

UNDERSTANDING FILM TECHNIQUE

Assessment Task 1

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FILM: SCARFACE

Scarface is a movie from 1932, directed by the famous *Howard Hawks*, and produced by the millionaire *Howard Hughes*, two of the biggest characters of Hollywood's golden age. It is considered a piece of art and one of the greatest films ever done by its crew, it also launched the career of the academy Award winning actor *Paul Muni* who gives life to the main character. It was very impactful and shocking for its time because of its violence and the amount of deaths and murders shown as part of the plot, It literally forced the industry to put censorship such as the Hays Code in the next movies filmed after the date of its release.

This Film is the pioneer of a new type of movies. It established and created a whole new different genre and theme in the industry of cinema: *The Gangster Movies*. Although it was influenced by a couple of previous movies such as "*The Musketeers of Pig Alley*" from 1912, "*Underworld*" from 1927, "*Little Caesar*" and "*Public Enemy*" both from 1931, The main influence were real life characters and events, and the actual economic and social situation of the time. *The 1929 Crash* and the *Great Depression* caused the market to collapse and there were no jobs for the middle and working class, who felt abandoned by the system they helped to construct; and "*The Prohibition Law*" lead to a huge criminal explosion and gangsters in big cities became celebrities. Out of all this Hollywood came out with a new "folk anti-hero". The Gangster represents an individual's struggle for power against the structure of society fighting the hard economic situation of the 30's and becoming rich and powerful, reaching the American dream. The idea, story, mood, tone...etc. that *Scarface* introduces to us, developed into a genre, and has inspired numerous movies throughout history.

Inspired in the life of Al Capone, The plot follows the story of "*Tony Camonte*" (*Scarface*) on his way to the top, from hitman to gang boss killing whoever gets in his way. Crude and bold, the action is fast and frequent. No care is given to the motive or reason behind Tony's lust for power; what's important is the control and domination of the social structure. The whole film shows the gangster's success not as result of intelligence, but from a very violent personality, criminal behavior and strong willingness to break with morality to get what he wants. *Scarface* achieves his goals of material goods and power by war and chaos, but by doing so he isolates himself from the world and ends up losing what really is important like love, friendship, family, and eventually his life.

Now that we know the context behind the story and the story itself, we can take a look at how the movie has been made. I will analyze a couple of scenes (scene "0"44"25", and scene "0"47"26") and see how by the use of Mise en Scene, cinematography, editing and other techniques the director has created his desired effect, contributing to the story, its significance and adding meaning, tone, vibe and emotion to the film.

Editing or cutting, or as Alfred Hitchcock liked to call "Assembly" is the way you put images one after the other in order to give more meaning to the story's emotion, more rhythm and helps the story move forward in a meaningful way.

Scene "0"44"25" is famous for the discussion between Tony Camonte (Scarface) and his Gang Boss, Johnny Lovo. During the scene they start an argument because Lovo's office has been attacked with machine guns, by another mob in reaction of Scarface acting against the orders of his boss, and now Lovo's arm is injured from the attack. The Editing at this point is very simple, because it cuts every time one character is speaking, until he stops or gets interrupted by the other character, in which case then cuts and shows a shot of the other character talking, and from time to time cuts into a longer shot of both characters talking. Its use is to give the two points of view in a conversation and help the audience get the whole situation. As the argument gets more intense, they speak faster so it cuts faster, building up suspense. Between the shots of each character there is a shot of the Machine gun Scarface is holding, giving a clue to what is to come next. Scarface wins the argument when he starts shooting at the wall with the new machine gun, the editing here is a bit different, they have used very short cuts of the wall being shot and then of Scarface shooting at it, just to go back to the wall being shot, and then back to Scarface. The short rapid cuts of each shot one after the other give a sense of fast action together of the loud noise of the machine gun (mise en scene) this provokes excitement on the audience and also sense of shock, as if something very important had happened. In fact it tells us that Scarface has won the ego fight against his Boss and that he is now more powerful, becoming the new boss of the gang. To finish the scene, it cuts to the next one with a cross fade, when Scarface and other members of the gang leave Lovo's office indicating that a different action is going to happen, in a different place and possibly a different time.

