



**SHORT  
CUT**  
SMALL STORIES  
BIG ISSUES

# THE DOOR

MIA LESSON PLAN

FRAME ANALYSIS

SCENE ANALYSIS

 **nervebelfast**  
creative learning centre



## TITLE

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'THE DOOR' DIRECTED BY JUANITA WILSON (2010)

## LESSON ONE - FRAME ANALYSIS

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### Analysis of a frame

Time code - 09.25

This frame is from a brief sequence that takes place in the hospital. In the scene immediately before, the father kisses his daughter's hands, but discovers a lesion: a moment of tenderness that signals a tragedy.



At the hospital, the parents walk down a corridor holding their daughter's hands. A cut away reveals the shot illustrated here. The image is subjective, it comes from a character's point of view. Placing us in a character's position like this evokes a sense of their inner thoughts and feelings. Considering the camera placement of the shot seems to be at eye-level with the other children we can assume that this shot is from the daughter's point of view.

Though different from each other these children share similar characteristics. They are all in the same sitting position, they all wear the same pale and homogeneous coloured robes, they all have shaved hair, and they all have a blank stare that suggests confusion or apprehension. The similarity of their appearance recalls similar presentations of children in horror films e.g. the Grady Twins in *The Shining* (1980).

All children are still seated with their backs to a wall, and are visually framed between two buttresses. The composition creates a cloistering effect similar to what one sees when the father prepares the door, before the final rites [(cf. *Film Analysis* "6 - Thresholds")]. The children are framed in that alcove, suggesting that movement beyond that point is impossible.



This shot is followed by another one, also subjective. Here we are placed in the position of the other children. Though neither the daughter nor the other children appear in the same shot the juxtaposition of these images creates a linking effect. A connection between her and the other children is implied. Like them she too is ill.

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## LESSON TWO - ANALYSIS OF A SEQUENCE

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### The Opening Sequence

Time code - 00.06

The Door, written and directed by Dubliner Juanita Wilson, is a poetic, atmospheric film that often recalls the observational visual style of Polish director Krystoff Kieslowski. Much of the film takes place within a haunting landscape of winter light, bare trees and shadows falling on snow.

The narrative of The Door begins with the loud diegetic sound of a motorcycle engine heard over the opening titles, white lettering on a black screen. This signals the important role that the soundtrack will play as a storytelling device revealing key elements of the drama.

The motorcycle engine stutters to a halt over a striking composition that immediately creates mystery and establishes an eerie, ominous atmosphere.



The low angle, long shot reveals an abandoned fairground, the frame divided equally in two by a solitary fence post.

Oppressive lines of barbed wire diagonally cross the horizontal plane setting up a visual tension with the verticals of the fence post and the giant Ferris wheel that dominates the frame. In the fading light, the blue tone of the cinematography and the encroaching shadows evoke a feeling of coldness and desolation.

The director holds this opening shot for 23 seconds. The camera remains static as the lone motorcyclist drives into the foreground, parking his vehicle on the left hand side of the frame. As the man slips through the barbed wire fence, the bisected composition allows us to observe his running across the fairground into the distance.

The use of static and extended long shots is a key technique employed throughout the film. The first five shots of the film employ this technique to follow the progress of the man from a distance. In the second shot, from the far distance the running man emerges from behind the towering Ferris wheel (placed at the centre of the composition) and the shot is held for 12 seconds until he reaches our vantage point.



In the third shot, the man emerges to the left of our vantage point running through the snow for 8 seconds until he almost disappears into the shadows of the gathering darkness. In the fourth shot, from an oblique, high angle perspective inside a derelict block of flats, the running man is reduced to the size of an ant and we can barely see him in the distance as he scurries across the frozen ground.

By the fifth shot, darkness has fallen and the man runs towards a concrete walkway, finding a hiding place in the shadows just as torch shines nearby. When the scene is suddenly bathed in electric light, the man is revealed by this long shot as a helpless figure trapped at the centre of the frame. Only then does the director break the pattern of shots with a medium shot of the terrified man, trying to remain unseen.

As each static shot has revealed further glimpses of the vacant spaces and the grey prison-like architecture of an abandoned city or ghost town, the atmosphere has become increasingly desolate. The subtle use of diegetic sound accentuates the oppressive mood – the squeaking of the ferris wheel as it rattles in the wind, a persistent metallic clanking sound, the whistling of the wind, an ominous droning noise, the heavy breathing of the running man and the changing sounds of his loud footsteps, first on concrete, and louder still on heavy snow. Each of these sounds pierces the silence and bounces off the empty buildings and the ruined landscape.

