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FVM 150 340 - Development of Film Expression

The Dark Knight

Directed by: Christopher Nolan

DVD Chapter: 25 (1:36:03-1:36:56)

Aspect Ratio - 1.44 : 1

Although there are an endless array of scenes with which to analyse in-depth, I have chosen a scene from *The Dark Knight* (2008) because of the implicit and explicit uses of various methods of film language. These varying influences range from German Expressionist cinema to the portfolio of none other than Francis Bacon: a 20th century painter who specialized in Expressionism and Surrealism. The director of the film, Christopher Nolan, leads this particular set of contiguous shots in an engaging way with the use of Caravaggio lighting, hints of film noir, masterful uses of the rule of thirds, and the like exceptionally well. The muted color tones and preference for wide shots versus long shots are only two of many sly storytelling techniques implemented to convey the thematic story beats at play in the narrative.

Director Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, *The Departed*) once said in a lecture on the art and history of film that every filmmaker that claims to be an artist must be an art lover first. In the spirit of this idea, I will explain through the duration of this blog-post how every frame in my selected scene is a painting, so to speak. How every single shot is captured perfectly to reflect a thematic purpose that propels the story onward. Not only are there homages to other films of prestige such as *Heat* (1995), but even more so homages to classic works of art from such artists as the previously mentioned Francis Bacon to other more notable artists from times past. Without further ado in the words of the Joker himself, "here we go!" to the first frame of this series of shots.

Shot 1: Warehouse Explosion



Start Frame: [1:36:03] - End Frame: [1:36:08]

These twelve contiguous shots were shot in an aspect ratio of 1.44:1 and only certain scenes from the film were shot in the much larger aspect ratio of 2.35:1. This latter ratio was used when IMAX cameras were involved in the shooting of the opening bank robbery scene, the Hong Kong kidnapping scene, the chase scene involving the flipped over semi-truck, and certain cityscape shots throughout the narrative. None of which are apart of these specific twelve shots that are being analysed as of now.

The following collection of shots were all filmed at 24fps (frames per second) and the duration of this particular shot is five seconds long. The shot size of this first shot is a Cowboy Shot and this was implemented to not only establish a sense of space within the frame, but to also let the audience feel the scope of the warehouse explosion. An effect that jolts the viewer with a sense of urgency and creates a desire for our characters to make it out alive before the explosion goes off.

The sound is very ominous with little to no music at first until the explosion draws the viewer's attention. This was used to create a great effect that will convey the importance of the initial explosion in the story as a whole. This explosion and the meticulous attention tended to the timing of the explosion's sound only supports this idea because it tells the audience that the characters in this shot are about to be significantly changed for the furtherment of the plot at hand. This happens in a literal sense and in a more subdued, figurative sense. Of further note, the only other sounds in the scene are the footsteps of Batman and Harvey Dent, who are portrayed by Christian Bale and Aaron Eckhart respectively, as they walk through the puddled steps of the alley. Again, the focus of this sound is drawing attention to the shock generated from the explosion. Once the explosion happens, the only sound is of the fanning flames and the shrieks of a suffering man.

Right off the bat, the scene in question guides the audience by focusing on the open door of the warehouse, subtly lighting the two figures clutching each other as they leave. Also, the dominant contrast is even stronger as the shot goes from start to finish. With Batman on the left side of the screen, he embraces the darkest parts of the frame, which symbolizes how he represents the dark knight of the movie. While on the right side of the screen, Harvey Dent is always in the light, representing how he is the white knight of the movie. A

duality is at play with the contrasting sides of the frames. This light is from inside the warehouse door pouring out from the entryway to the explosion, which takes place on the right side of the frame. The dominant contrast is drawing the viewer's eye not just to the two men, but specifically to Harvey Dent since he has the greatest character change during the sequence.

The two characters move from right to left in the frame at first, but once the explosion rattles them, they fall back a tad to the right. The first motion from right to left signifies the increasing danger into the darker unknown that lies ahead for our heroes. The explosion then triggers a change in the motion because the two stumble back into the right side of the frame, which lets the audience know that this dramatic character moment will greatly affect the course of the film. These two men are forever changed. As the late Roger Ebert would put it "The future seems to live on the right, the past on the left." Even so, the two men want to go back to the way things used to be, but fate had other intentions because the future is now forever fixed with this sudden character change in the two of them.

The character's movement is of interest to analyse because they exit the warehouse to avoid the impending bomb going off and the pair crosses the X-axis from left to right, then right to left. Resulting in the ever so slightest decline from up to down the Y-axis as they make their way to a set of stairs. Yet when the explosion occurs, the two are propelled forward in the Z-axis to the right a bit and in a way into the audience. As if to say that they are coming straight for us with the explosion not too far behind.

Once again it is important to notice how intimately Batman and Harvey Dent cling to one another as these two prominent figures morph into one tormented knight, so to speak. Both conflicted with their previous choices and are respectively at a social distance from us, but immediately move forward, towards the camera, creating a personal distance between us. The camera tracks with the two men and follows them on their grueling journey into the darkness of the night. The movement goes as follows: tracking left, then tracking right, yet at the same time pushing in with most likely a dolly of some sort.

