

THE DISSONANT BUILD OF SUSPENSE IN TELEVISION

by

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Abstract

This study investigates and analyzes the various cinematic techniques that build upon each other and are used in order to create suspense in audio/visual media, specifically television. Musical terms, such as dissonance and consonance, are the perfect analogy for suspense in film. Suspense is not told in a specific manner, but rather conveyed through various cinematic techniques that build upon each other to evoke emotions, like a dissonant chord. An episode of Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot* will be used to examine possible patterns and combinations in film. The study has determined that there are many factors in narrative film thus it is difficult to find a "correct" way to build suspense, but nuance is key in what cinematic language should be used and layered to result in effective suspenseful sequences.

The Dissonant Build of Suspense in Television

Filmmakers, directors, writers, and more have theorized the reasons as to why people engage in entertainment. However it is viewed, it generally always boils down to the same idea: we watch to feel. We watch shows and movies to be immersed in an experience. Through this stimulus, we expect to experience specific emotions. A properly conveyed story can be enough to draw out emotions, but in audiovisual media, the camera work, audio, and other cinematic techniques speak a language of their own. This paper will be arguing that combinations of cinematic techniques can elicit different feelings in the viewers, specifically suspense.

Genre, Suspense, and Emotion. A study conducted in 2020 looked into the differential effects of a film's genre on the viewers' absorption, identification, and overall enjoyment (Thompson et. al). They conducted two within-subject studies: an exploratory study and a replication, where participants viewed two film clips from two drastically different genres. Before and after each clip the participants were asked to answer questions about themselves, the clip they watched, and how they perceived it emotionally. The results revealed that genre did not have a huge influence on the viewers' absorption, identification, and or overall enjoyment, instead it was also observed that personal preference and feeling did influence those factors.

This study is relevant to the current study as the conclusion further stresses the results found in this study. Thompson et al (2020) claims that viewer engagement with narrative is not as simple as examining one or two factors, it should be seen as multidimensional. Many factors play into perception, feeling, and engagement from the viewer but that is something with no definite answer at this moment. It is possible that a study may get close to cracking the code, but

it is also likely that a definite answer will never be found given how complex, abstract, subjective, and individual engagement and perception is to the viewer.

In another study from 2020 conducted by Ralf Schmäzle and Clare Grall, the two used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and continuous response measurement (CRM) to look further into the collective brain dynamics of an audience watching a suspenseful film by studying the brain's reaction and processing of certain stimuli in film. The stimulus they used for this study was an episode from the show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* called “Band! You’re Dead” minimized down to 8 minutes from its normal run-time of 30 minutes. The results of this study found that there is consistency between the viewers’ brain activity in certain regions during more suspenseful scenes throughout the progression of the film. During suspenseful moments within the film, through the CRM brain activity was collectively found in the majority of participants in regions associated with emotional salience and higher cognitive processes.

Schmäzle and Gralls’ research is relevant to this study by showing consistency in the brains’ reaction to specific auditory and visual stimuli while watching a suspenseful film. Further research on how this data upholds the need for diverse genres, such as comedy or action. The study hypothesized that the results would be somewhat similar in the sense of the audience’s emotions syncing up assuming that the medium, film, is consistent in the presentation of both auditory and visual stimuli (Schmäzle & Gralls, 2020).

Nomikos and colleagues conducted a study in 1968 that sought to find what is more impactful in creating stress in a viewer— a jumpscare or a build of suspense. They tested this by showing participants one of two edited safety videos with three woodshop accidents occurring in each. One video was edited so it had a short period between threat level and impact of the first

two accidents and the third accident was left unchanged from the original video. The second video had longer clips and more foreshadowing for the first two accidents, and like the first video, the third accident was left unchanged from the original. Two major conclusions were found; long anticipation of stress (suspense) is more disturbing and engaging to a viewer than short anticipation (surprise) and that most of the stress reaction occurs during the anticipation period, which is likely what keeps a viewer engaged and on the edge of their seat. This is relevant as it gives insight into how we perceive stressful events and how building upon itself can draw the viewer further into suspense, pushing them further into feelings of unease.

Further into film and the individual, a 2011 article by Imanol Zumalde-Arregi seeks to find the origins of filmic emotions as a whole. This is a widely debated topic that is difficult to pin down due to the many factors of film. There are many theories as to how films elicit emotions, and we may never know a complete truth but rather a sequence of mostly accurate theories. To examine this, Zumalde-Arregi explored well-known theories behind the origins of filmic emotions and dug into the deeper meanings behind them, looking for commonalities between them all. Ultimately, despite many limiting factors, such as trying to confine something so broad and abstract into a neat concept, he compiled two main theories. The first is that elicited filmic emotions are based on a cultural approach. This takes into account demographic information of the viewers, such as age, race, gender, background, class, etc. The way we interact with the context of the world around us as individuals but also as members of various communities in society influences how we think and perceive the world around us, and that is essentially the root of this theory. The second theory is that film presents itself to be and what it directly or indirectly tells the viewers what to think and or how to feel, otherwise known as

cognitive theory and the semiotic approach. The study also revealed a third approach that is a middle ground between those two approaches. This not only takes into account the target viewers' demographics and background, but also how film is presented as a separate entity, detached from the audience. These theories provided valuable insight into possible reasons why different viewers can feel many different emotions based on the film they are watching and their demographic.

