On the Relation Between

American *Roman Noir* and *Film Noir*

Landscape in the Los Angeles novel is always weighed with symbolic meaning. The fact that the writers, as outsiders, were playing the region contrapuntally against a home territory accounts to a large extent for the symbolic quality it acquired in fiction. The landscape offered itself readily to a vision of being cut off from a familiar sense of space.

David Fine, *Los Angeles in Fiction* (10)

*Film noir* usually seems to the literary scholar an obvious derivative of the '20s and '30s American detective novel, but the similarities can be made to dissolve on inspection, as film scholars have shown. Film is visual, a highly technical medium whose optical qualities create its effect as much as its narrative does. These effects set *film noir* apart, they have contended, either as a style or a genre, from any literary origin.

Like the debate over the term *film noir*, the style/genre question is by now quite tangled; this essay does not propose to enter it, but rather to argue that the distinctiveness of *film noir* derives from the same techno-economic matrix that produced the *roman noir*, and that the narrative use of setting in the two genres reveals this debt. Technological and economic imperatives cloak themselves better in film, whereas literature's anxiety about these influences makes them palpable and allows us to create a comparative moment.

Let's begin with an admission: it is seldom noticed by literary investigators that the American *roman noir* is set almost exclusively in California, principally Los Angeles, or remarked that its authors were non-Californians. This odd conjunction then goes unexamined in the cinema derived from the novels, due to a body of criticism contending that narrative setting, its treatment and tone, is just not as important as the lighting, number of tracking shots, or *mise en scène*.

In American literary scholarship, of course, treatment of setting has been the meat of the canonical stew, and cooks from Vernon L. Parrington and Perry Miller through
Leo Marx and Alfred Kazin have corrected the ideological seasoning according to the era. Native sons or daughters extolling the virtues or complexity or, more recently, the limitations of a rural if not agrarian landscape have been the stuff of a scholarship showing that beneath such bucolic or positivistic surfaces, difficult negotiations with progress were taking place.

That a region such as California, generally conceived by the reading (and viewing) public to be among the world’s most beautiful landscapes, should be selected by outsiders as locus of “alienation,” mechanization, and “depravity”—this would have been a disparity to the cooks that required explanation. Landscape and region, they held, were significant components in the American ideological complex, especially in relation to its favored narrative themes about progress, technology, success, and integrity.

Now, since both are narrative media, could this not also be true of film? Could not film noir be an advanced example of the effects technology induces into narratives about social and economic change? Is it not probable that the technique of film noir continues a trend established by the technique of the roman noir, expanding upon the seeming “invisibility” that technology creates for itself ideologically?

The California Setting

Silver and Ward describe the typical setting of film noir as “contemporaneous, usually urban, and almost always American in setting. The few exceptions involve either urban men in a rural locale or Americans abroad. There is a narrative assumption that only natural forces are at play; extraordinary occurrences are either logically elucidated or left unexplained—no metaphysical values are adopted” (3). The first two sentences seem fair, though general, but how do they lead to a “narrative assumption”? There is a narrative assumption relating character to setting here, isn’t there? And isn’t it that setting and nature generally will be explicable by reason? How does this implicit premise square with the equally common one that characters in noir sense a determinism at work?

Though no Deity reigns, there are certainly metaphysical values present at the outset in the settings of film noir. Silver and Ward seem to want to indicate that the setting is neutralized, uninflected by ideological preconception. The basis of this judgment is itself comparative, however; we can only see noir’s settings as neutral in contrast to the settings of films made before 1930, the era of De Mille and Griffith. Hollywood then shared the older American “literary” view of setting, surveying the place where it found itself and liberating its subject from the pressures of time and place. Whether the fictive setting was Babylon or Bull Run, the “world elsewhere” created by that style, as Richard Poirier has noted of the novel, concerned the “creation of America out of a continental vastness.”

Even the most naive moviegoers knew that this “world elsewhere” was made of the environs of Los Angeles. In the work of Sennett, Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd, they saw the wide, clean streets of Los Angeles, pleasant suburban bungalows, palm trees, and distant mountains. In the chase scenes there were no clouds, no dark alleys, no claustrophobic rooms; nature was benign and the light was always special—in fact, the frame was filled with bright, flat light that illuminated every corner. The harried life of Harold Lloyd in Safety Last must have appeared idyllic to audiences in Iowa. Everything was visible; the setting, in a Keystone chase or even in Chaplin’s most polemic films, is potentially liberatory. The tradition of “idyllic, pastoral treatment,” as Louis Giannetti has pointed out, extends from the hundreds of films made by the influential Griffith virtually unbroken through his disciples John Ford and Frank Capra. The reformulation of this setting in literature owes, as Poirier has noted, to naturalism. In American popular literature, it owes to Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Horace McCoy and Raymond Chandler. They rendered a new socio-economic California setting, in which no expansion of the self was possible. This did not have
any substantial basis in reality; they were quite consciously involved in closing off, by technique, outlets to the world elsewhere.

Some history: scholarly studies by Kevin Starr and others of San Francisco and Los Angeles between 1900 and 1950 show that there was abundant, reasonably-priced housing, relatively honest government, and little crime, especially compared to Eastern cities. Los Angeles led the nation in churches per capita in the '20s and was a center of Prohibition sentiment. Long in the vanguard of the Progressive Movement, California came close to electing a Socialist, Upton Sinclair, as governor in 1934. Oligopolies did exist in media, railroads, and farming, but they were relatively benign, especially compared to, say, the Eastern beef or coal "trusts."

As David Fine has explained, the basic structure of California as noir setting that James M. Cain and Horace McCoy rendered was "contrapuntal." Their readings were violent reactions against two, fatigued metaphors detailed by Starr. The earlier, romantic view, exemplified by Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), was rooted in the Spanish-American pioneer era and had been influential with D.W. Griffith and his generation of filmmakers, and was later evident in the "Mediterranean" and "Babylonian" premises of so many films. It was partially replaced by the "Progressive" view of Charles Arthur Loomis, Arroyo culture, and the Good Government Movement, typified by Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) and Robinson Jeffers's *Californians* (1916). Cain and McCoy, notes Fine, focus on the finiteness of "the man-made landscape—the roadside motor court, the dance hall at the edge of the ocean, the car on the Coast Highway—as images of deception, metaphors for betrayed hope" (18).