Cinematography, together with editing is the language that movies use to communicate, only that this time is through the use of the camera. The camera movements, the different angles, distance, focus... etc, it all has a specific reason to be, and it is to deliver a certain message to the audience. It contributes to the meaning of the scene and to its action and how the director wants the viewers to perceive that action.

Scene "0"44"25" opens up with a medium shot of a man looking outside from a window, then the man goes out of focus, and what's in focus is the door in the back of the room. This tells us that the action is going to happen next to the door. Straight after that, Scarface comes through that door with Poppy (Lovo's wife) and the shot becomes a track shot, moving right, following Scarface's direction, throughout the windows until he stops at a table. The camera then stays still, and starts zooming into the room where Scarface is checking his new machine gun. We can tell that by using cinematography the director is guiding our eyes to where the action is going to or is taking place. Johnny Lovo opens the door of the office on a medium shot and walks left to the other side of the table where Scarface is and the Argument starts. The Argument is full of shot reverse, using opposite directions with the same angle to have a shot of each character looking in the opposite way, (one looking right, and the other one left) citing to one or the other every time that character speaks, this technique is used to show the different points of view and perspectives of the two different characters, to introduce the audience in the discussion. All of a sudden, Lovo says a sentence that really gets Scarface Angry, Then we get a close up shot of Tony Camonte's face looking to his right (to Johnny Lovo) with the scar on his chin giving the crazy look. The close up tells the audience to give special attention to something in particular, in this case to Scarface's killer eyes, sending a violent message to Lovo, or later on showing us a close up of the machine gun telling us that Scarface doesn't have any problem in using it.

Lovo then moves around the table and stands in front of Scarface, (we see this through a pan shot that follows Lovo's movement). We get to a Back to shoulder shot from Lovo's back, seeing Scarface's head and torso. This is done to show the action that is about to happen from Lovo's point of view. Then the argument becomes more intense and Scarface starts talking louder and louder, confronting his boss and showing everyone in the room who has the power. The camera zooms in to Scarface, this makes him look bigger and bigger, while Lovo starts disappearing through the left hand side of the frame, giving the effect that Scarface's ego is winning over Lovo, until Lovo is not in the frame anymore and Scarface starts shooting the machine gun like a mad man. This is introducing the audience to the situation where Scarface has metaphorically "killed" his boss in front of the members of the gang, climbing up another step to power and control. After the shooting Scarface leaves the screen with the other men, leaving only Poppy on the frame who was behind him, and who then throws a gun (with good intentions) to Scarface. The camera makes a fast tilt/pan movement following the gun through the air up and down to the left, connecting to Scarface, who is already leaving through the door. This effect gives us a sense of movement, and its also a way to introduce us to the next sequence of fast events about to happen.

Mise en Scene is the original french term for "what's on scene", It refers to every element arranged in the shot that affects the viewers experience. What the audience can see and the way they are invited to see it. It goes from the setting, to the acting, the lightning, composition, color, music, sounds...etc. It establishes the theme and the mood and uses symbolisms to build up the action. Through the *Mise en scene* we are deeply introduced to whats going on in the movie; the clothing, suits and hats of the actors tell us that is based somewhere in the 1930's around a civic area. The characters gather around in some sort of secret setting, a low-light room that seems hidden from the authorities, and the fact that the main character holds a machine gun tells us that these characters are criminals. In fact the *mise en scene* here is not only telling us the theme, vibe and tone, but it is also revealing us the Genre. Its a gangster movie.

From the beginning of our scene "0"44"25" we can tell there has been an attack of some sort, The man guarding through the window, acting scared pulling out a gun when Someone gets in the room, the bullet holes in the glass of the window, the low light in the atmosphere to stay covered, it all gives a certain vibe of insecurity and shelter.