The angle is eye level adding more to the realism of coming alongside these heroes on their tumultuous task of stopping the unstoppable Joker on this hallowed eve of terror. It makes the viewer feel as if they are right there in the midst of the chaotic action. The lens is a wide angle which over extends the Z-axis, only furthering the scope of the dire situation. The depth of field adds to this by having Batman and Harvey Dent in the foreground, the warehouse in the midground, and the alley in the background. A deep focus is used to emphasize the two protagonists stumbling in defeat into the blurred blackness.

The shot is illuminated with a very dense set of low key lighting that infers the tone of the film in general. The lighting is actually very reminiscent of film noir of the 1940s era in cinema and captures the theme beautifully with the bonus effect of high contrast lighting of the shadows in the shot. The color usage is very minimal. The white lights that align along the left side of the screen, the doorway as they move right to left, and lastly the massive explosion from the background forcing itself onto the characters in the foreground. All with the intent to really push the explosion of vibrant fire jumping at us. With it's variations of orange hues, the Z-axis is contracted and restricts our characters into a very small area of the setting they inhabit.

The screen composition is structurally sound with a strong leaning towards the upper right corner of the shot and makes the rule of thirds very dense on the right side as well because of the persistent framing to the right. Giving the scene an unbalanced and open formed shot. The leading line is formed using the warehouse gutter in the upper right side of the frame and ends in the upper left side. The editing style is very much cutting on the action of Batman reacting to Harvey Dent's freak out over the fire burning his facial flesh. A stunning moment that hides the simple cut to the second shot of the contiguous sequence of shots. This specific shot actually starts and stops by cutting on action. Beginning with cutting to Batman carrying Harvey Dent out of the warehouse, but then cuts on Harvey Dent turning side to side on the ground.

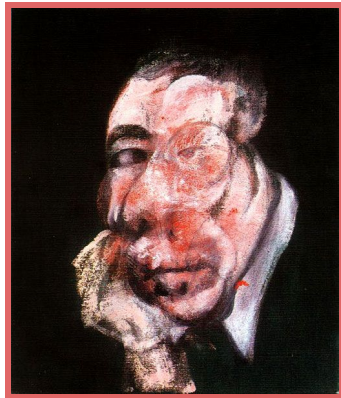
The time within the shot is presented in real time to make the moment as real and surprising as possible to the audience with the underlying subtext carrying this conceptual idea. That said conceptual idea being the hopelessness of the situation that this pair of protagonists finds engulfing them in this moment. This hopeless situation is brutally being handed to them by the infamous Joker through a series of fatal, but intimate moral dichotomies of torment brilliantly conveyed by the acting chops of the late Heath Ledger in this movie. There are no black and white decisions here. No morally upright actions that the heroes can make to stop the antagonist, that is, the Joker. The only option for the two is to make their way through the moral grey that inevitably leads to destruction and moral decay.

Shot 2: Burning Man



Start Frame: [1:36:09] - End Frame: [1:36:11]

As has been mentioned previously, the aspect ratio is 1.44:1 and the duration of this next shot is two seconds at 24fps. The shot size for this second shot is a close-up for the very reason that it helps the audience sympathise with the character that is in agonising pain. The shot being so close on the figure forces the viewer to see nothing but the excruciating character moment in this thematic dynamic before us. This is the defining character moment for Harvey Dent's transformation into the infamous Two-Face. There is a special emphasis on part of Nolan's direction for the viewer to remember this moment vividly. A moment that will permanently mark Harvey Dent as a character in the film. Both in the literal and figurative sense.



The sound is also of note. All that can be heard is the anguish of this frail man that's simply burning away. The lack of sound is the key in this shot because mixed with the imagery, it conveys a silent horror of sorts. All we hear is the flames engulfing Harvey Dent as his world burns away. There is an apparent dominant contrast here drawing the viewer's gaze to Harvey Dent's facial frenzy of grueling agony. The only lighting within this shot happens to be the fire engulfing Dent's face. An effect that catches our eye immediately.

As was referred to in the last shot, this one follows the same method for lighting the scene. The left side is utter darkness, while the right is a smothered array of orange hues surrounding Dent. This method is a homage to the works of the late Francis Bacon who displayed this similar method of splitting his art into darkness versus splashes of color. The inspiration behind the creation of Two-Face in this film comes from this specific piece of art entitled *HEAD III*. It takes an ordinary man and blurs him into a tormented behemoth of suffering.

The character movement is rapid and fast, but the effect is slowed down a tad which causes extra focus to the motion in frame. It is reduced to pay attention to the suffering of Dent's moment of absolute weakness. He shakes his head left to right twice, which symbolizes the dramatic torment of our protagonist rushing across the X-axis. At the same rate, his hands enter the frame going up the Y-axis in hopes of stopping the fiery flames, yet he realizes that all he can do at the moment is burn. Whereas motion is very present in both the X-axis and the Y-axis, the movement in the Z-axis is noticeably absent. Possibly because we are observing at such a close point of view that having the Z-axis condensed helps push Harvey Dent towards the audience.