What exactly was betrayed? These authors and the directors who filmed their work moved to California in mid-life with high expectations, just as Iowa farmers and small entrepreneurs had a decade earlier, and they lived a generally good life. Hack writers lived opulently, when fifteen years earlier they would have labored for a penny a word in Greenwich Village's dime novel ghetto. When Cain reported on "Paradise" for the *American Mercury* in 1933, he rhapsodized about California's cleanliness, quality of education, roads and recreation opportunities, and "the unfailing friendliness and courtesy of the people." There was no alienation in his initial, objective account.

When he and McCoy went on to portray what the reading public conceived to be a Valhalla of "sunshine and oranges" as the locus of deceit, murder, and treachery, they inverted, for a national audience, long-standing American themes of Western movement, progress and self-improvement. Landscape had played a part in such themes as the raw material, the stuff out of which protagonists created (or, tragically, did not create) themselves. Whether he mechanically subded it or spiritually revered it, the hero traditionally had a significant relation to his setting. Such a tradition is evident among California writers as late as Steinbeck, a native son, who focused on technology's impact on landscape even in the '60s.

The inversion of this theme, by outsiders, appears due to their perception that California lacked something, something their places of origin had, namely conflict and technology. This lack was usually identified as an "industrial base," evidence that *things being made* sustained the good life. As Poirier remarks, such writers "ask us to believe that the strange environments they create are a consequence not of their distaste for social, economic, and biologic realities but of the fact that these aren't more abundant in American life" (9). This helps us to understand why Hammett, in *Red Harvest* (1927), opened a narrative that ruminates on California politics and wealth in front of "smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain" (4). Cain, who had covered the West Virginia coal strikes of the '20s, wrote explicitly in "Paradise" that he missed the conflict of Eastern labor disputes: "[Californians] suffer from the cruel feebleness of the play which the economy of the region compels them to take part in" (275). There was no "voltage" (a telling metaphor) for Cain without economic conflict, which he associated with heavy industry. This is a signal critique;
one could cite other, vaguer ones by the writers and directors involved in film noir, all discomfited by the “vacuity” or “phoniness” of a setting whose economy was the first in the world to enter a purely post-industrial phase.

The most common narrative emplotment of this anxiety—in which setting precludes any world elsewhere—was less a rebellion against material satiety, as some critics have assumed, than an instance of American technological paradigms shifting from exteriorization to interiorization. The absence of a mechanized economy must mean that the apparently polite Californian had been forced by his environment to internalize economic conflict. The representation of a character’s internalization, after Modernism, was to be accomplished through technique. It is in this sense that David Fine’s remark about the California novel being “cut off from a familiar sense of space” is so apropos. Outsiders were specially equipped to suggest the contrapuntal home territory, in literature or film, by de-familiarizing the California setting through technique. The absent, mechanized economy could be immanentized, converted into technique.

Setting in Roman Noir

The early narratives of Dashiell Hammett exemplify the way things were before the paradigm shifted, when technology was still an explicit topic. An Easterner until he was twenty-six and many years an advertising copywriter, Hammett tried to valorize setting in ways that appealed to a mass, national audience. Biographer Diane Johnson reveals that as a boy Hammett read “trash, mysteries” and esteemed the hunting stories of his maternal grandfather, as well as “stories about the West” heard “down at the railroad yard.”

Hammett’s work after arriving in San Francisco and through Red Harvest (1927) employs the conventions of such sources: lone cowboys, rival gangs, trackers, gold miners, and dance-hall whores drift down from the Sierra to San Francisco. The Continental Op depends on his tracking talent (“The Scorched Face”) shooting it out in an arroyo (“The Golden Horseshoe”) and fighting off outlaw gangs (“The Gutting of Couffignal.” “The Big Knockover”). In Red Harvest he is a just man who cleans up a corrupt town. The Dain Curse (1929) is rife with exotic locales and feuding “families.”

In The Maltese Falcon (1930), Hammett’s turning point and the origin of the “noir” complexion of popular fiction about San Francisco, he gave relatively few descriptions of his setting and many of those are figures borrowed from the Western. The most important, the alley up which Brigid leads Miles Archer to his death, is an urban rendering of ambush in a box canyon. Most of the action takes place in the confined spaces of apartments, a new, technological form of residence only widespread in California before 1930 in peninsular San Francisco. But that turns out to be one reason why it made such a good film noir: interiors. Lack of a world elsewhere, of sunshine, can be emphasized. There are few guns or cars in the novel, but many telephone calls, newspapers and doorways, though none of these egress on a world elsewhere. Their number was to grow in the film. John Huston perceived in such elements the potential for what Silver/Ward gingerly term “certain relationships between elements of style—not icons—and narrative events or character sentiments” (5). They lead us to the brink of an assertion that style can be a rendering of character motivation, albeit less apparent to the viewer. All of the clues necessary to a filmic version of technique as motivation are, in fact, present in Hammett’s famous objective style—in the passage about Spade’s cigarette-rolling, for instance. It is hardly revolutionary to think this way; scholarship on characterization in Hemingway’s early work has long related technique to motivation.

Cain and Chandler extended this displacement of the contrapuntal landscape into technique, but in quite opposed ways. Cain aligned California with national, even mythic preconceptions about prodigality, while pioneering a telegraphic minimalist
style that created the counterpoint. Chandler took the opposite tact. He attempted in
a metaphoric, prodigal style to universalize local geographic paradigms about internaliza-
tion and alienation. His stylistic embellishments try to overturn the received impres-
sion of California landscape.

Brief examples will make this clearer. Cain opens The Postman Always Rings Twice
(1934) with this celebrated passage: “They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I
had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there
under the canvas, I went to sleep. I needed plenty of that, after three weeks in Tia
Juana” [sic] (1). A national audience in the ’30s could not fail to perceive Cain’s
narrator as one of the drifters who roamed the nation seeking work. From his job as
editorial writer, Cain knew that Frank Chambers was a national issue; but he didn’t
know California intimately, so he chose as settings those Southern California landscapes
already familiar to a national audience: the roadside restaurant/gas station, Spanish
style houses, and orange groves. His is an already read setting. His mountains and
beaches are generic, his Mexico is a preconceived Sodom to the south. His California
is a metonymic reduction.

