

Examples Of Composition

Force Of Evil

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Force of Evil (1948)

directed by Abraham Polonsky

photographed by George Barnes

The era of Film Noir found its makers emerging from the era of Expressionism and these shots exhibit prime examples of both forms.

The extreme high angle shot looking down on the two men imposes a distant perspective. This creates a sense of fear as it relegates the players to the roles of ants within a story, in this case, with a greater

moral focus. They have left a discussion of creating a crime syndicate, and Joe Morse (John Garfield), an up and coming lawyer, has decided to cast his lot with an old style gangster who has been convinced by Joe that crime can be turned to a profitable, legitimate, if shady, business. This can also be seen commented by the twist of the banister and the drape of shadows.

The business of Film Noir, and the techniques of Expressionism inform us that this illusion of legality has a rotten core, and that the law is ever vigilant. The domination of the frame by the desk contributes to overwhelming Joe as he is hemmed in. The plot has revealed Joe keeps a private



telephone line in the desk drawer, and he has been informed that there are taps being made on his conversations: ***“You can spend a lifetime wondering what you shouldn’t have said.”***



In this last long shot, Joe is barely visible as his image, and his soul have been reduced through the course of events. In fact, if we were to rely on stills, the viewer might miss him entirely. With motion, he becomes visible, and his diminution becomes dramatic in this scale. This scene is a literal descent into hell as he rushes to the river's edge to find the body of his brother who has died at the hands of a competing mob.