Visual Techniques. A 2020 study conducted by Erin T. Gannon and Michael A. Grubb examined the effects of shot length on participants' attention of a presented film. They did so by tracking eye movement of participants as they watched different films. Prior research contributed to their hypothesis that shots with shorter average lengths will cause participants' eye movements to be more synchronous and consistent than that of a long shot that may allow their eyes to wander and lose focus on the film. The results supported the hypothesis and contributed to many more factors in film than the shot length that influences a viewers' focus. This is not to say that a viewer will lose interest in a scene because the shot length is longer, but rather that general viewers are more likely to have their focus consistently controlled through shorter takes. This is relevant to the current study due to the use of both long and short takes.

Another study that featured eye tracking was conducted by Swenberg et al published in 2021. This one sought to find the emotional responses found in the viewer of a narrative film where a reflection of light is visible in an actor's eyes. It was ultimately found that their participants, the audience, were engaged with the film both implicitly (eye-tracking) and explicitly (survey) when eyelight was visible in the film. This revealed that visual aspects of film, including something as small as a reflection of light in the character's eyes, is enough to

sway the audience in one way or the other. It is also stated that the participants found they were able to connect with the characters emotionally when their faces were clearly seen with the eyelight than otherwise, implying that framing, angle, etc. are also relevant to the results found in the study.

In a 2006 study, Amy Coplan examined the role of emotional contagion in one's affective engagement with narrative fictional films. She states that there is a significant amount of research into viewers' emotional responses to narrative film, but they tend to focus on sophisticated emotional processes (imagination or cognitive evaluations) as opposed to more simple ones (such as reactions and emotional contagion). Emotional contagion is "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (Hatfield et al 1992). In other words, emotional contagion refers to the act of subconsciously picking up and "catching" emotions seen in one subject by the viewer of said subject, almost copying them. Coplan (2006) stressed that emotional contagion is an involuntary and automatic emotional response.

Coplan (2006) found that emotional contagion can help cue the viewer of an audiovisual medium into how they should feel about characters and their circumstances, but it should be noted that there are many other variables, such as empathy and identification, at play. In this current paper, the research into emotional contagion and its implications will be relevant when taking into consideration how the actors are being presented. Cinematically, this ties into framing, angle, duration, motion, and editing.

Audio techniques. In a 2007 study, Siu-Lan Tan and colleagues examined how music influences the perception of characters' emotions in film. Music is a key aspect of film that has been theorized to mold the viewers' perception of what is happening on-screen while also providing many other functions, such as guiding the story's progression. Character themes and motifs are created and included to help provide auditory context clues as to what is happening, who may be present, characters or situations that are being remembered, and so on. Music creates an extra degree of depth to film making it something worth studying.

Tan and colleagues (2007) conducted their experiment by having participants watch clips with manipulated variables and had viewers report their perception of how they felt the characters felt. They mixed and matched emotional music (happy, sad, angry, and fearful) with visuals featuring the same emotions. Tan et. al (2007) reference three bigger theories that state music has such a great influence on our perception of film due to it activating schemas (schemas being mental frameworks of how we perceive objects or subjects to exist in the world in relation to itself and others based off of experience), drawing attention in a specific, intentional way through temporal congruence, mood congruence, and or semantic congruence (congruence being psychological attributes and behavior that in this case divided into different categories) (Bolivar, Cohen, & Fentress, 1994, Boltz, 2001; Marshall & Cohen, 1988). Ultimately it was found that the results supported the hypothesis.

A second point studied in Tan et al's experiment claims there is huge impact of musical foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is a literary device in which there is a subtle warning or indication of a future event, and this can be used for both good and bad things that may occur in the future. The study found that musical foreshadowing is just as influential as musical cues

taking place during the emotional event. However, this did not translate as strongly when emotional music was played after the emotional scene. It was also shown that even when attention was drawn away from the music, as long as it was playing, it had some type of influence on the audiences' perception of the film. How viewers interpret the emotion of film characters with the influence of music, along with how viewers interpret the film in general with music, is relevant to this study because of the unconscious understanding of how music can sway the audience.

Another sound study is from 1994 where Claudia Bullerjahn and Markus Guldenring examined how music influences a viewer's perception of the relationships between characters, the viewers' recall of a scene, and the outcome of a scene. This was conducted empirically with over 400 participants, one short experimental film, and five different soundtracks in varying styles. The results of this study showed that music greatly influenced the emotional atmosphere and understanding of the plot of the film presented.

This study is relevant due to the focus on film music and perception of the plot. The majority of films will feature some type of music and or calculated sound design, and if it has been shown that sound and music can influence the perception of emotions, it is likely it can also alter perception and understanding of the plot. Also, despite being a study centered in sound, shot duration, camera viewpoint, and scene description is also discussed through their methods. The cinematic aspects of their stimuli were not important in the analysis of this study, but it is still helpful as a reference as most studies will not account for the cinematic language actually used.