On the other hand, Raymond Chandler had worked some twenty years in the L.A.
oil industry before he began writing. He disliked research, depending on his figurative
power with language. He didn’t know American taste like Cain, but he knew California
intimately. In the first sentence of his first novel he attempted to make a minor
aberration in local climate into a synecdoche: “It was about eleven o’clock in the
morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the
clearness of the foothills” (The Big Sleep 1). The unseasonable rain (recall Mary
Austin’s Land of Little Rain, 1903) refutes preconceptions about the land of sunshine.
Chandler attempts to expand this aberration by tropes, allusions, and romantic embel-
lishment, but his counter-figuration is lost on most modern readers. When Chandler
later employed beaches and mountain lakes for settings, they were specific places—
Venice Beach or Big Bear Lake—and they had local meaning for Chandler that he
was often able to communicate by synecdoche to his audience.

None of the film versions of either The Postman Always Rings Twice or The Big
Sleep use setting for such pointedly figurative purposes. Both were filmed in the
neutral “iconic” style of The Maltese Falcon. But while the counterpoint between
California and an “other, previous” landscape (for Cain, the coalfields of West Virginia;
for Chandler, the England of his youth) got lost, the projection of a world elsewhere
by technique was not lost on filmmakers.

Film Technology and Ideological Opportunity

The cleavage between the exterior settings of the novels and the interiors favored
by the films is another clue to the nature of the paradigm shift under way. In literature,
and in earlier film, a character’s “reading” of his setting told a great deal about him,
that is, a series of initial events secured the audience’s collaboration in the creation
of his narrative function. After the introduction of sound, after the Mazda tests in
1928 that standardized film stock, lighting, and make-up, the creation of an actor’s
character became a site of burgeoning technological opportunity. Much of the diegesis
concerning actors and events in written narrative was gradually assumed by technique
in film, for which every angle and shot had psychological implications. Nichols, Salt,
and Bordwell, among others, have argued in various ways that a progression of film
techniques creates imaginative figuration, which is in turn constitutive of meaning: a
series of such figures creates a way-of-seeing-things, an ideological position. The
skill that Hammett had shown Spade to possess in his cigarette-rolling could be
appropriated by the film technicians. Homo faber became the cameraman rather than
a character, who no longer understood the forces that made him. Film scholarship,
however, has been chary of cataloging a grammar of technique as it creates character.
We read, for example, that "... there is nothing intrinsic in side-light or a moving camera that connotes such qualities as alienation, obsession, or paranoia in the manner that a tied-down pistol may imply a gunfight, a drone of planes, an air raid, or marks on the neck, a vampire. ..." 8

This is a refusal to recognize how audiences create narrative causality, even with the barest hints. It recognizes synecdochical figures (a drone of planes) but not metonymic ones (long versus close shot, still versus moving camera). It ignores, as Paul Kerr and James Damico have pointed out, the advent of film noir at a time of massive economic and technical change in the means of production.9 New film technology was busy creating techniques that helped style stand for narrative motivation and causation. It did so by eliding the old sequence of event — figure (icon) — style. What was an icon, after all, but an event so long associated with an object that the former had become sedimented in it? The law of technology—eliminate steps! — had already dislocated the perceptive habits of audiences from synecdoche to metonymy in other fields: a sequence of shots could become a metonymic reduction of an event.

The advent of sound led in this direction. The crude technology of early sound recording made necessary control of background sound, which was not possible outside. As sound became a success and then a competitive necessity, production shifted to sets and studio lots. There noise could be controlled, making purposeful sound as important a production value as light. The advance of film in the '20s and early '30s into musicals, into stories of hard-working chorus girls and ambitious young tenors, is not coincidental; it exploits the medium's new resources. Heroes and heroines broke into song without provocation, ignoring psychological motivation. Such characters hardly stand apart from "production values"; they are technologically blessed: they have diegetic power, as well as mimetic skill, will, and opportunity. In the romantic comedies of the '30s, as Elizabeth Kendall has argued, techno-economic opportunity helps to figure an emerging feminist heroine.10

The conventions, and figures, of sound grew slowly. As Salt has shown, a single microphone connected to a camera in a blimp gave poor cognitive cues; it was replaced by the boom mike and then by independent multi-point recording that was post-synchronized (256-81). Sound cutting techniques at first resulted in distracting silent spots or muddied overlays. The adoption of synchronized sound-on-film between 1928 and 1930 solved this problem with the sound overlap, one or two frames of sound playing over the new scene and creating a sensation of seamless temporal unity. Shots had to be planned with such "dialogue cutting points" in mind: whose words would cover what visual? The cutting point is a physical elision of reality, an opportunity to make metaphors, metonymies, and other figures, and the dictum that "sound leads" was broadly adopted by 1930. Also in evidence were off-frame sound effects that prefigured the visual cut to another scene. As sound editing became more sophisticated, sound was conceived to have depth, and "virtual soundscapes" created a new diegetic quality. Bordwell has pointed out that by 1930, "for every cut from point to point there must be an auditory shift as well. 'I can give you a close-up of sound, just as I can give you a close-up of a person' [said an engineer]. In the late 1920s, there was considerable controversy about whether it was more 'natural' for a close-up's volume to be louder than the volume for a long shot, but by the early 1930s, it was evident that volume should be in rough proportion to shot scale" (302).

Such proportion is as artificial as Renaissance "laws" of visual perspective. But as it evolved, sound created a similar virtual reality: it was fast, smooth, and clear—it was instantly intelligible, patterned yet always new and bright. It was exactly what the emerging techno-economic climate required.

**Economic Imperatives**

Paul Kerr has shown convincingly how the second feature, the "B" film, was not
only a box office rival, but a production challenge to the "A" feature, as the continuous production of Henry Ford finally arrived in Hollywood:

To take two examples: Val Lewton's films at RKO had tight, twenty-one day schedules whilst Edgar G. Ulmer's at PRC were often brought in after only six days and nights. (To achieve this remarkable shooting speed night work was almost inevitable and Ulmer's unit used to mount as many as eighty different camera set-ups a day.) Props, sets and costumes were kept to a minimum, except on those occasions when they could be borrowed from more expensive productions, as Lewton borrowed a staircase from The Magnificent Ambersons for his first feature. (51)

Bordwell too has noted how the Depression forced filmmakers to cut set construction and to re-use scenery when possible (77). Subsequent "warranty limits on set construction and the 'realism' of combat documentaries" even made location shooting desirable again and cheaper, now that sound problems were solved.11