The character's proxemics and position is noteworthy because he is almost dead-center, but sways to the left more so than the right side of frame. The distance is strikingly intimate giving a sense that we are hovering over him like Batman currently is, but not quite Batman's POV. We'll go in detail on that further along. The camera movement is fixed on Dent and locked in place, only continuing the idea of demanding the audience to pay attention to this important shot. The stationary shot implemented is for the shock value of Dent's own horror to being burned alive.

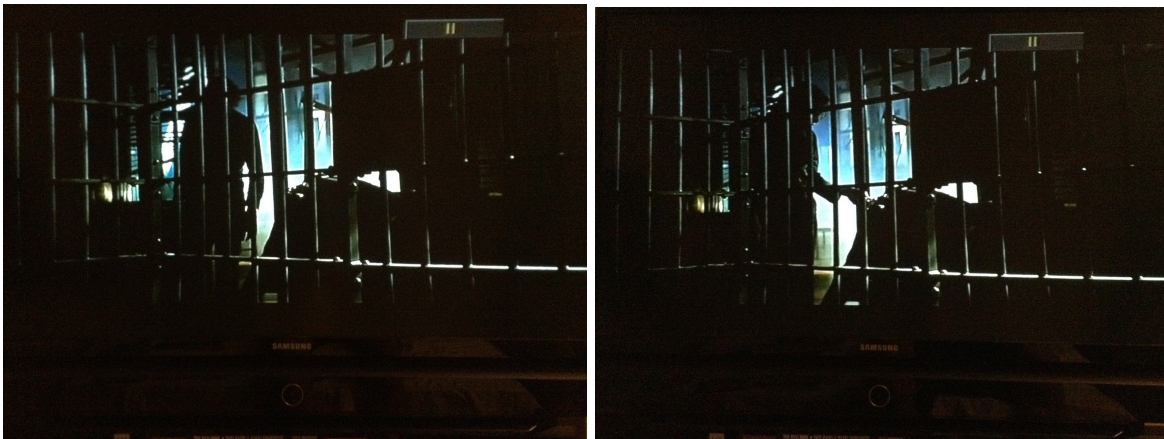
The camera angle is a combination of a Bird's Eye View and a POV because it starts masquerading as a POV of Batman trying to fan out the fire on Dent's face. As he enters from the right to the left, we then can infer that it is indeed a Bird's Eye View. The lens is a long angle, resulting in Harvey Dent being blown up in frame into absolute prominence.

The depth of field is shallow focus since all attention is paid to Dent's burning face. The lighting is low key with the single motivated source being the fire upon the right side of Dent's face. It's shadows likewise are in a high contrast to show how the world around is fading away. The color usage is intense with a vast set of orange and yellow enveloping the right side of the screen, while the left side remains with little to no color. Still running with the idea that these two characters are hopelessly outmatched by the Joker.

The screen composition is fairly balanced with closed form as Harvey Dent's head tears through the Rule of Thirds, mostly in the mid-quadrants. The object in frame, Harvey Dent's head, is very much centered. Although it does sway, it still remains the focal point of the piece. The editing style starts by cutting on the action of Harvey Dent spinning in writhing misery and then Batman's own body cuts the shot as he moves from right to left within the shot. This movement is thus causing a wipe of sorts, but with Batman's own body. Even time itself is brought to a slower beat because of a reduced sense of motion. This in effect, cues the audience in on feeling as if this moment is longer than it really is.

In essence, Christopher Nolan in this brief moment of the film wants us to feel and have sympathy for our broken character who has lost it all; his future wife to be, his own body, and the like. It's a moving shot that captures what it's like to have everything, yet not be able to do a thing as it all burns away.

Shot 3: Joker Silhouette



Start Frame: [1:36:12] - End Frame: [1:36:15]

The duration of this shot is 3:12 at 24fps and is filmed using a Cowboy Shot. This special shot is used a second time because it now parallels the heroes with the villain: the Joker. A menace of unspeakable horrors who literally haunts an empty jailhouse. This way of showing the Joker confidently walk through the jailhouse he just wrecked versus the two main heroes clutching to each other fleeing from a warehouse that's a literal ticking time bomb is a striking comparison indeed. Nolan uses this effect to show how much larger than life the Joker truly is when compared to that world he inhabits..

The sound design and sound editing in this shot adds more than the previous shot. In this third shot, we hear the sparks of the broken jailhouse that was just wrecked by a phone bomb and the buzzing of the broken light bulbs. As these ambient noises are being heard, the score of the film returns at first quietly, but begins to become more present in the scene as it progresses.

The dominant contrast in this specific shot is the shadowed outline of the Joker. The subsidiary contrast is the bars of the jail cell that are parallel with the Joker. The outline signifying the unknown danger coming towards the audience, while the jail cell bars symbolize how the Joker is so flamboyantly open, yet hardly a thing is known about him. The character movement of the Joker in this shot is memorable because of his "couldn't care

less” attitude to the whole situation. When just a few moments ago, the jail house blew up, along with two warehouses. His demeanor throughout the upcoming few shots is that of complete control and dominance. He knows he has won. It’s the swagger of a victor ready to literally take the keys to the kingdom, or at least to the jail cell housing none other than Lau, a very high up Chinese gangster played expertly by Chin Han.