Present Study. All the research mentioned in the above section supports that different aspects of audiovisual media, television specifically in this context, can influence the viewer in

different ways. This plays into how the viewer is affected emotionally depending on the context surrounding the video they are watching and how it is being presented to them. To put it into film terminology: relevant aspects of this include, but are not limited to, cinematography, specifically framing, angle, and movement, in addition to sound, specifically music, soundscape, and space.

This current study seeks to find if there are commonalities between combinations of cinematic techniques that will lead to the creation and perception of suspense in film. It is expected that there will be some techniques that when paired with others will be more effective in building suspense and that the layering of those techniques and new ones will provide a build to that suspense. But while accounting for the complexities of film, it is not expected to find a definite answer as to what would be the most effective combination of techniques to elicit any specific feelings in the viewer of a film.

Method

Being an audio/visual medium, there are multiple aspects of film to be considered in a research setting. First, there is narrative film in itself, what it is, and the significance. Then there are the visual aspects, such as setting, movement, distance, framing, lighting, and so on. There are also auditory features such as rhythm and space. And finally, there is editing. All of these qualities can be picked apart and analyzed in their own right, and when they are put all together they create a whole film. This section will define filmic terms and techniques according to David Bordwell, Kristen Thompson, and Jeff Smith's *Film Art: An Introduction (Eleventh Edition)*.

Narrative film. Narrative film is a motion picture that tells a type of story, be it fictionalized, about an event, or simply a narrative. These stories are most found in theatres and

television and tend to be the most common type of story presented when studying film in a psychological way. The context of the research is typically what influences what narrative is being shown and because film is so complex, simple narrative stories tend to be easier to follow and examine then, say, an experimental film. Also, while using narrative film, many studies use the opinions of professional critics to determine a film's success which in turn will help researchers determine if a scene is worth studying. All in all, most research applied to narrative film can also be applied to cinematic television.

Mise-en-Scene. Mise-en-Scene is a film technique that is most recognized by a viewer. As opposed to specific cinematic techniques such as framing and camera work, this is where the setting, lighting, costumes and makeup, and staging and performance come into play (113). These techniques provided an ambiance of the film in question. In this study's case, the important factors of mise-en-scene to consider are setting, lighting, and staging. The setting is the location of the film and will help indicate the context and create narrative expectations. It is also typically the first thing a viewer will see in a film. With this, a closed-in space can make the characters and viewers feel a bit claustrophobic while an open field can make them feel free. The context can also change these perceptions as that claustrophobic room can be seen as a comfort and someone can be running from an axe murderer in that open field, context is key.

Lighting can serve a similar purpose to setting in cueing the viewer into what to pay attention to and the context of the scene. It can also be used to highlight certain aspects of something while obscuring others (i.e., people or props). Often, quality lighting will be used to make a subject look good while bad lighting can make the subject look out of place, which again, in the right context, can give insight into how to feel about certain situations. The color of the

lighting (along with color in general) can subconsciously influence the viewer as well (125-131). There are innate perceptions of the meanings behind colors, such as red representing excitement, passion, and or intensity, blue as calm, trusting, and or reliable, and so on. This can in turn influence the perception of the subject being presented.

While make-up/costumes and staging/performance are the least important aspects of mise-en-scene in this context they are still worth discussing. Makeup and costumes will cue the viewer into the character, their being, their status, who they are and how they present themselves, and so on. Performance can also tie into this, it will show emotion. Body language can convey thoughts and relations to others and how they carry themselves also shows a bit about a character; And the placement of the actors can show dynamics between characters, who is stronger, what has the advantage, etc. These subtle details can show us so much about characters and their situations (131-140).

Camerawork. There are four key aspects of camerawork that this paper will explore: framing, angle, motion, and length. Framing is one of the most important and powerful cinematic techniques. There are multiple ways to frame a shot in film and there are multiple tricks one can utilize with smart framing. A rule of thumb is that framing is defined by how close the camera is to a person or subject: a shot where the frame is filled by the subject's face in a close-up, even closer into a specific aspect of the face or any object would be an extreme close-up. A step back becomes a medium close-up, showing the subject from shoulders up, and another step back would be a medium shot where half of the body is shown. The further back the camera moves the shots become known as full-body, long, or wide depending on the distance. These all present the entire body at differing distances. And finally, there are establishing shots, where it generally

establishes the setting with little focus on a human or object as a subject (177-178). Another rule of thumb is: the closer a shot is, the more intimate it is. An extreme close-up is going to be a lot more personal than an emotionally distant or detached wide shot (189). This is only considered when there is one subject but not much changes when one or more are added aside from the depth of the shot (148).

Angles play a more subtle but equally important role in film. Angles can imply power in the subject. A high angle looking down can make the subject appear powerless, while a low angle looking up can display superiority. These angles can also just be used to show more of a shot and or hide information from the viewers along with playing with perception and height. A leveled angle is one of the most common and basic shots where it is level with the subject, and a dutch or canted angle is tilted which can make the viewer feel uneasy. All angles, under the right context, can imply something about the subject, keying the viewer into another unspoken aspect of the film they are watching (188).