The way to disguise re-used sets and props was to shoot them differently. "B" directors, said one cameraman, "pick new angles and redress the foreground . . . [and] agree to shoot at night" (52). Light was expensive: the less used, the better. Studio streets plunged into shadow not only weren't recognized as the settings of feature films, but needn't be detailed or accurate. Expensive three-point lighting gave way to "high key" lighting (main and a small amount of fill) or single-source illumination. Directors avoided spectacular action sequences: "You can't shoot a first-rate crime wave on short dough, so you borrow or buy about twenty pieces of thrilling moments from twenty forgotten pictures," said cameraman Nick Grinde.12

After electricity, sets, and action, human labor was the most expensive item. Crowd scenes were avoided or borrowed and casts kept to a minimum, which also reduced the number of titles. While the movie unions had a ban on overtime, many technicians avoided it by working straight-time on contract to the tightly-scheduled "B" units. Unclear scripts and poorly motivated characters were simply shot and later edited into coherence. Plot complexity, Kerr argues, actually increased.

When in 1943 the government reduced the studios' raw film stock by twenty-five percent, "B" films absorbed the brunt of the shortage. Again they turned economic necessity into stylistic virtue. The "B" film shrank from seventy-five or eighty minutes to fifty-five or sixty minutes. Average shot length, as Barry Salt has shown, decreased, imparting a sense of action. Shorter shots allowed even more film to be recycled. Exhibitors got to show shorter films two to three extra times per week. "Such economies as 'B' units practiced," concludes Kerr, "were not related to fixed assets like rents and salaries but to variable costs like sets, scripts, footage, casual labor and, crucially, power" (53).

Salt has documented that studios leapt at every opportunity to reduce this huge electrical consumption. An important development was new higher-speed film introduced by Agfa and Kodak in 1938. These reduced the foot-candles of light required by half. But the faster film was not used for increased depth of field, only to reduce light and heat on the set. Studios commonly overexposed the film, in fact, then underdeveloped it to produce a flatter, less contrasty print with more grey tones.

The trend toward deep focus, a convention of film noir, began when 20th Century-Fox instituted a policy of shooting all films on interior sets at f3.5 to take advantage of the speed of Plus X, their new standard film. Fox films from 1938 on have greater depth of field and sharper focus, features then copied by other studios. Fox cameraman Gregg Toland, often cited as the pioneer of depth shooting, developed the potential of deep focus, but the technique was based on technology designed to save money (Salt 256-81).

Deep focus required wider angle lenses than the 28mm available, but wider lenses could not be mounted on older style cameras, especially those in soundproof blimps (259). In 1939 Fox introduced a camera with built-in soundproofing that accepted lenses wider than 25mm. It weighed only eighty pounds and had two 1,000-foot film
magazines. Along with military cameras, this led to models small and light enough for hand-held shooting. Such technological advances made possible the “subjective camera” of Murder My Sweet (1944), The Lady in the Lake (1946) and Dark Passage (1947). Fresnel lenses introduced in the late ’30s allowed extremely focused light to be projected over distances (Salt 260). The repertoire of shots expanded when cranes built for filming musicals, first at Universal, then at Paramount in 1933, were borrowed by “B”-units. Bell and Howell began to manufacture small, highly maneuverable dollies, which had been handcrafted for earlier movies like The Front Page (1931).

The Genealogy of Film Noir

The most conspicuous cinema ancestors of film noir were the gangster movies of 1928-34. Not only did they pioneer some of the techniques identified with film noir, but their narratives were often based on a story of two “brothers” or friends. They were usually members of a neighborhood gang, from which one emerged to rise in crime. The conventional, stay-at-home brother foiled the criminal, as in Public Enemy (1931). Crime was often figured as a new “organization” in an increasingly bureaucratic society. Such gangster films already showed a shift in film’s underlying paradigm about technology. One has only to remember films of the ’20s—Keaton’s Our Hospitality (1920) or One Week (1921) for example—to realize the extent to which technology as the butt of popular humor had been replaced by technological positivism. This shift is already evident in Little Caesar. Warner’s extraordinary success of 1930 that can be regarded as the grandfather of film noir. It spawned over fifty imitations in three years, but none crystallized the relation between film noir and technology as well as Warner’s own follow-up—The Public Enemy (1931), directed by William Wellman and starring James Cagney.

The Public Enemy opens with a high-angle shot of downtown Chicago in 1909. Ant-like people thread a maze of daily existence, the quality of which is hinted by a subsequent high-angle shot of the stockyards. Beer, the evil soporific that makes it all bearable, rolls out of a brewery on wagons and fills the sloshing pails of workmen. The Dreiserian crudeness of this 1909 Chicago is intended; this aspect of the film evokes Griffith’s moralizing and his temperance melodramas. The technique of the opening montage also bears a message; by zooming back from a detail to a long shot, the camera not only establishes the setting but cues the viewer to three-dimensional space, centers attention, delays some information (suspense), and provides a parallel for future reverse tracking shots. Andrew Sarris saw early that Wellman’s “images tend to recede from the foreground to the background” (Slat 252). He used very few close-ups and a disproportionate number of medium and long shots. But few of his shots were stationary, as his camera zoomed, tracked, and panned. In fact, his technique provided the audience with a diegetic resume of recent American history. As film time passes, the number of sets increases and the number of exterior shots decreases; technology becomes an implied actor in the narrative.

The second segment of The Public Enemy is set in 1917. It opens with a dolly shot, giving the impression that Cagney’s good brother, Mike Powers, and his fiancée have established a channel of personal vision and calm planning on the eye level of the viewer. Life has become more rational than it was on the initial anhill. The third segment, set in 1920, opens with a long shot of a theatre exterior that is clearly a set, on which the pandemonium that supposedly attended the beginning of Prohibition is organized by a sequence of mini-narratives in the repetitive rhythm of establishing, medium and close shots. Each three-shot “story” makes the same point: that old temperance melodrama about life deteriorating was silly. Technique clarifies recent history: as technology increases, life gets better—and misfits like Cagney are eliminated.