The acting and make up of course play a huge role in experiencing whats going on. Scarface is relaxed and sure of himself and he doesn't care at all of what happens, he just wants to get all the power, while Lovo is scared and wounded (blood on his arm) and even though he is the boss his orders are being ignored. Scarface shows determination and talks loud showing dominance over Lovo who shows fear and talks very high, fast and you can hardly understand him. We know who is going to win the ego fight.

The composition of some shots is also crucial in understanding the whole situation of the scene. When we have a long medium shot of both male characters together at the beginning of the discussion we can see some sort of symmetry having two members of the gang to each side of them and Poppy (Lovo's Wife) standing in the middle, this suggests that at the beginning the forces are somehow equal, but as the discussion gets more violent and the presence of scarface grows in importance the composition of the frame also changes, and we get a medium shot showing Poppy and all the members of the gang behind Scarface or by his side, and Lovo left alone. After Scarface shoots the gun, Lovo literally disappears and is never shown again in the scene, like if it had died.

Symbolism is also a huge thing not only in this scene but throughout the whole movie. In the scene Scarface takes over the power of his boss by confronting him, not listening to his orders and metaphorically killing him, kicking him out of the frame when he shoots. He manages to do it with the use of a new machine gun. Specially in the close up shot of the weapon, we can say that it is a falic symbol that represents that Scarface is the Strong male of the pack, the one who has the power and the strongest weapon. While Lovo is wounded and getting smaller symbolizing the weak male. When Scarface shoots with the machine gun, he shoots at the wall of Lovo's office where you can see how there are many wooden pool sticks that are being destroyed by the bullets, symbolizing all the other men he is going to kill shortly. To symbolize that Scarface takes over Lovo's power and job as gang boss (dominant male position), he not only gets the respect of the mob (pack) but he also gets Poppy (beautiful blond female) like if it was a possession that the dominant male gets.

The Mise en Scene of this film is very influenced by the german expressionism style. There is a use of shadows to give an impressionistic construction of the action that impacts even more on the viewers such as in the scene of *"Saint Valentine's Day"* where there are seven characters being coldly murdered at the same time, all in a row against a wall, but you are only introduced to this by the shadows that appear in the wall. In that same scene we are introduced to the biggest and most famous symbol in the whole movie, the "X". Throughout the whole film, a huge "X" always marks the spots of the murders. In the Saint Valentine's scene, right before and right after the shooting of the seven characters takes place we are shown a piece of the ceiling that has the shape of seven "X"s, the same amount of dead people. And it happens over and over again every time death is present: Characters get shot in the middle of the street and fall into a shadow with the shape of an X in the floor, an "X" is present in the site of the crime where there are dead people, "X" shadows and "X"s drawn with light..etc. Death is one of the main themes in the movie and The "X" symbolizes it. The other great theme in the film is the lust for power and control, which is symbolized by the slogan of an airline "The World is Yours", it represents all the power he manages to achieve in the end of the movie where he is basically the king of the city after he has killed all the other gang bosses from all the other mobs. Tragically the Power symbol "The World is Yours" is overtaken by the Death symbol "X" at the end of the movie when Scarface gets killed in a hail of bullets by an army of police officers. Ironically when scarface dies, the symbol that marks his death site is "The World is Yours"... but the fact is that Scarface was always marked by the "X" shaped scar in his chic, he was destined to be the last "X".

To conclude, we could say that this Film is a masterpiece in history of cinema. As important as it is because it developed a new theme, it is the product of a time, and a critic to the system and it also does it from the story of a man who's character was based on a real life criminal, creating an antihero. Scarface uses old and new techniques to give a perfect new tone, vibe, mood and emotion to the story and achieves something completely new through fast editing, smooth cinematography, and an exceptional use of mise en scene. The whole movie is a packed of symbolism and hidden meanings that get to your subconscious creating a whole new different experience. This Film has inspired hundreds of gangster movies, and we have to thank this movie for creating the theme and the genre