The camera guides our eyes through film and this is where motion comes into play. There are multiple different ways that motion can be present in film, to name a few there are pans, tilts, zooms, tracking, focus, and stability. All of these forms can imply something different to the viewer. Pans scan the space horizontally, can be used to show something out of frame, while tilts do the same vertically (194). Zooms, as the name implies, moves in or out on a subject which can intensify or lessen any type of situation being shown (198). Tracking, or dolly shots, are where the camera physically moves to the side where crane shots physically move the camera vertically (195). Stability is essentially how stable a shot is. This is influenced by how the scene is shot, be it handheld, on a tripod, and/or the use of other stabilizing devices, and the still

stability or lack thereof can both build suspense or other feelings in the right context. The distance, angle, and movement can also indicate that what we are watching is a character's point of view (POV) shot, putting us directly in their heads through this framing (197).

Finally, there is the length of a shot. There are no rules to how long or short a shot should be, but the time spent on a shot can influence how it is perceived. A longer shot can be seen as more intimate but can become boring, and shorter ones can be intense but also forgettable, it depends on the context. Adding movement into this equation adds a whole other dimension to this by stressing the possible intensity of the shots in question (203).

Sound. Sound is a highly complex technique with several and multiple aspects. However, rhythm and space will be majorly explored. Sound has become a very important aspect of film, be it through music, verbal communication, sound effects, or general ambient sounds that one would hear in the location of the film. It can add a lot to the atmosphere that visuals cannot express.

Rhythm is most commonly known and acknowledged in music, but it also plays a big part in a film's pacing, both in using music and in general sounds. Humans are naturally drawn to patterns so a discernible rhythm in a scene can draw the attention of a viewer. Humans are also good at picking up changes in rhythm which can stress if there is a change occurring and if it is a bad one to worry about or one to relax at. Rhythm can also play along with editing where shots can be cut on certain beats, or it just helps to keep the continuity of shots in order. Also, once filmmakers understand how to utilize rhythm in their work, they are able to break it to subvert the expectations of the viewers or reset a scene (281-284).

Space refers to the source of a sound. All sounds in film can fall into one of two categories: diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic sounds are those that are present in the universe—someone screams so they are heard or they run so footsteps are heard. Non-diegetic is any sound where the source is occurring off-screen, such as background music or someone yelling from off-screen. Because there is typically a variety of sounds playing at once creating a soundscape there is generally a mix of diegetic and non-diegetic throughout a scene, and something that is diegetic in one shot can continue playing in the next shot without being seen making it non-diegetic and vice versa. This can be utilized to establish continuity, progress the story, create expectations or break them, and more (285-296).

Editing. A final important aspect of film is editing and general post-production. This is the metaphorical glue that ties films together by literally stitching the production together and the way something is edited can influence the flow and perception of a film or a scene. That said, a lot of eventual editing will be planned before filming even begins. This is where everything discussed previously comes together to create the final diverse product. How a scene is spliced together can create feelings of comfort and ease or, alternatively, build up tension and create stress for the viewer (218-219). Editing has the final say in film. At this point in production, it is likely that everything will be recorded, both audio and visual, so now it is up to the editors to make it coherent. In doing so, if they want something to flow they will make sure cuts are seamless, motions are in sync, what is being shown would make sense and not cause the viewer to think about it. Alternatively, if the scene should be jarring jump cuts and or quick cuts can be used to momentarily make the viewer reflect on what is happening. It is more than likely that

different combinations of edits and cuts will be used when appropriate for different scenarios in a film.

Analysis, Results, and Discussion

Analysis. This section will be discussing key suspenseful factors in a 7-minute scene from Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot* season 4 episode 5, "405 Method Not Found." As per what is discussed in the method second, this will be broken up into simplified scene analysis sections featuring the narrative, camera distance/angle/movement, image, and sound, and psychological/filmic notes will be brought up as necessary.*

To start with the basic narrative of the scene, the audience initially has no idea what is going on. In doing so, the scene has the choice to reveal and withhold information as it sees fit, thus immediately influencing the viewers' perception of what is going on and creating an atmosphere of suspense. It starts with Darlene (Carly Chaikin) going into a building and distracting the guard as Elliot (Rami Malek) runs in, and the audience is keyed into there being a new time limit. Cluing the audience into the importance of time here and the need to finish things quickly is a second step of building suspense in the narrative. The audience is also introduced to a security guard and his green water bottle that, along with the pressure of time, are the main antagonists of this scene and episode. As the scene continues, the audience realizes this is where main characters Elliot and Darlene sneak into Virtual Reality, the place that hosts the servers they want to hack, and the first step is getting through security and turning off the cameras. To add an extra layer of exposition, the security guard is watching John McTiernan's *Die Hard* (1988)

which has many thematic and story parallels to the episode, thus creating nuance. All of this sets the stage for what the audience should be anticipating for the rest of the scene.