The Public Enemy returns to exterior locations only once more, to introduce Jean
Harlow, who plays Cleopatra to Jimmy Cagney's Caesar. Unlike other exterior scenes, this one is a striking failure. There's a modern Standard Oil station in the background, apparently a Los Angeles street. The camera angle foreshortens Harlow, the light is hard and flat, and her sidewalk setting suggests a streetwalker. By contrast, in later nightclub scenes, the set design, props, lower camera angles, and three-point lighting emphasize Harlow's sensual allure. Sets completely replace exterior locations late in *The Public Enemy*. Both the depiction of a Prohibition bombing and the sniper execution of Matt Doyle (Edward Woods) occur on studio back lots. The second event particularly demonstrates the additional increment of artistry available to the director who controls every production element. Wellman used the camera point of view, the framing device of the window, and deep focus to put his audience in the shoes of the assassins, suggesting viewer complicity in and hypocrisy about Prohibition, but also the thrill of illicit violence. These are three techniques specifically associated by most scholars with *film noir*.

*The Public Enemy* reaches its climax when Cagney, in a studio rainstorm notable for its torrential volume, failure to puddle, and equidistant raindrops, arrives at his rivals' hideout to kill them. By mixing the rain noise, the gunplay and Cagney's voice, by employing dramatic lighting, and by using doors, windows, and the camera aperture as framing devices, Wellman created a soundscape and sense of spatial depth far superior to anything possible in reality. His recreation of a cityscape is particularly superior to the ant-like reality in the opening scene, of which viewers may be reminded by tracking shots that suggest a parallel.

This subsumption of setting to technique will be even more conscious in the *films noirs* of the '40s. During the rest of the Depression, however, the genre developed sporadically. Aside from *Scarface* (1932) and *The Glass Key* (1935), based on Hammett's last "tough guy" novel, most of the detective fare chosen for filming came from the lighter, English tradition, such as S.S. Van Dine's *The Kennel Murder* (1933) and Hammett's *The Thin Man* (1934)—William Powell was both Philo Vance and Nick Charles. The style of the earlier gangster movies, however, in which technology figured history, became a sedimented referent of later *noir* films.

**Narrative Events**

James Damico has described *film noir*'s central narrative this way:

Either because he is fated to do so by chance, or because he has been hired for a job specifically associated with her, a man whose experience of life has left him sanguine and often bitter meets a not-innocent woman of similar outlook to whom he is sexually and fatally attracted. Through this attraction, either because the woman induces him to it or because it is the natural result of their relationship, the man comes to cheat, attempt to murder, or actually murder a second man to whom the woman is unhappily or unwillingly attached (generally he is her husband or lover), an act which often leads to the woman's betrayal of the protagonist, but which in any event brings out the sometimes metaphoric, but usually literal destruction of the woman, the man to whom she is attached, and frequently the protagonist himself. (54)

Damico notes that this plot appears in a dozen of the canonical *noir* films made between 1941 and 1949, such as *Double Indemnity*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Blue Dahlia*, *Murder, My Sweet*, and *The Maltese Falcon*. It is important to note that in this plot, the narrative process of the protagonist's deterioration is embedded within a narrative process of social improvement. In *film noir* the destruction of the protagonist and his female counterpart is caused by a force representing improvement, without the narrative of improvement being told. In fact, this narrative has been immanentized, transubstantiated into a diegetic voice. This "immanent improvement" is sometimes present in the film's setting as a technological representation of society (*Double Indemnity*).

The ways in which this narrative can be delivered through technique is the subject
of recent scholarship by Sarah Kozloff and J.P. Telotte. Telotte writes that “What makes the noir voice so distinctive is that the patterns of violation it speaks of also appear to be the patterns of our cultural and human order” (1). The “retrospective approach . . . retained for the screen versions of the novels” produces a sense that the protagonist is “violated” by a kind of diegetic narrative presence, writes Telotte. This arises from the mix of four narrative positions: 1) classic third person, 2) voice-over and flash-back 3) subjective camera, and 4) documentary style. The second item contains two techniques, of course; and we may add multiple narrators to the classic third person. The mix of these narrative voices in a classic like Double Indemnity, as Krutnik observed, can produce an “intermittent” third-person actor whose “voice-over does not have the same authoritative hold in the channeling of the discourse of Truth” that the novel’s simple first-person narrator did. To this Telotte adds that “The Cain novel had established the potential for this focus, although it subordinates a concern with discourse to the threatening power of desire itself. What inspires the film’s voice-over narration and its added complications though is the novel’s structure as a written statement, a notarized confession of murder by its protagonist” (45). Sarah Kozloff has shown how voice-over is not only not the “voice” of the protagonist, but that it creates something other than the counterpoint to image that has long been presumed. Rather, voice-over is the key to what Seymour Chatman has called the “double time demand” of film. That is, film contains an overabundance of visual detail, which cannot be absorbed by the viewer unless some aspect of the narrative calls it to the attention. In this dual time system, devices like voice-over tell us how to figure the visual surfeit. Kozloff points out that in Letter from an Unknown Woman such a noir staple as the dark, rainy, forbidding street can suggest culture and romance if overlaid with a graceful calligraphic title that reads “Vienna, About 1900” (73).

For Kozloff, a film like Double Indemnity, with its voice-over, third-person “actual” voice, third-person “confessional,” and visually objective modes is more like an embedded series of narrators who progressively focus a narrative in symphony with the repertoire of the camera. This gives rise to a more sophisticated kind of understanding, as Kozloff details in an account of Mildred Pierce:

Mildred’s narrating voice remarks, “At first it bothered Monte [her lover] to take money from me, then it became a habit with him.” The shot accompanying this statement does not show Monte taking a check from her, instead, we see a sheaf of bills from fancy men’s clothing stores. The unspoken implication is that these are Monte’s bills, that this is what he’s spending her hard-earned money on. The combination of picture and narration forcefully reveals Monte’s profligacy without stating it explicitly on either track: it quietly leads the viewer to make the connection himself or herself. (106)

In this example, voice-over clearly performs a metonymic reduction, making bills stand in a part-to-part relation to profligacy. More forcefully and more concisely than if Monte had been seen at his haberdashers, such a figure elides “setting” and substitutes technique as the “cause” of motivation.