The proxemics and positioning of the Joker is from a social distance as he travels slowly through the Z-axis and then grabs the cell door keys along the X-axis. Oddly enough, the Y-axis remains untouched as far as character movement is concerned. He enters the fractured jailhouse, which causes a sense of fear in the viewer because of the way he enters the room. The psychopathic stance of the Joker adds to this dimension as he strangely turns to find the keys. All in the hopes that the viewer is scared of this imposing threat coming towards them.

The camera is at a stationary position as the character displays all of the apparent movement on screen. This leads to an effect of fear because the audience can only sit there as the Joker tauntingly plays with a set of keys. The camera is at a very minor tilt that embodies the POV of Lau who is sitting in his cell, clutching to the bars. This shot is filmed with a wide angle lense that results in subtle moments sticking out more so than with a normal lense.

The shot is set in a shallow focus, blurring all of the dark shades together, excluding the light in the farthest part of the Z-axis in frame. This result forms a sense of chaos and uneasiness. The lighting is very reminiscent of classic Expressionist Films with their low key lighting and unmotivated sources. All of which figure into the general tone of the film. The usage of color is quite minimal and is used to great effect. The blue hue that reverberates from the backlight is used to make a great end product that exemplifies the illuminated Joker. Also, the subtle grays add another layer of grit to the shot for an even stronger image.

The screen is composed with a strong presence of leading lines that guide the viewer to what the Joker is doing within the narrative. These leading lines are constructed with the jail cell bars and the rule of thirds is used well in this shot because the Joker inhabits the left side of the screen. Thus leaving shadowy darkness to the right side of the screen. As the shot continues, our eyeline goes from the top of the Y-axis, down the Y-axis to the midpoint, and then to the right of the X-axis.

The editing style is very much so cut on the action from start to finish. The first cut is from Harvey Dent’s close-up of him rolling on the floor to the Joker walking towards Lau’s cell. It cuts right as the Joker lifts the keys up with his finger. The editing the sequence as a whole is a montage of sorts where three to five second long snippets are shown back-to-back to convey the narrative in a shortened amount of time. During the shot, the time is set in real time, although the case can be made that as we go shot-by-shot, time is being slowly condensed as the film rises in intensity. The subtext is that the Joker knows he has Lau in his back pocket, that either Rachel or Harvey are dead because only one of them could survive, and he can successfully escape the jail with little to no resistance.

Shot 4: Lau’s Jail Cell



Start Frame: [1:36:16]; End Frame: [1:36:17]

At 24fps and with another Cowboy Shot in this sequence, we see what the Joker is awaiting to unwrap. Yet this is not a typical Cowboy Shot that the DP uses here. Whereas most Cowboy Shots are of a figure standing upright, in this Cowboy Shot Lau is crouched down clinging to the jail cell bars. This not only shows the environment that Lau is in currently, but it helps show why the Joker is still in the jail. He could have left by now, but he decides to stay and get something. Now the audience knows what exactly the Joker is letting out.

The sound is again very miniscule. The score may be rising, but besides the score of the movie, the only other sound present is the footsteps of the Joker walking on the concrete floor. A haunting sound for the character Lau nonetheless for underestimating the Joker during the First Act of the film. The sounds are very few and far between, but when they come the story hinges on their presence.

The dominant contrast is Lau who is literally dead center in the frame. He is the absolute focus of the Joker currently for his next scheme. He is the first thing the viewer zooms in on and then the next thing would be the subsidiary contrast of his environment around him, mostly the cell doors though. The character movement is at a complete stop. Lau is stricken with fear of the explosion, as well as the Joker who caused the explosion. He knows after all that he has done previously in the movie is going to get him right back. Lau is facing the Joker and can only cling in terror. He is about a social distance from the viewer and not likely to get any closer. He is trying to stay away from the Joker as much as possible in the given circumstances.

The camera is stationary and mimics the emotions that Lau is going through, yet it could be interpreted that this is the Joker's POV. While that is a good, educated guess, Lau's eyeline is off a bit to the left side of the frame and is looking him in the eye. The only brave thing Lau can amount to in the shot is stare at the embodiment of all his fears: the Joker. The angle is at a high angle telling the audience that Lau has no control and is very vulnerable .

A wide angle lense is used to help make Lau feel farther away than he actually is in real life. Causing there to be a distance between the Joker and Lau, which exaggerates their relationship. The depth of field is forged using a shallow focus that creates a sense of hollowed light surrounding Lau from a nearby window of