Next will be the camera distance, angle, and movement. As most action sequences, the analyzed section is full of different shots with varying distances, angles, framing, and movement. Essentially all basic shot distances are utilized, some of which in conjunction with the camera movement. Medium to long shots are used most during the beginning of the scene, and as the scene progresses it moves more into medium close to extreme close-ups. During sequences with further distances, extreme close-ups are used to stress subtle, but important details. The opposite can be said during the closer sequences where wider framing is used to isolate the subject or stress the gravity of the situation. This section tends to have more motion in the shots as opposed to staying stationary. This technique is constantly being used to conceal or reveal information, such as what the characters are looking at or imminent threats. This movement is also used to track characters and stick on them for longer than one may expect, forcing the audience to sit with them in the current situation. This can build a feeling of awkwardness and anticipation for what is going to happen next. Along with this movement, it tends to stay at eye level with the characters, pushing it into a point of view shot further putting the viewer into the position of the characters. There is also a lot of use of the extreme close-up when necessary to convey important objects even when the audience does not know it is important yet. As for framing, characters and objects tend to fall out of the center and many times will prominently be more to the sides of the screen forcing distance between characters (Darlene and the security guard in this case) despite physically being close. In doing so, the created distance and slight feelings of isolation further push discomfort and suspense in the scene.

To go along with the camera work, there is also the image itself. A good portion of the analyzed scene is presented at the entrance of the office building. The colors are predominantly cool greys and natural tones from a muted palette giving it a colder, more detached feel. Also, considering how it is an office building, it presents itself as a very formal, cold atmosphere that contrasts to the more informally dressed and disheveled characters. Darlene is dressed to fit the part of a businesswoman in a grey coat and business attire that matches the formality of the security guard's suit. In contrast, Elliot is dressed in his normal black-on-black shoes, pants, hoodie ensemble that causes him to stand out in the setting. Once Elliot sneaks in, the audience is greeted to a bright orange stairwell and eventually long bright blue hallways before returning Elliot to a space where it seems he belongs: a dark, cool-lit basement. These pops of color are jarring and at the peak of a suspenseful moment, further adding to the stress.

The sound here is very interesting given the complexity of the sound design. To divide it simply, there is diegetic and non-diegetic noise present. Diegetic refers to sound present in the scene while non-diegetic (also known as extra-diegetic) is sound off-screen or outside of the universe of the subjects. The diegetic sound stays true to what is being shown—a character is running so we hear footsteps, a door slams so we hear it shut, a card is declined so we hear an error, and so on. Where the sound diverges from the expected is in the non-diegetic. There is music present that begins at what can be considered the beginning of the protagonist's impending time limit. The music is somewhat simple and electronic featuring rhythmic basses layering on top of each other, but as the scene's intensity increases, so does the music by adding more and more elements until eventually, a choir comes in at the climax. Even more subtly, there would be quick rises and falls that feel like fake-outs, making one anticipate something but nothing

happens. One final interesting aspect of the soundscape is the addition of heavy breathing. This is featured when Elliot is running down the stairs and through the hallway. This betrays what is being shown on screen as Elliot is not seen breathing heavily. There are two things to be noted about this, the first being that given the intensity of the scene at this point, one may not even notice that the non-diegetic breath does not sync up to anything. The second is that, as humans, we naturally tune into the sound of human voices, but again given the intensity of the scene we may not consciously recognize that the breath is there. In doing so, this would create a subtle yet effective way of conveying a mood and the intensity of the scene. Therefore, a viewer may begin to feel the extra stress due to this additional human voice but will have no explanation as to why, causing even more stress and adding to the suspense and anticipation.

If a filmmaker is going to create a suspenseful work of audio/visual media, it is likely that they will want each aspect of their work to be impactful to the audience. This work achieves that as there was a lot of care and work was put into sound, visual, and post-production; but arguably these aspects will not be as effective on their own. With all of these individual techniques combined together, it creates something more suspenseful as a whole. Not only does it combine different techniques, but it also does so strategically. In this specific scene, it starts slow, the suspense builds from a lack of knowledge, the use of long tracking shots, real-time point of view shots, getting close to the characters to gain some inkling of what they may be thinking or feeling, and so on. The beginning of the scene also keeps it relatively simple with these choices and with the somewhat simplistic choice of music that eventually builds and resolves throughout. It's a fast sequence, but it all takes time to reveal what is important to the scene. And as the scene progresses it adds more and more layers upon all aspects, the music gets more intense, the shots

become more focused and snappy, the pressure of time swells until ultimately all the tension is released once the siblings make it inside and the cameras are shut down which in turn creates a new ticking clock for them to race.

*Note that these are just a few examples of the choices made in this seven-minute section, see the Appendix for full data.

Results. As seen through the analysis, there are technically combinations of filmic techniques that help contribute to the building of suspense within the context of the examined scene and possibly all narrative films, but there is not likely a set way to go about putting it together. There are more simple overarching techniques such as picking up the pace in post-production, for example, starting with longer takes and subtle cuts and moving to shorter, quicker shots and more abrupt cuts as the scene progresses. Or, alternatively, having music that starts relatively calm and or simple and having the tempo and complexity increase as the scene progresses. Another level of those simple suggestions would be combining the two. This works especially in a slow build that utilizes these techniques in waves. In doing so, the scene builds and releases suspense multiple times while subtly yet gradually increasing the intensity with each wave. And there are more complex ways of putting the scene together, such as accounting for the nuances of framing, distance, movement, time, what in the scene is being revealed in what way, and so on. Therefore, combining techniques make for effective suspenseful moments, but it does depend on the context and how often certain techniques are being used.