Director Juanita Wilson decided that *The Door* needed to be filmed where the actual events of the story took place:

“We saw Pripyat in the snow on the Internet. We knew we just had to go there....It’s just the way the city is, it speaks so much, long streets, big buildings, the dereliction, the Ferris wheel and the abandoned fairground, everything about was perfect. We walked and walked around the city and very quickly said we’ll use this shot, this angle, whatever. You see man being a victim of his environment, this huge structure and this little man lost within it looking for somewhere.”

## The Evacuation: The Interior Apartment Scene

Time code - 04.13 - 06.42

Sound is once again used to time travel in *The Door*. The wailing of sirens can be heard on the soundtrack over the extended long shot of the man driving into the distance along the snow-covered train tracks as his first person voice-over narration ends on the words "We left on the third day".

The diegetic sound of loud banging on a door accompanies the sudden cut into a flashback of the family's forced departure from their home. There are only four cuts in this 87 second interior scene.



The apartment scene is filmed in a very different style to the slow extended long shots that keep us at a distance in the opening scene. Here we are immediately thrust into intimate contact with the family of the motorcyclist with a restless, handheld camera following their anxious movements through the cramped spaces of their apartment.

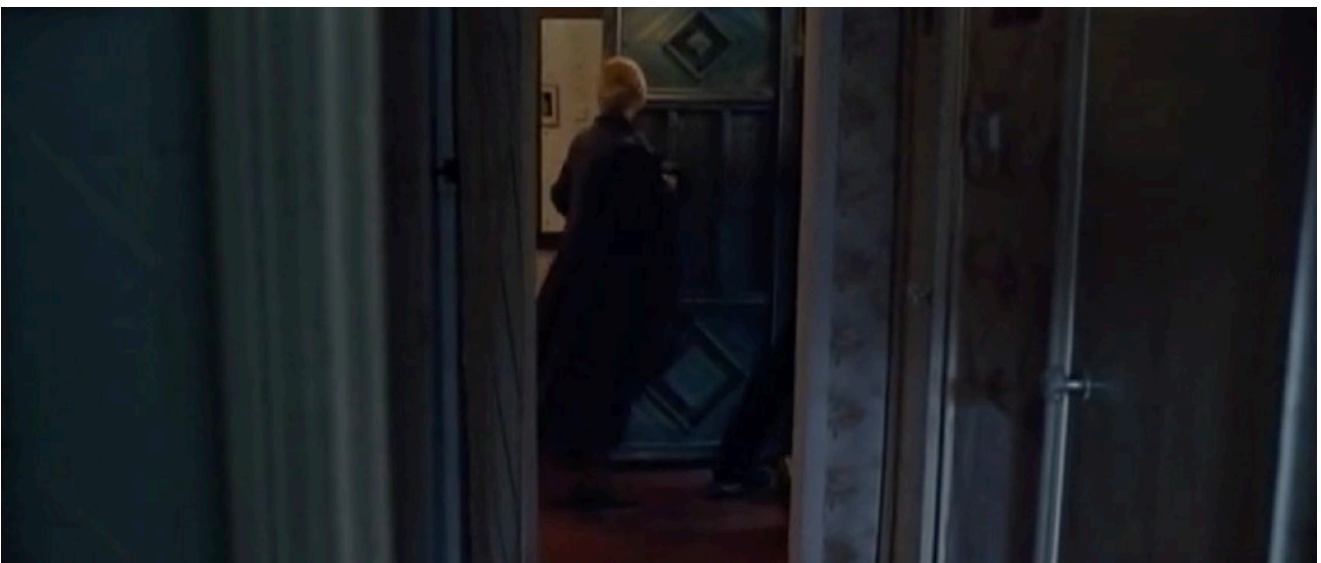
The director employs the same oblique, low camera angle to cut from a tight close-up of the child collecting her pencils to the hands of her father grabbing the suitcase from the drawer. When the camera is abruptly raised up to head height enabling us to watch the hurried movements of the father at such close quarters, we have the feeling that we are actually there watching these troubling events unfold.



The jerky, mobile camera moves around as if it is the POV of another person, pointing downwards to view the cat being placed in the suitcase, quickly swinging around to peer down at the child in the bedroom doorway, then reverse tracking to make room for the father to squeeze past on his way to the kitchen.

