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Filming Technique in *Double Indemnity*

and How It Assisted the Film

Film noir was a genre of film originated from the 1900s that contained elements such as a dark tone, narrative of crime thriller with voice over and flash backs, high contrast, black-and-white, antihero, and femme fatale - a beautiful yet duplicitous woman who seduces and traps the antihero. Arguably, film noir derived from German Expressionism - a film style after the world wars that reflected the society’s post-war disillusionment through dark and tilted techniques of expression. Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944) served as a great example of classical noir films that contained all the above elements. Among them, camera techniques played a huge role in which helped the film better convey the tension or sarcastic theatricality.

To start with the most basic yet potentially unrecognized, the shooting positions - from the shooting location to the camera backgrounds - were skillfully selected to help either implicitly reflect the background atmosphere or explicitly present a dramatic contrast. For example, in the opening scene of the movie, the camera was fixed and located at a crossroad in LA at night. As Walter drives his car closer towards the audience, the background turns even darker and faded out. In this scene, the audience understood the hint that something went wrong and saw something ominous imminent. Indeed, the audience soon had their assumption turn out to be true when Walter picked up a dictaphoneand started recording, admitting that he commited murder in the opening scene of the narration.

Shooting from different camera angles from different distances achieves the same goal as an assistance for the audience to better interpret the scene. For example, in the final scene, where Keyes lit a cigar for Walter, though Walter and Keyes still split the screen in half, Keyes was obviously in the dominant position as he appeared to be higher in position while Walter lay down at the corner in a weaker position. Such a contrast revealed the characters’ opposite situations without words: Walter was a desparate criminal who commited double murder and was waiting to be convicted, whereas Keyes was the acute detective who discovered the truth and became the game-winner.

This ending scene also involved techniques of contrast and lighting, which put an emphasizing shadow on Walter, marking the exchange of power between Walter and Keyes. Throughout the movie, Walter always appears taller than Keyes and not a single scene of them together was darker than the last one. In fact, whenever Walter was with Keyes throughout the movie, the lighting is always smooth, eliminating the shadows. This implied that Walter had higher power than Keyes as Walter thought he had everything in control. Knowing more than Keyes, Walter had always been hiding the truth from Keyes that he was the murderer However, when Walter was with Phyllis, the lighting was visibly darker, creating more shadow and higher contrast than with Keyes, especially at their wrongdoings. The lighting was extremely dark at the night when they committed murder of Mr. Dietrichson, as well as at Walter’s last visit to Phyllis’ house, when she tried to hide her handgun and kill him. Since both of these were killing scenes, darker lighting functioned as a perfect indicator of heavy mood and high tension.

Throughout Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), various camera techniques like position, angle, distance, lighting and shadow are implemented to vividly enhance the scenes’ readability by emphasizing the context, usually creating more tension. Although film noir no longer exists in modern society as the depressive post-war period has long passed, watching and studying film noir will always teach a lesson, unveiling the hidden dimensions of the old world that many people today might have never encountered before. In this movie, Walter managed to cover Phyllis and himself from a murder , but eventually failed. Justice may be late but never absent. In the end, everyone gets what they deserve.