Discussion. Granted the analyzed scenes are from an episode regarded as effectively suspenseful, that does not mean copying it exactly will result in a film just as suspenseful. A filmmaker can follow Esmail's work to a T, mimicking the shots, lengths, movement, etc.

perfectly, but with a different overarching story, it will result in something completely different and likely less effective. This is where context is key, what is highlighted through visual and audio choices is due to what is important to the context of the story.

To express this in musical terms, the general exposition can be considered the root of a dissonant chord, it will theoretically work on its own, but in something like film it may not be conveyed as something truly suspenseful when nothing different is happening with the audio or visual. Adding auditory and visual aspects add to the chord itself and is what creates the dissonance. A simple visual aspect can contribute to the overall chord, but an added element in the sound can be like a flatted note, adding to that uneasiness. Too much of that will result in musical chaos that makes no sense (at least leading into it) while too little will result in something that is unsatisfying. There needs to be a balance between the notes and once that is achieved, chords can be played in succession, building and resolving as it sees fit, but there needs to be harmony otherwise it will not make sense, and this is where context and moderation is key.

As stated earlier, this moderation is used throughout the section analyzed. A standard was created in shot length, framing, color, sound, and many other aspects of film during the section. The viewer gains an understanding of what is normal at the moment and what to expect. This created the base of the note. Then changes that break expectations or layer those standards making them more complex add to the flavor of the chord making it more interesting; i.e. having a close-up, objective shot during a more distanced subjective sequence or vice versa. It subverts expectations and adds suspense. This could be done multiple ways through multiple different combinations of techniques. What now matters is the context of what is being presented. If it

does not make sense to cut to a close-up of a random water bottle during a long sequence then the series of shots will at best be confusing and at worst take the viewer out of the scene. But, in the context of the sequence analyzed, the water bottle is connected to the perceived antagonist so it creates a sense of dread in the viewer. The first example of the water bottle is like throwing random notes into a chord, chaos with no deeper meaning, but the second is properly creating that chord and leaving room for future notes and chords to build upon itself.

Limitations. There were a handful of limitations that occurred throughout this project. A big one is that all the data is based on one opinion. Given a section of film and a vocabulary of standard film terminology, anyone can break down a scene into physical action, camera movement, framing, image, sound, etc. and have their findings be consistent with others analyzing the same clip. The limiting factor here falls in the interpreted psychological implications and reactions of the broken-down aspects of the scene. Many factors shape how we perceive different aspects of life and film, and that alone can completely shift the tone one views a scene to hold. There is a chance that perception may vary based on variables such as gender identity, sexuality, race, age, class, etc, which should be considered if this were made into an empirical study.

Another limiting factor is the choice of show and scenes in question. As of writing, the episode “405 Method Not Allowed” has 11,000+ reviews on IMDB and a rating of 9.7 out of 10. It is a very well-regarded episode which contributes to why it was chosen, but this was the only subject examined in detail: one work by one modern director with no cross-examination. Many film studies will tend to focus on a single scene or multiple scenes from one work, and that

works within the context of those studies, but given that this is an examination of cinematic techniques it would be valuable to see what remains consistent throughout different works.

Future research. This study leaves a lot of room for future research. This is primarily due to the nature of the project, being a theoretical paper featuring a case study in the form of a scene analysis, but also because of the implications it would have for film and the psychology of film. From what this project has gathered, I do not think the results of an empirical study would yield much differences aside from confirming or denying what makes specific scenes suspenseful (or any other complex feeling), but again, that does not mean it is not worth looking into. In future research, it would also be interesting to consider the many variables relating to the viewers such as their demographics and backgrounds which likely shape the way they would perceive different audio/visual works.

Conclusion. Ultimately, the results for this paper are somewhat inconclusive. There were many commonalities between different techniques being used in conjunction with each other to add layers upon layers of suspense, but it is impossible or even undesirable to find a formula in cinematic techniques that defines this. Despite this, it can be claimed that context and moderation are key in creating and sustaining impactful suspenseful/resolution scenes, and it is possible that this holds true for many types of emotion-evoking scenes in audio/visual media.

A final aspect to consider is that if the question of how suspense is made impactful in film were simple enough that an undergraduate psychology student could figure it out and clearly explain it in a theoretical case study, it would already be common knowledge. Cinema is an ever-evolving medium and if there were textbook ways to convey something that is meant to be a complex feeling, all film would end up being boring and formulaic. There are known techniques

that when pieced together in specific sequences can produce intended emotional effects, but there are so many factors of filmmaking that come into play that can change the outcome of the mood of the scene. That said, despite this being something that may be too complex to ever pin down, it is still worth studying to gain a deeper understanding of our own perception of film and how film can manipulate and influence us.

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Appendix

Sample of data collected from the analyzed scene, only from 8:21 to 12:03.

Key: E is Elliot, D is Darleen, and GD is the Security Guard.