This fly-on-the-wall observational camera style generates a palpable feeling of realism and immediacy. The camera conveys a sense of immersion. It positions us as witnesses to the action which unfolds in real time in a 70 second extended long take. The nervous, handheld camera movements convey the mounting anxiety of the family members – following close behind the father as he moves along the darkened passageways into the kitchen; framing the tentative actions of the mother in tight medium close-up as she is momentarily left alone in the kitchen; remaining in the kitchen with the couple to eavesdrop on their worried reactions to the commands from the radio to depart with nothing; and finally offering us a frame-within-a-frame perspective of the isolated figure of the mother glimpsed in the shadows of the hallway.

This fly-on-the-wall camera position is repeated in the closing image of the scene as we peer through a door frame at another door being opened and closed for the final time. This is the same door which the father risks his life to retrieve in the opening scene.



Diegetic sound contributes greatly to both the realism and the growing sense of anxiety in the scene. Although "Don't Panic" is the incessant message of the chilling voice of authority on the radio, all the other sounds – the loud banging on doors, the angry voices, the siren alarms, the whirling helicopters in the sky – convey the very opposite emotion.

The director's skillful use of documentary realist camera technique and low-key lighting to place us within the claustrophobic spaces of the apartment evokes an unnerving sense of a frightening and hostile new world closing in on the family. The power of the scene lies in what it leaves to our imagination. Throughout the sequence, the camera confines us to the apartment. At no point are we ever shown the threatening world outside. We only get to hear the terrifying sounds of catastrophe invading the family home.

# The Final Sequence

Time code - 12:40 - 15:00

## The child

The sequence opens with a close-up of the face of the dead child, touched by the hands of the mother and father. The lighting applied to her face - half illuminated, half obscured - suggests that this young girl is in an interval position, between the visible world and the underworld, the world of the living and the dead. The child's face is pale, and she no longer has her long blonde hair. The knitted funeral cap on her scalp recalls a shaved head. Mise-en-scene choices present her in a way reminiscent of the children we had previously seen in the hospital.

As the camera pulls back we see the mother depositing the pencils next to the daughter's body, revealing that the child will be buried with the potentially contaminated objects which may have caused her death.

## The door

During that same show the father says in voiceover: „We lay it on the door, the same door where my father had been lying. The door I had to steal from my own apartment.“

With those words the viewer finally grasps the importance of the door as an object in this story. In their local traditions the door of the family home is used to transport the dead to their graves. This family tradition is threatened when the family are forced to flee their home. In the evacuation they lose not just their home but a vital instrument without which they cannot truly mourn.

With this knowledge we can now understand why the father returned to his city, even putting himself at risk of being captured and arrested. Having lost his home and his daughter this grieving father commits a desperate act of theft so that a family tradition can be retained. In the face of overwhelming loss this family tradition is the only thing they can preserve.

## The procession

The initial camera movement reframes the scene, the slow pull back allowing us to see the child's feet at the end of the door and the pallbearers moving into position to lift her. The camera remains locked in place as they lift her up and move through the doorways ahead.

In the next shot, we see a snowy landscape, reminiscent of the one seen from the doctor's office. A small procession, led by the priest, come forward with the child's corpse. Among the mourners we see a man and a woman who scatter throw lightly coloured roses on the ground. These roses are symbols of innocence and carry religious connotations.



## The bridge

The procession continues until they reach a bridge that extends over what appears to be a frozen, snow-covered river. At that point, the group splits into two: the priest and the two pallbearers continue, and the rest stop at the beginning of the bridge. We see a shot in which the priest and pallbearer cross the bridge. It's an abstract composition, framed in an extreme long shot the figures become small and barely distinguishable, all but engulfed by the landscape of snow and trees.



The next shot shows the parents standing in the foreground. As the other mourners turn their backs and leave. The parents remain still, at the beginning of the bridge, watching their daughter as she's carried away. In the next shot, the door is already on the other side of the bridge, and the parents can be seen in the background, with the priest, the men and the corpse in the foreground. The priest and the men exit frame to the right, moving beyond our sight. In the background at the bottom of the frame the parents remain. They are alone in the frame and this new visual composition underlines their loneliness. In the end, we do not know exactly where the child will be buried.



In a film full of thresholds and portals the bridge serves as the last of these symbols. The parents who remain can not follow their daughter. The bridge becomes a symbol of the divides between life and death, possession and loss, the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown.

Material translated and adapted from our Shortcut Portuguese Partners - Os Filhos de Lumière.