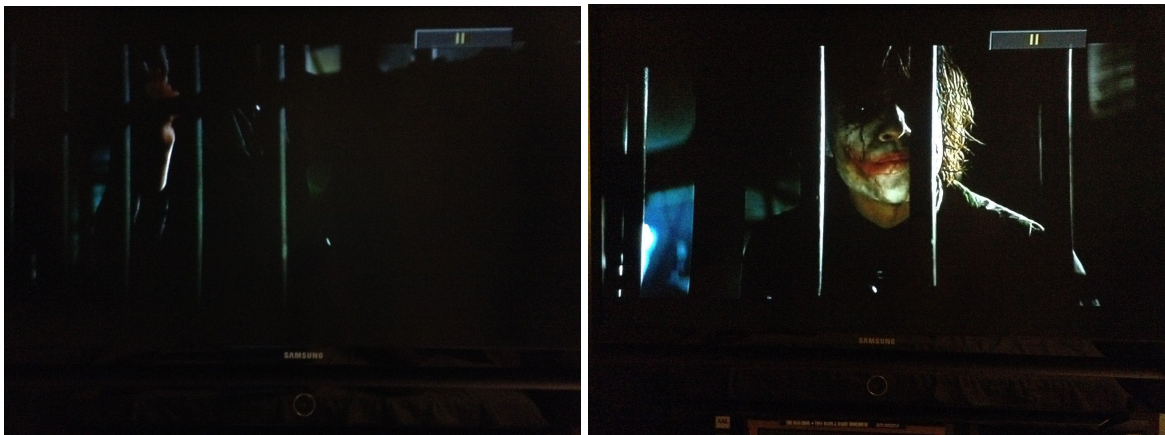
some sort in the upper left corner. It is as if the Joker has found his grand prize of hidden treasure. The reason he was there all along was for Lau and the lens is devised expertly here.

The lighting is very motivated with a window shining brightly upon Lau in his cell, which in a way illuminates him as a character of vital importance. The environment is surrounded by low key lighting and likewise has low contrast in the shot. All of the lighting that is used is to help keep the visual aesthetic consistent throughout the narrative. The color used in this shot is a tinted goldish brown mixed with gray. Lau is dressed in lighter colored clothing like white and gray, while the Joker is dressed in more subdued colors like dark green, dark grey, etc. It just goes to show their conflicting personalities. The Joker is a chaotic anarchist who never has a plan and Lau is a well dressed, numbers guy who masquerades as a tough guy to other clients. Their differing color palettes play with this power struggle.

For the screen composition, the leading lines go straight in Lau's direction and center in on him. Concerning the rule of thirds, Lau is at the very center of the frame which invokes a sense of isolation and loneliness in the audience. Lau is in a closed form as he is literally boxed in by an arrangement of cell door bars, plus the shot he is the centerpiece of is extremely balanced. The editing style is simple since the shot is so short and works as a reverse shot in a way, but with little to no reaction for it to be considered a reaction shot. Although, Lau's reaction could be his inaction in doing anything against the Joker.

The time is set in real time and is neither compressed nor expanded because it's such a small snippet that keeping the time real adds to the thematic dynamic of the scene as a whole. As far as subtext goes, Lau is first known as the big bad who takes care of all of the other bad dudes money, but the Joker comes in and ruins his whole scheme by offering to kill the Batman. Long story short, Lau is captured and now the Joker is going to use him as his little pawn to carry out his own schemes.

Shot 5: Joker Jail-Cell Bars



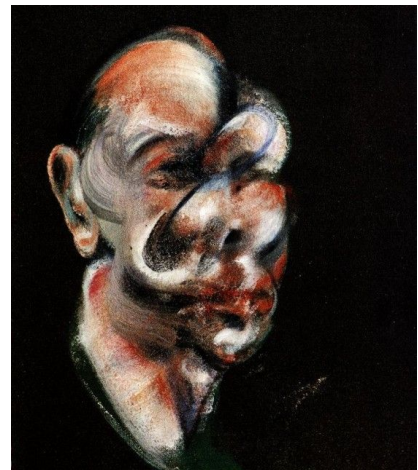
Start Frame: [1:36:18] - End Frame: [1:36:21]

After the Cowboy Shot of Lau attempting to hide in fear, there is this reverse shot of Lau's greatest fear stepping into the light: the Joker uncaged. The shot duration is three seconds and is a Close-Up of first the Joker's hand jingling the jail-cell keys, before turning into a Close-Up of the Joker's bust between the bars. The primary

motivation behind this shot clearly is the vantage point of Lau as we shall see confirmed in the shot to follow this one. At first he notices the keys in the Joker's hand as he rings them aloud, then looks at the Joker puzzled. It's a transitioning of focus on Lau's part: first the jail keys and lastly the Joker.

The music continues to swell in typical Hans Zimmer fashion as well as other ambient background sounds: the sparks of the post-jail explosion setting and the footsteps of the Joker coming towards Lau's cell. The reason for a few other sounds is to pay tribute to the two sounds that matter most here: the jingling of the keys by the Joker and the Joker's dialogue. By having the Joker jingle the keys it resembles how he has the control in the situation and the power. Lau is subject to his will, which is a scary situation to be in for sure. The Joker likewise adds a quip like usual with his "Hello there" to just rub in the fact that he has all the power. It's an utterly intense and frightening shot that gives a look into how others perceive the Joker.

As was mentioned earlier on shot 2 concerning the artistic influences of Francis Bacon on Christopher Nolan's work on *The Dark Knight*, Nolan himself has publicly stated that Bacon was a major influence and can be seen again only moments later from Dent's shining white knight being tested with the fires of heartache to the encapsulation of fear embodied in the Joker. Here we have for reference sake the *Heads I* by Francis Bacon.



