

Christopher Nolan is a worldwide director whose action packed films have kept people guessing for many years. Dark lighting and music to add dramatic effect are all part of Nolan's directorial style. I have decided to view two of his films, *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Inception* (2010). Each film includes dramatic lighting and suspenseful music which clearly display Nolan's style.

Nolan uses specific lighting as part of his directorial style. In both *Inception* and *The Dark Knight* he uses certain lighting techniques. In each film the audiences understanding of the situation of the scene in the film is enhanced by lighting, specifically the suspense and drama is built up for the audience.

In the same bank robbery scene of *The Dark Knight* Nolan uses lighting in a way to show the audience who the Joker is and build up the suspense. As the Joker's accomplices break into the safe the lighting is very dark with a green tinge across it. This dark lighting builds up dramatic effect to the audience as it is not very bright like it is in the bank it is dark and looks like it is in a room below the ground as there are no windows. This builds up suspense as the audience can tell by the lighting that it a place where no one goes and is very secretive and private and they are trying to break into it. When the Joker reveals himself Nolan adds a green lighting effect that signals his lack of humanity to the audience. The first time we see his actual face it is dark and greenish amongst his greasy hair and terrible clown makeup. **The lighting in this scene also helps the audience understand the intensity of the situation,** (1) obviously robbing a bank is high intensity but the low lighting effects adds to the dark and "thriller" type feel amongst the scene. This low lighting style is used all throughout the whole film as the story continues, Nolan keeps the lighting low and dark to add effect to the seriousness and danger of what is happening. Even in daytime scenes it is not fully bright and sunny he uses a dark tinge across the scenes to build up the suspense and seriousness of what is to come.

Nolan also uses these techniques in *Inception* to once again show the intensity or seriousness of a situation by keeping the lighting low and with dark screen tinges. In the zero gravity fight scene Arthur begins in a hotel room watching over his colleagues while they are in a dream. The room is extremely dark even though it is set out in the daytime. It has the effect of curtains being closed and a low light switched on. **Once again Nolan uses this dark hotel room as a secret private room where business is being done just like in *The Dark Knight* in the vault** (2). The low lighting in the room may appear to be while everyone sleeps but it also lets the audience understand the seriousness of this situation. As Arthur steps outside to the hallway it only has lights on the wall showing, Nolan uses these so that any shadows are able to be seen and this is exactly what happens. Arthur begins to be followed/chased by a enemy and Nolan uses the low lighting for the shadows to build suspense to the audience as it is very mysterious who the shadow is. When Arthur and the enemy are fighting in another hotel room, the lighting is once again dark and low, this time only the lamp shades are on which once again creates the shadow effect. When Arthur kills the enemy the lighting goes even darker to emphasis the danger and seriousness of the situation. Nolan creates a dark and scary setting with the use of low lighting and shadow effects.

Music plays a huge part of Nolan's directorial style, he uses specific instruments and beats to build up suspense for the audience. In both *The Dark Knight* and *Inception* Nolan uses high pitched violins to add dramatic effect to the specific scene. This is so the audience can feel scared for the characters and worried as to what is to come.

In *The Dark Knight* the opening scene has the Joker's accomplices breaking into a bank and holding everyone inside hostage. The music starts off with a low drum beat with a sharp synth that builds up as there is a zoom into the skyscraper, then as the window smashes a hollow drum starts to beat. Nolan uses each new instrument to build the story as it goes, he builds up the orchestra as the story builds. By doing this the audience is engaged as they know by the suspense being built up that something is going to happen. Nolan uses a lot of string instruments for high pitched noises in intense action scenes and a lot of low drum beats that build suspense as they sound like heart beats so therefore it makes the audience feel as if their heart is racing as to wondering what will happen next. He then cuts all the music so it is silent and makes the audience sit there and wait for something to happen but nothing ever does, it just begins to build up again. This effect on the audience has them drawn right in and absorbs them into the film as they focus on what is to happen (3).

Nolan also uses these techniques in *Inception* where the fight in the hallway in zero gravity begins. It starts off with a low steady drum beat as he is walking out of the hotel room. As he walks towards the elevator a faster drum beat starts and this builds up some suspension as to what will happen next, we then see someone else walk out of the elevator and this is when a high pitched violin starts. The sound is loud and screechy and uncomfortable for the audience to hear. The drum beat once again sounds like a heartbeat and Nolan uses this so the audience can feel as if their heart beat is beating as well and as it gets faster therefore expecting something bad is about to happen. As the enemy approaches the music stops again just like in *The Dark Knight*. Nolan does this so that the audience is anticipating what will happen next and is waiting for something bad to happen. As the fight starts there is a loud trumpet playing against the low drum beats. Nolan uses these high pitched and low beat instruments together to create a high intensity beat to follow the fight through, it makes the fight seem so much more intense and frightening because it's been so built up with the stopping and starting of music that he makes you really think about who will win.

Overall Nolan uses a wide range of instruments to create suspense building music to hype up and play on the audience's minds. He also uses a lot of building up then stopping and so on so that when something finally happens it is unexpected and that is exactly how he wants his films to be to the audience.

Nolan's mixture of high intensity music and dark lighting play on the audiences mind so they do not expect what happens next. This is how he creates such blockbuster films and has his own directorial style.