Action	Camera distance/angle/movement	Image	Sound	Notes
Dar opening car door, walking to building, stands outside	Leg level, med shot to a high wide shot, to a high medium close up, crane tracking	D's boots as she walks out the car, reveals her body and keeps moving up, follows her back, overhead of her looking forward	Car door opening and closing, car horns, footsteps on pavement , sirens, car alarms, talking, cars passing by, honking, ambient noises	Scene starts a bit ominous, you don't know exactly what's happening, camera is looming over D
Inside of building with security	Brief stationary moment, stable wide pan right , D's POV	Entrance to the gym next to entrance to the stairs, wall with plants obscuring this view a bit, pan goes over entrance to building and reveals security guards under Virtual realty sign	Truck passing by, honking, clunky streetwork sounds (?), more ambient noises	Establishing the setting of the entrance, the challenge
D looks down	Close up, stable, slightly lower angle	D's face looking forward, building in the background, d looks down	Ambient noises	Slightly lower angle can read as D rising up to the challenge
Phone changes to 11:00	close up (or ecu) of phone, stable, high angle	Samsung phone taking up majority of shot, background and D's finger blurred, phone reads 10:59 am December 25, 2015, changes to 11:00 am, shot seems to be stable but D's hands aren't	ambient sound, "suspenseful music" begins playing once phone hits 11:00, it's subtly electronic, starts with bass	if this is supposed to be D's POV it breaks the line, would the beginning of the scene or this be the first level of building suspense
D looks up	Same shot as 4 (does this count as a shot reverse shot?)	D looks up	music cont	looks forward with determination
Security changes	Wide pan left tracking guard leaving, it slows to a stop when he gets to gate	One guard gets up and walks through gates, nodding to coworker, gate opens	music cont., as Guard gets up another instrument/ layer of music is added, like a metronome, as guard goes through	Music begins to pick up, change is being shown, the audience can read this as whatever is happening was meticulously researched and planned by the protagonists

			gate there's a minor swell in music and a beep indicating his card swiped	
D nods walks in, elliot watches from car, puts on gloves	Med shot with a lot of head room on D, zoom out/pan right to CU of E, tilts down	D through a muddy lense looks at camera, nods, walks into building, pan reveals E watching from car and putting on gloves	more bass beats join music as the focus moved to E, ambient outside sounds, sounds of rubber gloves being put on	Bigger things are at play, D looks a little concerned but that may just be her face, E putting on gloves, this can be read as things getting serious, he's about to spring into action
Guard Dolph (GD) drinks from water bottle	CU on water bottle, tilts up, out, and a little to the right to reveal GD in med sho	Green water bottle with gym symbol and tape saying "Dolph Lawle..." is grabbed, GD is sitting and surrounded by computers and a tiny video player	music cont., door opening (off screen), water bottle sounds and gulps	water bottle is very defining for GD
Die hard	Static MCU on video player	Die Hard reveals protagonist in vents with a lighter, the video player is centered and the background is obscured/ out of focus	music cont., minor swell, sound of zippo being lit	Like foreshadow or an explanation of what is going to happen
GD looks up at D	Where 9 left off, centered med shot of GD	GD watching die hard surrounded by computers and what not, he looks up with just his eyes	music cont. door closing	there's a bit of tension as D walks passed and they acknowledge each other
D walking in	Wide pan on D, d centered, eye level , GD POV	D looking all business-y walks passed GD	music cont., shoes hitting floor	
Back to GD	Dolly pan on guard, MCU, slightly above eye level, D POV	Guard acknowledges D and looks back at movie, framed between computer and sign in background	music cont. door closing, water noises, footsteps cont.	
Back to D walking	Continuation of 12, full shot (with head room)	D walking to gates, gym obscured in background along with doors, paintings, wall with plants, foreground had computers	music cont. and footsteps cont., super tiny swell as D approaches scanner	Its from GD POV but he's not looking
D scans card, gets denied	Stable CU, off centered with focus to the left	See D scan the card and it gets denied, pulls card away, the scanner goes from green to red in that moment, D almost blends into the grey scenery	another tiny swell as D scans card, denied beep	builds suspense

E gets out of car, walks to building, smokes	Overhead of E, crane down to eye level med then MCU profile	Overhead of gray car on right, E walks across the street as camera pulls down, as he makes it to the sidewalk he pulls out a cigarette (camera about eye level), walks up to and leans against bricks of building next to garage door (head on), lights cigarette (side profile, building on left, sidewalk on right)	Car door opening and closing, footsteps on pavement, music removes some base elements after a swell of higher instruments, sounds like sighs in the music, ambient outside noises again, sound of lighter and cigarette burning	
D scans card, denied again	continuation of 15, CU on card, pan to MCU/CU of D's face	D tries scanning card again, same as last time, but camera pans up when denied reveal D's face looking back while facing forward	music cont., hitting card on thing and denied beep, and small clashy sounds	trying to scan over and over again catches GD's attention which plus the repeated beeping can increase suspense
GD looks up at D	Stable med of GD	Guard drinking water, green bottle is only pop of color, framed between back sign and monitor	Music cont., error beeps, water sounds	
D tries one more time, sighs, turns around, smiles, walks to GD	Cont. of 17, MCU D's side profile	D slightly left of center faces forward in profile, sighs, the pivots and smiles as GD while walking to his desk	Music gets quiet cutting out most aspects, final error beep, D sighs	Very deliberate with actions
GD puts water down and moves to interact	Cont. of 18, stable med of GD	GD puts down water bottle, same image as last time	Music cont. and footsteps, water bottle placed down	
E turns	Centered slightly low angle medium shot E	E centered takes a step and turns to face the window (opposite profile of previous shot of E)	Minimal beats to music now, outside ambient sounds	While D and GD are having a friendly interaction, E watches from outside, a looming presence
Through window E watches D talk to GD	Stable E POV wide, eye level,, OTS for D and GD	E's reflection in foreground (along with the bricks he's next to, all slightly right of center) and slightly obscuring D, GD and D midground interacting centered, D surrounded by walls on all sides	Minimal beats cont, outside ambience	very interesting shot