The Joker visually is much more inspired by Bacon's works versus the aesthetic of Two-Face (Harvey Dent) when observing his gallery of work. Notice the smearing of the color scheme on both the *Heads I* and the Joker's CU that we have here in view. The darkened eyes, the red lips, powdery white cheeks, string-like hair, and the list goes on. The dominant contrast brilliantly highlights this fact by shining on his face directly, but only half since a sliver is covered by a jail-cell bar, while the upper horizontal portion of his face is slowly darkened by the nearby shadows of the atmosphere. As if to say, here is the Joker, but only a hint of who he really is. It's deceptive for the audience because we obviously know who the Joker is, yet feel distant to him because he's not in clear view. Thus, highlighting the fact that throughout the film, no one ever finds out who he really is and they never will. He is just the ghost of the gray morality he preaches combined with the mindset of an antagonistic anarchist who wants to watch the world burn. It's a startling frame to consider.

The movement of the Joker is very characteristically and ironically, clown-like: taunting, treating everyone as inferior, and most of all looking down on others. It is unnerving the way he parades throughout the shot and the scene as a whole as if whatever happens has no effect on him. He makes his circumstances, his circumstances do not make him. The Joker's movement goes in a left to right motion along the X-axis depicting the Joker's overwhelming success in the movie as an unstoppable force that so far in the film has been unapproachable by or protagonists.

The proxemics and positioning of the Joker is that he is exceptionally close to the camera as he is almost looking at it, but instead looks at Lau. The two characters are merely feet from one another. Maybe not even a yard as the two are very personally, almost intimately, distant from each other. The same distance is in fact closer for us as the audience where the Joker is quite intimately close conveying a need for us or him to back up a little, but neither do. An awkward, yet tantalizing exchange of space and blocking between the two actors at work.

The camera moves in a diagonal motion at first. It follows the keys jingling in the Joker's hand, but then travels upward to the Close-Up of the Joker himself against the jail-cell bars. Since the perspective is that of Lau's, the audience follows his perspective as he desperately wants to leave. He looks at the keys, but then is puzzled because the Joker is coming towards him with the keys. The shot is puzzling not only for Lau, but for the audience as well because watching from his perspective we have no idea what the Joker is going to do next.

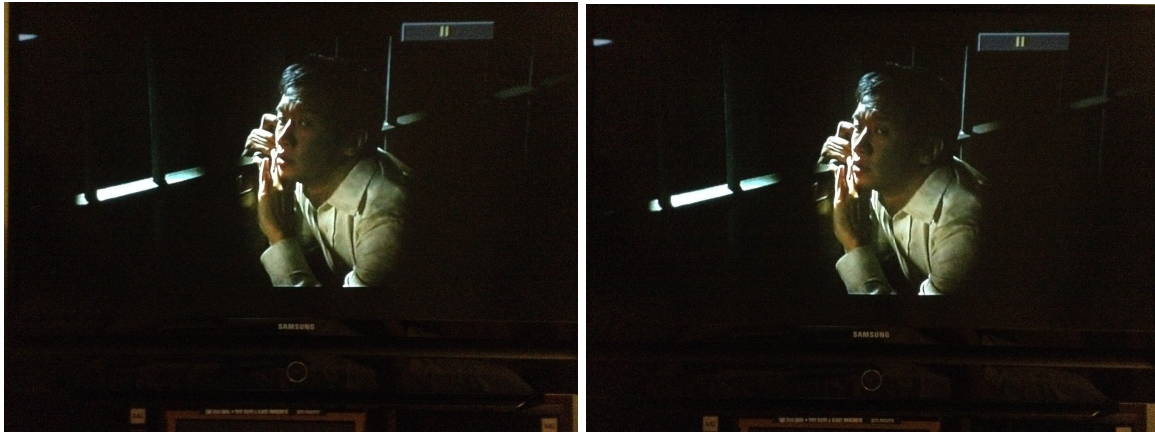
The camera angle is at a slight tilt upwards showing Lau's POV perspective of the Joker. The minor high angle that is used signifies again how much larger than life the Joker truly is compared to those around him. The lens is a wide lense as is the personal preference of Nolan, which is used to accentuate the background and the foreground' depth with the movement along the Z-axis. The depth of field is in shallow focus to zero in on the Joker's profile bust, as well as blur out other distracting visuals that may take away from having all of our direct attention on the Joker himself.

The lighting is masterful craftsmanship in this certain shot. The lighting perfectly displays and showcases just how unknowable the Joker truly is. The low key lighting helps illuminate the Joker by directing all of the light facing him. With the motivated source being the same window that lights Lau as well. The color usage is a lot brighter than in previous shots since the Joker's facial makeup is clearly seen. As was noted previously, the Joker's makeup is a smeared array of blacks, greens, whites, and reds. The jacket is green and purple, while the surrounding set is a contrast of darker hues of gray. Thus allowing the Joker to pop out of the frame.