A Turning Point: 1941

Although the mid-30s were a prodigious period in the American detective novel, Hollywood did not revive its interest in crime until 1941. Then it returned to filming on California locations, with new technological options that could re-make setting. High Sierra, directed by Raoul Walsh in 1941, is a stunning example of the new way of representing setting. W.R. Burnett, who had written the novel that formed the basis of Little Caesar, teamed with John Huston to write the script from his novel. Setting is here specifically thematized. The Sierra Nevada first appear, rugged and untamable, under the opening credits. Then a montage of increasingly tighter shots shows the power of nature’s opponent, mankind, as represented by government, prison,
and a governor’s pardon. Accompanied by music, rather than voice-over, this diegetic
frame prepares us for Roy Earle (Humphrey Bogart) who, on his release from prison,
goes immediately to commune with a bucolic, naïve version of nature in the local
park. Then he drives cross-country to California, and a new narrative about nature
takes shape. Stopping at the old family farm in Indiana, he finds the catfish no longer
bite at the fishing hole, the farmers are hayseeds. But since the yokels (apparently
newspaper readers) recognize his face, this “old nature” becomes a threat to Earle.
Now the landscape changes from a lush Indiana to the Mojave Desert—the rest of
America is elided. Nature’s harshness is emphasized by Earle’s frantic trip across the
Western deserts. Unconventional in film noir, the bright, flat, outdoor lighting of this
section also serves to recall an earlier period of U.S. history, just as it did in Public
Enemy.

When Bogart arrives at the Sierras, even Walsh’s best shots of the mighty mountains
seem relatively bland. Retrospectively, it is obvious this setting was a specifically
cinematic as well as a larger technological problem. The Sierras resisted the infusion
of production values that could be added by technique on a set. This problem Walsh
solved for most of the film by treating his landscape like an interior. The time that
Bogart’s gangsters spend in the high Sierras, they pass inside cabins. When Walsh
used locations, he treated them like complex interiors. The trees in his campground
scenes are unnecessary, except that Walsh can use them, like the pillars in the lobby
of a building, to enhance the production values of the film by flourishes such as
reverse point of view, dollying and deep focus. These trees are not trees but challenges
to his technical mastery.

Only in the final scenes did Walsh use the dark palette typical of film noir. There
his positivist rendering of technology becomes unmistakable. A montage of shots
depicts the communications and police grid closing down on the fleeing Bogie, whom
the audience may now understand to embody an archaic notion of nature’s goodness
and nobility. Walsh worked hard to subsume the Sierra foothills to technique in the
celebrated car chase, but the swirling dust that bedeviled him only emphasizes for a
modern viewer his incomplete control. The double 360-degree shot following Earle,
then the police, as they drive up a mountain hairpin, is a technical triumph, though
the chase itself is curiously flat. When Bogie reaches the “Road Closed” sign and
scrambles up the cliff with a machine gun, the audience understands that there is no
refuge in nature; there are no “Earle family farms” anymore, there is no “world
elsewhere.” The technological matrix that traps Earle is present in the police lines,
the radio reporter, the searchlight, and the report of an airplane coming to bomb him
off the cliff face. The Roy Earles of the ’30s may be living a romantic narrative of
deterioration, but the average people of this film are experiencing the narrative of
 technological improvement, against which Earle rebels. Nature is not only no sanctuary
for the Earles, but can be reduced to rubble by a phone call from the authorities. Man
controls nature.

Walsh avoids the darkness of this implication by summoning nature’s spirit, a Natty
Bumppo figure—the man with “the queer-looking gun”—to wipe out the deviance
that is Roy Earle. This correspondence is the most astonishing aspect of High Sierra,
for the film employs much of the plot of James Fenimore Cooper’s The Pioneers
(1823). Like the novel’s Oliver Edwards, Roy Earle must hide his past. Like Edwards,
he meets an upright family (the Temples, the Goodhues). The patriarchs of both
families suffer technological trouble: Edwards pulls Judge Temple’s wagon off the
cliff and Earle fixes Mr. Goodhue’s car. Edwards falls in love with Elizabeth Temple.
Earle with Velma Goodhue. As Judge Temple is frustrated by the ecological ravages
of civilization on nature, so is Earle surprised by the decline of his old Indiana
homestead. But Cooper salvaged from such forebodings the hope of a fair future by
marrying Edwards into the Temple clan; the protagonist lives a narrative of improve-
ment, synchronous with that of society. In High Sierra, a similar positivism operates,
but by sleight of hand, as the “bad” Earle (expert with a machine gun) is removed, by marriage to his gun-moll and by death, from the “good” Earle, who has been figured, we now see, by his funding the medical procedure on Velma’s clubfoot—an endorsement of technology. The world elsewhere that Cooper suggested in nature, if it exists at all, resides in technology’s transforming possibilities.

Such a perspective on High Sierra focuses the same issue in The Maltese Falcon, also filmed in 1941. Shot almost exclusively on sets, John Huston’s first solo effort as director was a model of planning and economy. Recognizing that little needed to be done to Hammett’s novel to turn it into a screenplay, Huston changed only the exterior scenes and added telephone calls and spinning tires as transitions between interior sets. Contrary to the notion that the novel is a classic San Francisco story, setting in the novel is a minor element; as Bruce Crowther notes, it could have taken place in any harbor city. But a technological conception of San Francisco becomes important in the film.

The only problem with the novel as a movie script would seem to be the question of Spade’s honesty with Brigid O’Shaughnessy, hidden by the third-person “objective” point of view. As Robert Edenbaum pointed out in 1968, if Spade knows all along that Brigid killed Miles, then he strings her along immorally, and his protestations of love in the final scene are worse than hollow. He is in Edenbaum’s phrase a “daemonic agent,” a vehicle for allegory, and Brigid is truly the wronged party. But Huston took a large part of Spade’s complexity and transferred it to the diegetic frame. Bordwell points out that Huston abandoned Spade’s point of view early in the film by showing the death of Miles Archer without an identifiable seer; he “declines to show the killer (we see only a gloved hand)” (40). So the key fact that justifies Spade as “daemonic agent” is shared with the audience early, suggesting that the diegetic power moving the hero influences the viewer too.

This diegetic sharing of hero and audience is balanced by strong misdirection about clues. The opening, expository titles that scroll over the statue of the falcon suggest that its treasure is established fact. But in the novel this pedigree is never certain, coming from arch-villain Casper Gutman, and the statuette is unseen until finally unwrapped. The novel’s statue dupes the crooks, not Spade. The film’s statue, coming first, dupes viewers too. The mystery of the novel finally concerns who Spade is really, but the mystery of the film is how the actors and audience could be so seriously duped into believing that this art moderne statue is “concealing” anything. The novel warns about the costs of becoming a Spade, but the film presents Spade’s as the only intelligent position.

