliance on mid shots and close ups place the audience closer to the psyche of the characters is typical of psychological thrillers which emphasize the mental states of its characters- their perceptions, thoughts, distortions, and general struggle to grasp reality (Packer, 2007). The use of slow motion and motion blurs is used to signify extrasensory perception. The reversal of footage after the antagonist's first version of his story and the when the Investigator was processing information was a creative way to visually show the characters thought processes.

Conclusion

Extrasensory Perception is an original and compelling live action product which addresses the *Screen It* 2016 theme of "mystery" with panache. Practical production skills including camera, audio, acting and directing are of a very high standard for a high school student. The editing, use of sound effects, titles, colour grading and motion blur contribute to the abstract nature of the narrative. The visual style of the film overall suits the psychological thriller genre and provides the audience with up close information like pieces of a jigsaw. While it is somewhat disappointing to not be given a resolution to the narrative, the Investigator leaving the house at the end extends the theme.

1448 words

References

Bunge, Mario. (1987). Why Parapsychology Cannot Become a Science. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 10: 576–577.

Packer, Sharon (2007). *Movies and the Modern Psyche*. Greenwood Publishing Group. pp. 87–90. ISBN 9780275993597.