The screen composition is very well thought out with the jail-cell bars becoming leading lines that guide us to the Joker. It is a closed form that is very balanced, but not equally balanced as the left eye of the Joker is covered by a jail-cell bar, while the right is uncovered. A centered piece that is mostly inhabiting the upper central square within the rule of thirds. The editing style is a simple cut in and cut out, since this is a rendition of a shot-reverse-shot sequence. The emphasis for this shot and the last two is on editing, rather than mise en scene.

The time is played out in real time with nothing more than what each character in the shot perceives in real time. The subtext is quite simple: the Joker wants Lau, but Lau does not know why, which will be discussed further down the line with the next shot in this sequence of ten contiguous shots.

Shot 6: Lau Reaction Shot



Start Frame: [1:36:22] - End Frame: [1:36:23]

The duration of this shot is a mere second and the shot size is a Medium Shot of Lau in the same position he was in from the previous fourth shot. The reasoning behind having the whole scene set-up the same, except the size of the shot is to display how Lau has the Joker's attention. He is wondering why the Joker has the jail-cell keys and is talking to him who is his sworn enemy. On the other side of this point, the Joker's focus is on Lau, which is now confirmed by the push in of sorts from a Cowboy Shot establishing the setting to zooming into a Medium Shot that shows why the Joker is here: he wants Lau. Why? Leverage over Batman and any other opposition that may try to stop his psychedelic plans further in the feature.

The sound in the shot continues from the shot preceding this one with the Joker dilly-dallying with the keys as he makes his way to Lau. The music is swelling, Lau has no audible dialogue, although he does make a "huh?" motion with his facial reaction to the Joker intruding on his broken imprisonment. It is a quite subdued shot sound-wise, relying almost exclusively on the score provided by Hans Zimmer. But this adds to the confusion of Lau in the Joker's actions that just took place.

The dominitory contrast is Lau and the bar he is grasping onto, while the subsidiary contrast is the bars that frame him in the forefront of the screen. The idea behind the choice is to really make it clear not only what the Joker's want is in this scene exchange, but how Lau feels and thinks about the Joker's course of action: confusion mixed with outright fear. Now the character movement ties into this perfectly with how Lau showcases his state as a character. Reacting to the Joker's action with some of the most ingeniously faint physical expressions. Han conveys plainly what Lau is feeling and thinking about his current situation with the simple usage of facial cues. Whether it be the scrunting of the eyebrows, squinting of the eyes, and the scrunching of the forehead. All amount to a reaction shot that tells the audience not only how Lau feels about his current situation, but of how we as the audience are supposed to feel.

The character Lau is very close to the screen in the proxemic sense and his positioning is a personal distance with the Joker as he stands by his jail-cell. The same distance is made between the camera and with Lau as he faces the Joker. The camera is stationary and has no movement during this shot. Just a straight-on of Lau's response to the Joker's antics.

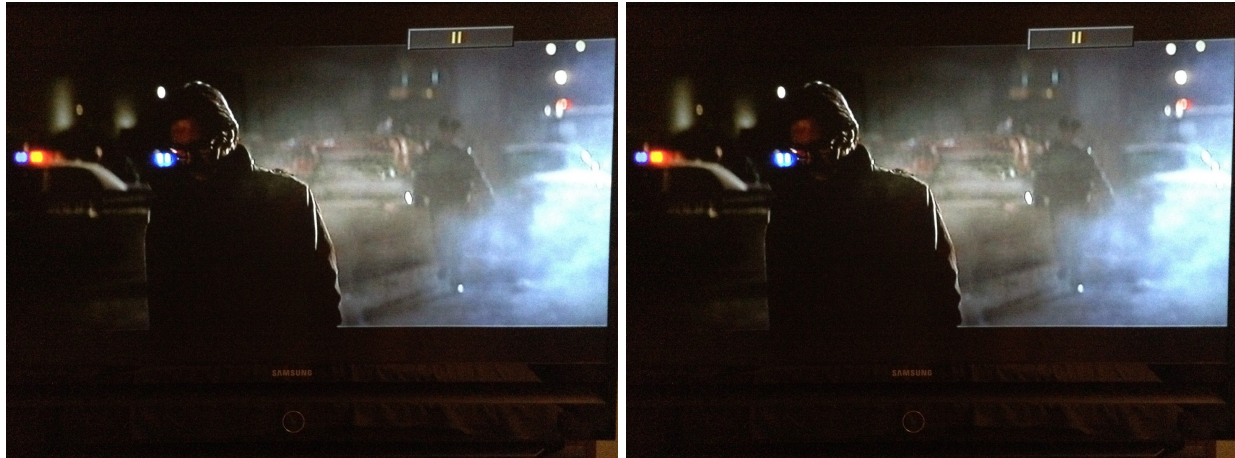
The camera angle is at a high angle, but in the slimmest sense as it is the Joker's POV of Lau currently. This aspect also plays into the power struggle taking place unspokenly between the two as from the Joker's perspective, Lau is no threat. He can do nothing to stop the Joker's attempts at anarchy. The lens is a telephoto lense as it compresses the space around Lau to make him feel enclosed by the physical barriers of his jail-cell, but also by the psychological entanglements of his inner self-conscious dealing with the ramifications of the Joker wishing to release him.