E	Cont. 21, slight movement to keep E centered	E centered takes a minuscule step forward closer to the window (opposite profile of previous shot of E) very similar to 21	Minimal beats and outside ambience cont.	
Through window E and D make eye contact, E exhales smoke, starts moving	Cont. 22	E's reflection in foreground(along with the bricks he's next to, all slightly right of center) and slightly obscuring D, GD and D midground interacting centered, D surrounded by walls on all sides- at end of shot GD and D move to right side of frame and E top of head and reflection runs left of camera	Minimal beats and outside ambience cont, E exhales, music swells fast and rhythm picks up as E moves	Music picks up again increasing suspense
E enters building, pans through security cameras of E running, Die Hard, E running again, then D picking up bad	Wide (lots of head room), pan back, cu of screens as camera pans by them left to right (on level with monitors), pulls back to med of D	E runs in through the huge doors and quickly out of frame to the right, camera pulls backwards to reveal monitors showing an angle we haven't seen of the gates which E jumps over, as it pans to the right Die Hard is briefly show, then the water bottle, the final monitor showing E running into the stairwell, christmas tree to the right, sitting area bottom right (again a shot we haven't seen before), pulls out to reveal D standing up and adjusting bag	More treble-y music plays, door opens, E walking and the chime of metal bumping into metal (like keys), chorus and bass comes in once camera views monitors, as it moves music becomes more complex , as D gets up we hear her bag and footsteps	Interesting way of presenting an intense shot
GD standing	Stable med eye level, right of center	GD standing slightly right of center, surveillance video in background	music cont.	
Beat in scene	-	-	-	-
E running down stairs (orange)	Med tracking, high angle, descends	Running down orange stairwell, head out of frame, reaches bottom and runs through door	Music cont. gets more bass-y, doors opening and closing, footsteps going down the stairs and bag still making small	panting in this isn't coming from E, or we don't see him out of breath, but we hear it

			noises, minor panting	
E running through hallway from the front(blue)	tracking as E runs towards camera, starts wide, then full, then sustained med, stable	Match on action, runs into blue hallway from left almost chasing the camera, hallway is relatively narrow with piles all throughout the ceiling	Footsteps and music cont., panting	
E running through hallway from the back (blue)	Wide tracking shot	Running through same blue hallway, there are other hallways to the side but E runs straight	Footsteps and music cont., panting	it feels like he's being chased and we know E's pressed for time here
E running through hallway from the front(blue) but closer	Cont. 29, MCU, tracking	Still running in blue hallway, closer to E who takes up about a third of the screen, blue consumes the rest	Footsteps and music cont., panting	
E running through hallway from the back (blue) same shot, sits down pulls out laptop	Cont. 30, wide tracking, slows to a near stop and a full shot, eye level	E stops running and sits against the wall, profile to camera, doors at end of hallway, goes from wide to full	music cont., shoes hitting floor	
Typing	ECU of hands, high angle	Hands typing on computer	typing sounds, music cont.	This whole hacking section is very quick
Kali Linux	Computer screen	Kali log in, then desktop, then a program opens	music cont, typing and mouse clicks, music takes on slightly more electronic vibe	
Decrypt, enter key	Zoomed computer screen	Mouse moves around program, clicks decrypt, prompted to enter key of 00 00 00 00 etc	music cont, typing and mouse clicks	screen capture?
E sitting typing	Full(?) stationary, eye level but E consuming lost of right side of screen	Continuation of E sitting against the wall, slightly closer, exit sign seen in background and room labeled "SECURITY" is somewhat legible in background	music cont, typing and mouse clicks	
Close up drop down menu	Zoomed computer screen	Mouse interacting with drop down menu, selecting door lock...	Music cont, mouse clicks	

full screen	Computer screen	Two programs opened on top of each other, it's what was just shown but the entire screen	music cont	
Hands moving on mouse pad	ECU of hands, high angle	Hands (black gloves) moving on mouse pad obscured by other hand on keyboard	music cont	
"send"	Zoomed computer screen	Mouse moves to hit "SEND", loads for a second	Music cont., mouse click	
Keypad unlocks	CU on door handle and keypad	Keypad above door handle goes from glowing red to glowing green	Beeps and unlocking door, music slows	
E walks through door	Med eye level, stable pan tracking E (med), pushes forward to center E (med/full)	Door opens out, E slides in and lets it close behind, color tone completely shifts from previous bright cold tones to dark warm, walks through festively decorated office, E stops centered in cold/ bright light from computers and various warm lights leaving a slight silhouette effect	Door opening and closing, music slowly removes aspects until it's just a straight baseline, one E makes it center music completely shifts to "ominous music"	He finally made it where he needs to be, it feels like a safe zone due to contrast, but then if you were to keep going the suspense builds again