The movie’s setting, like the novel’s, is now completely misconceived. The film opens with a wide shot of the Golden Gate Bridge, which was not even a gleam in the collective eye of civil engineering when Hammett wrote his novel in 1928-29. A montage of San Francisco scenes follows, then the bridge again, and a reverse zoom that leaves the viewer in the offices of Spade and Archer. This icon of technology remains visible in their windows during most of the office scenes. Completed only four years before the film, the bridge celebrates technology’s conquest of nature. It was a particular kind of technology, like Hoover Dam and the California Aqueduct—massive and geographically transforming, located in California, and viewed as the answer to the Depression.

Following Brigid O’Shaughnessy’s visit to Spade’s office, Huston filmed a justly celebrated noir sequence. A telephone rings in a darkened room and Spade, answering but never visible, hears of his partner’s death. The effect is of Spade voicing-over his own absence-as-presence, for the camera remains focused on the base of the phone, behind which a curtain blows languidly over a window that opens on the city lights and night sounds.

Spade then takes a cab to Stockton and Bush Streets, where Archer’s body lies at the bottom of a slope. By alternating high-angle shots (down on Archer) and low-
angle shots (Spade looking up to where Archer was shot), Huston established the urban equivalent of the box canyon of the Western. On three sides buildings rise up, while the far end is closed by a hill, trees, and the lights of distant buildings. The setting is surprising, initially because of the trees and natural elements, but also because of Spade's uneasiness and sense of entrapment. In the novel, Hammett described ironically a billboard dominating this scene, with detectives hunting futilely under it.

Huston shot most of the middle of the film on beautifully lighted sets that could have served any musical or Phil Vance detective film. The scenes between Bogart and Mary Astor employ conventional camera angles and three-point lighting. What is unusual is the number of telephone calls (a dozen) and the tightly framed shots of this object. Telephone calls not only deliver more information than in the novel, but become transitions to cut from scene to scene: telephones entail plot.

Toward the film's end, Huston returned to exteriors, once to replicate the novel's superfluous "wild goose chase" to Burlingame, another time to depict fire-fighting equipment that saves the ship on which the Maltese falcon arrives. In the first scene, Spade walks down a deserted wooden sidewalk, past shuttered stores of archaic wares, giving an impression of time travel back in the economy. He ends up between buildings in a vacant lot with a small "For Sale" sign—a "box canyon" that pairs neatly with the earlier one. Nothing like this happens in the novel, in which Spade searches an empty house. As in the first box canyon, Spade turns from the scene and a taxi whisks him away. In the second scene, the fire and fire-fighting equipment, nowhere described in the novel, present viewers with high production values, "nature" out of control, and another example of intricate and apparently very effective technology.

_Double Indemnity_ (1944) is regarded by many as film noir's masterpiece. "In its time [it] was an outrageous picture," writes Baxter: "For the first time a sympathetic man, played by one of those gum-chewing wisecracking 'good guy' actors, portrayed a character who killed for lust and money. The film also broke new ground in its technique of revealing the killed in the opening scene, and telling the story in voice-over flashbacks" (122).

As a conjunction of eccentric talents, it is probably unrivalled: James M. Cain's novel as scripted by Raymond Chandler (who said, "Cain is the sort of faux naif I have always detested") and directed by Billy Wilder (who called Chandler "a virtuoso alcoholic"). But Wilder's casting—he hounded Fred MacMurray, who had never played any but personable roles, until he consented to play Walter Huff—and outsider's eye for the unique in California settings, combined in a work of genius. It is at once a distinctly Los Angeles film and one that embraces technology's ascendancy in _noir_.

As in _High Sierra_, a threatening setting appears under the opening credits—darkened, forbidding city streets: city has replaced nature as primal force. Cain began the novel on a lighter note, allowing his first-person narrator, Walter Huff, to give inside dope on sales techniques and to describe satirically the pseudo-Spanish decor of the "death house." As Wellman did in _The Public Enemy_, Wilder used a high-angle shot of Huff's office to suggest the nameless, faceless nature of urban, nine-to-five life. The Dictaphone into which Huff tells his story assumes the narrative task of Cain's foreshadowing and compounds the technological hegemony. Cain's protagonist had confessed his tale to the priestly figure of an actuary; Wilder's confesses to a machine.

Only five minutes into the film does Wilder allow the sunny Hollywood hills of Cain's first page to appear. This exterior is as Cain described it, but the interior of the film's house is cool and Gothic, rather than the tacky Tijuana decor that Cain satirized: attacking visual design values so pointedly might well call those of the film into question. The initial meeting between Huff and his _femme fatale_ lasts a great deal longer than in the novel, and when Wilder's protagonist departs he stops first at a drive-in, where he orders a beer, and then at a bowling alley to "roll a few lines and calm my nerves." These scenes are not in the novel; Cain sent Huff directly to his office. But Wilder's additions are brilliant, foregrounding what is only a minor theme in Cain, the extent to which marketing seems to have prefigured all of his protagonist's
desires. For Wilder (and his writer, Chandler), the California landscape had become marketing. They show Huff operating within a consumer economy that controls even his leisure.

Cain had written a number of scenes set "on the ocean road, about three miles above Santa Monica" and in Griffith Park; his idea of a good California setting was a geographic oddity, such as the moon rising over the Pacific, or scenic bridle trails in the Santa Monica Mountains. Wilder discarded these; he dispensed with nature altogether. He substituted a supermarket, in which Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck meet repeatedly to discuss their crime amid pyramids of cans and boxes of baby food. Murder, the film suggests ironically, is a series of marketing decisions about probabilities, combined with lucky breaks, such as whether your product appears at eye level. A passing patron, in fact, complains to MacMurray about her difficulty in reaching what she assumes is his line of baby food.

Cain, a lapsed Catholic, was fond of concluding his novels with scenes involving travel over water to a symbolic hell. In the novel he sent Huff off with Phyllis on a cruise ship, where they committed suicide together. Wilder discarded this in favor of thematic closure of the technological theme: at first he filmed MacMurray dying in the gas chamber at Folsom Prison, a set that cost Paramount $150,000 and took five days of shooting. But Wilder felt uneasy about it and decided to make the same statement in less emphatic fashion. Huff completes his Dictaphone roll as his boss and pursuer, Keyes, walks in. Keyes allows Huff to flee, predicting that he "won't make it as far as the door," where indeed the salesman collapses. In following out the predictive statistical portrait of life, the triumph of demographic research, Wilder technologized the retributive agency in Cain's novel.

