

Memento – Never answer the phone

Alex Murray

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In this report, we will be analyzing some of the camera work, editing and lighting of a short scene from the movie *Memento*. The scene can be found on youtube[1].

Camera Work

Table 1 breaks down all of the shots.

Table 1: Camera Work

Time	Description
(1) 0:00-0:03	Close-Up shot of arm, slowly zooming in as he starts to peel away at his bandage.
(2) 0:03-0:06	Medium shot of his face, as he talks on the phone. The camera is also slowly zooming in.
(3) 0:06-0:10	Closer-Up shot of arm, again still zooming in as he continues peeling.
(4) 0:10-0:14	Medium/close shot of his face, he continues talking on the phone.
(5) 0:14-0:15	Macro shot of arm, he finally peels away the bandage but we don't get to see what's under it yet.
(6) 0:15-0:17	Close-Up shot of his face, he stops dead in his sentence as he looks at what is under the bandage.
(7) 0:17-0:19	Macro shot of what was under the bandage; it's some text tattoo'd on, saying "Never answer the phone"
(8) 0:19-0:29	Close-Up shot of his face as he asks, confused, "Who is this?" before the caller hangs up. The camera is focused on the center of his face and pans left and right when his head turns left or right.
(9) 0:29-0:33	Wide shot of the room with him sitting on his bed in the center.

Editing

I believe this scene was filmed using only three shots, and then chopped up during editing to make it more captivating. Shots (1), (3), (5) and (7) possibly all belong to a single, continuous shot, and the same is true for shots (2), (4), (6) and (8).

It's subtle, but the camera slowly zooms in during both arm and face shots, further contributing to the tension of the scene as the viewer wonders more and more what's under the bandage.

They switch away from shot (7) very fast, hiding what's under the bandage further still. Again, this is meant to build up tension until finally the text is revealed in shot (8).

Lighting

In the first two shots, the colours have a very high contrast. It seems like there's a bright light illuminating the arm from the back and a bright light is illuminating only one side of his face, leaving the other side dark.

This is because he's in a room with the lights off, and the only source of light is that sun shining through the glass doors that (probably?) lead to a balcony.

Sound

I didn't realise at first, but the volume of his voice has the same volume as the crinkling sound of the bandage. The sound of the bandage is very raw and close, as if a microphone is just millimeters away, even when the camera is focused on his face.

When he reads what's tattoo'd onto his arm, a weird distorted high pitched bell mixed with a deep synth fades in, to help emphasize the shock he is experiencing. Mixing high tones with low tones (and leaving out all mid tones) is a common technique in sound design to make the viewer feel uneasy, because it conveys mixed messages. We are biologically programmed to find comfort in low frequency sounds, whereas high frequency sounds are generally trigger alertness. Mixing the two makes us confused and uneasy.

References

- [1] *Memento Scene - Never answer the phone*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSgiVutQ2JQ>. accessed 2017-10-07. 2000.