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FLM151: Section B — Fall 2016

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Film Analysis #5

Mise en Scène

1. In specific terms backed by examples with time-stamps, write 300 words about the film's *mise-en-scène*: the *settings, acting, props, lighting* and/or *wardrobe*, and how they support the story.

The Usual Suspects is a wonderful example of how paying attention to the details can really tell a story. Considering that *The Usual Suspects* is intentionally ambiguous in an attempt to tell a mystery crime thriller, it is especially important that the arrangement of every scene of the movie back up it's big reveal to the audience by the end of the film. Without these special considerations a mystery movie would feel cheap, like there was no way one could put the pieces together to make sense of the ending, the audience would just have to accept the ending instead of connecting the dots on their own. Thankfully, the crew behind the film for *The Usual Suspects* makes exceptional use of *mise-en-scène* to tell an amazing story with every frame of the film.

Right from the opening credits of the movie, *The Usual Suspects* uses the setting to full advantage to hint at the nature of the film. The film opens with the camera panning across a moonlit lake, the water rippling across the lake while the credits of those in the film are displayed (00:00:30 – 00:02:15). While this might appear to be just an establishing shot it can actually be interpreted as much more. The moonlight reflecting off the water “appear like the wavy lines one would see for a digital recreation of voices...asking the question, who are these voices...which one is telling us the ‘truth’” (Johnson). This is an amazing example of every element of a story, even the opening credits, can be used to the fullest to help set the scene of a great story.

By the end of the film, *The Usual Suspects* asks the viewer just how much you were paying attention to the *mise-en-scène* of the film. Satisfied with Verbal Kint's account of everything that happens, Agent Kujan allows him to leave the police station before finally understanding the mistake he's made (01:37:12 – 01:40:46). Through a series of detail shots of the items on the walls and desk of the office the viewer is able to piece together that Kint's story was all a fabrication, but in the end “it was ultimately Agent Kujan's mind that betrayed us” (Odd Films). These details beg the question; how much were you paying attention? The coffee cup with the name “Kobayashi”, the pin board with the “fat person”, “Bricks”, and “Redfoot”. Even the Quartet pin board and its manufacturing company based out of Skokie Illinois were all used by Kint to manufacture a believable story. These props were used in the best possible way by *The Usual Suspects* to reinforce the story and prove to show how even basic props can be put to good use in setting the scene.

Works Cited

The Usual Suspects. Dir. Bryan Singer. By Christopher McQuarrie. Perf. Stephen Baldwin, Gabriel Byrne, and Kevin Spacey. Gramercy Pictures, 1995.

Johnson, Bill. "The Usual Suspects, an Essay by Bill Johnson." *The Usual Suspects, an Essay by Bill Johnson*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Oct. 2016.

Odd Films. "Usual Suspects Movie Interpretation." Odd Films. N.p., 2015. Web. 12 Oct. 2016.