This is perhaps the clearest example of what Fine termed "a vision of being cut off." Wilder's style allows no "world elsewhere." Double Indemnity offers only enjoyable techno-economic consumerism or technological determinism. It shows that setting may be subsumed by technology, just as directors control films by technique. The principle of technology is optimization, which is self-referential and closed. We may optimize, but we may not escape, our places. Most earlier film noir, whether The Public Enemy with its good brother, or High Sierra with its loveable cripple and devoted dog, or The Maltese Falcon with Spade's struggle between his code and his attraction to Brigid, offered us some way out of technological determinism. But Double Indemnity does not. It is a pure statement of Hollywood's belief in technology. Instead of man creating himself from/against a landscape, technology now composes or reduces character on the field of its own possibilities.

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Notes

1 For an overview, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 74-77; Bruce Crowther, Film Noir: reflections in a dark mirror (New York: Ungar, 1989) 7-39; Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," Awake in the Dark, ed. David Denby (New York: Random, 1977) 278-90; Jon Tuska, Dark Cinema (Westport: Greenwood, 1984) 149-99; Film Noir, eds. Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward (London: Secker, 1980) 3-9. Most film scholars agree implicitly that the canonicity of film noir, like that of literature, depends greatly on retrospect. They mention beguiling features of the classics that anticipate later films: The Maltese Falcon (1941) leads to The Big Sleep (1946) and to Chinatown (1980). But argument about canonicity in film has depended more on style and less on plot, character, than it does in literature. So debate about the origin of film noir turned to argument about whether or not the films constituted a genre or merely shared a style. This debate, like that over the term film noir, marginalized the literary debt. When French critic Jean-Pierre Chartier wrote "Les Americains aussi font les film noirs" in the November 1946 issue of La Revue du Cinema, World War II had prevented his countrymen from seeing The Maltese Falcon. Double Indemnity, Murder, My Sweet, and other American films. Chartier found these films as dark and brooding as the French Pepe le Moko (1937) and Quai des Brumes (1938). He
brought his readers up to date on American tough guy trends, which since the ’20s had attracted the French, especially writers such as Albert Camus (an early fan of Hammett). The comparison implied by “aussi” in Chartier’s title appears to be “American roman noir,” for as film scholars Silver and Ward point out, “the majority of the serie noir [detective novels published in France] were translations of . . . such authors as Hammett, Chandler, James M. Cain and Horace McCoy” (1). The source of American film noir was clear to Chartier; he doesn’t imply that the American films derive from French films or novels. But this faux pas, attributed to him by scholars who want to date the coinage to “cineaste Nino Frank earlier than 1946,” is the fog in which film noir loses its literary parents. Radical disavowals of descent eventually came about: “the narrative of these noir films possessed an economy of expression and a graphic impact substantially different from the hard-boiled novels or the pulp stories of the Black Mask magazine” write Silver and Ward (3). The source of film noir still seemed obvious to French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton in their pioneering genealogy of the genre. The “immediate source,” they wrote, “is clearly the American or English detective thriller novel . . . Hammett, Chandler, Cain, W. B. Burnett . . .” They said film noir was a “total submission by the cinema to literature” (quoted in Telotte, Voices in the Dark, 5). Indeed in Silver/Ward’s reference volume, of the thirty-six films noirs listed for the 1940-45 period, twenty-seven are based on published works, seven on unpublished works, and only two are original film scripts.


6 Diane Johnson, Dashiell Hammett, A Life (New York: Random, 1983) 39. The only “authorized” biographer to date, Johnson provides many details unavailable to earlier, equally industrious writers such as Richard Layman, Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett and William Nolan, Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook and Hammett: A Life at the Edge.

7 See Bill Nichols, Ideology and the Image (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981); Barry Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis (London: Starword, 1983) and Bordwell et al.

8 Silver and Ward 6.


11 According to J. Douglas Gomery, “By the time Warner’s brought out The Jazz Singer on October 6, 1927, it had invested S5 million in sound, including S500,000 in its first release. Quarterly losses declined from the $300,000 range to the $100,000 level and in 1928 Warner’s made $2 million. In 1929 Warner’s profits were an astonishing $14 million, more than double those of any other film company” (in The American Film Industry, ed. Balio [Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1976] 204, 209. See also 199-202). This sort of demonstration makes other companies take note. The industry adopted sound yesterday. The five big studios, which had planned to do nothing until there was a mature technology, adopted Western Electric’s Movietone system in February 1928. By autumn of the following year, notes Gomery, “the dominance of the talkies was virtually complete, with only small towns and rural areas still showing silent pictures. A myriad of technical problems were solved: studios were soundproofed, armies of technicians were hired to service the delicate equipment, and theaters were wired. Scriptwriters were replaced by playwrights skilled in writing dialogue. Actors without stage experience took voice lessons, and those unable to correct foreign accents, faulty diction, or unpleasant voices soon found themselves unemployed” (193). This is probably the most rapid change in narrative technique in history.


13 Sarah Kozloff, Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988). Kozloff applies narrative theory to film, but also employs William Labov’s Language in the Inner City, which defines narrative in six phases. She also employs the semiotics of Pierce, Eco, and Barthes, and Gennette’s taxonomy of narrators. She identifies irony as the chief mode of voice-over narration (102f).The information conveyed in the V.O. can parallel or counterpart the image, or to use Kozloff’s terms, be complementary or disparate, which allows more shadings and is less binary. An example she cites
is Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960), which opens with a V.O. by a narrator who quotes statistics and works for Consolidated Life of New York (104-05). Long shots of cityscapes then change to medium shots of large, organized office interiors, then to a close-up of Jack Lemmon as C.C. Baxter. "Most people call me 'Bud.'"

In another productive study, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1989), J.P. Telotte writes that "what makes the *noir* voice so distinctive is that the patterns of violation it speaks of also appear to be the attempts of our cultural and human order. That identity, of course, forestalls any easy or conventional imaginary resolution" (1). It seems that this violation is a diegetic force that interrupts a visual filmic silence. Telotte writes that its "narrative voice" makes noir different and allows it an "ambiguous posture on the borders of genre" (2).

14 Krutnick, cited by Telotte 22.
15 Crowther 28.

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