The depth of field is in shallow focus to bring the viewer's attention to that of Lau's dismay over the series of events that have brought him to this emotional state. The shot is lit using a low key lighting to draw all of the attention to Lau and his outward expression of his inner struggles. The light as mentioned on Shot 4 is from a motivated source that is most likely a window of some kind or a whole in the infrastructure due to the jail explosion caused earlier by the Joker for his grand escape. The color scheme and palette is a combination of brown, gray, and white hues that reverberate along the shot forming a well-balanced scene. The frame is very unified and all colors implemented are there to form this unification of a well-balanced shot color-wise.

The screen composition is very proportional and centered as there is a frame within a frame on screen. As the jail-cell bars themselves create an additional frame that boxes in Lau as he must already feel boxed in with this close encounter with the strange Joker near him. Lau is like past shots the centermost aspect of the frame. There is however a evolution from Shot 3 to this current shot in that the camera zooms closer and closer in. At first, both Lau and the Joker are set inside of Cowboy Shots, but then the Joker is in a Close-Up, while Lau is in a Medium Shot. As if to say that the Joker is closely examining his prize like an animal under inspection that has no say in the matter.

The editing style is pretty clear-cut with both the beginning of the shot and the end of the shot being sewn together with simple cuts on action. Shot 5: the Joker jingles a pair of keys. Shot 6: Lau expresses terrified confusion. Shot 7: Commissioner Gordon walks by in sorrow. From action-to-action, the whole scene is actually cut this way to increase the intensity of the situation and keep the film moving in a fluid, forward motion. Time is set in real time, it is neither contracted or expanded for thematic purposes. The subtext is hence a look inside the mind of a coward facing his greatest fears brought to the forefront of his life when the Joker approaches him with a pair of jail-cell keys. The Joker ready to claim his prize at Lau's expense and to his own personal gain. Alas, Lau's reaction is justified and understood as a messy combination of terror and confusion.

Shot 7: Commissioner Gordon & Police Backlights



Start Frame: [1:36:24] - End Frame: [1:36:25]

This next shot is Commissioner Gordon at the aftermath of Rachel Dawes' unexpected death due to an explosion set up by the Joker. The duration of this seventh shot is just a second and is a Medium Shot. It's a powerfully sombering scene of a man who usually always has it together, broken by the recent tragedy of Rachel Dawes' death because his men could not save Rachel in time. The Medium Shot helps set the mood and tone of what this story is like from the perspective of the police. Not only do we, the audience, see this tragedy from Gordon's viewpoint, but it also helps tell the audience exactly where we are in the movie: the warehouse that Rachel was being held hostage until the warehouse exploded.

The sound in this shot has more layers to it than the last one as the heroes of this film are attempting to recover from their loss to the Joker. We hear the sirens of the police patrol cars, Gordon walking slowly as he is deep in thought, the walking of another police officer following behind Gordon, and the still swelling music of the film's score by Hans Zimmer. The movie's score has slowly become a haunting and chilling soundtrack as Commissioner Gordon makes his way on-screen in a meditative manner.

The dominant contrast in this shot is Gordon as the rest of the shot is the subsidiary contrast surrounding Gordon. His presence instantaneously catches our eye as he dominates the foreground of the shot. The rest of the shot is noticed next as a landscape of policemen who failed at their one job: protecting others. The logic as to why Nolan wants the viewer to notice Gordon first is because he is the guiding character in this shot. He reflects what the viewer should be feeling and portrays the anguish on-screen.

With that, we come to the character's movement within this brief shot. Since Gordon is the dominant contrast in the shot, we'll observe his movement first. Gary Oldman flawlessly exhibits what Commissioner Gordon is going through with some little mannerisms. He has a thoughtful, yet slow pace as he wanders as if he is walking off the pain of not getting there soon enough. His hands are deeply rooted in his pocket and his head tilted downward in grief. It's a sobering shot that shows a snippet of the life the police have to live every single day. The police officer behind Gordon walks behind Gordon looking busy as if this is not the first time something like this has happened in this line of work. Just another night on the job.

Gordon's proxemics on screen is that he is facing the audience at a social distance, while the police officer behind him is also facing us, but at a much farther, public distance from us. We immediately connect with Gordon because his positioning is closer and in focus, whereas the police officer is distant and out of focus. He travels from right screen to left screen, which can logically mean he is pondering the past puddled with pain. As Gordon is contemplating the consequences of his actions, the world he lives in as a man of blue blood becomes distant in this troubling time.

The camera tracks along with Gordon as he paces and stays on him as the rest of the things moving in frame try to keep up (i.e. the police officer). It is him that the DP is most concerned with following, and as such so are we as the viewer. The camera crosses the X-axis as it tracks just like Gordon from right to left. The emotion of the tracking motion is the cold, hard reality that even though he may try, Gordon can never save everyone. Lives will always be lost in this line of livelihood. The angle of the camera is at eye level as if we were there witnessing this moment ourselves in person. Also, in the style of a tracking shot, the camera shakes a bit. Since it is not as smooth as a pan that mostly sits on some sort of a tripod and thus will shake a bit, this causes the film to look like we are physically present with this group of policemen.

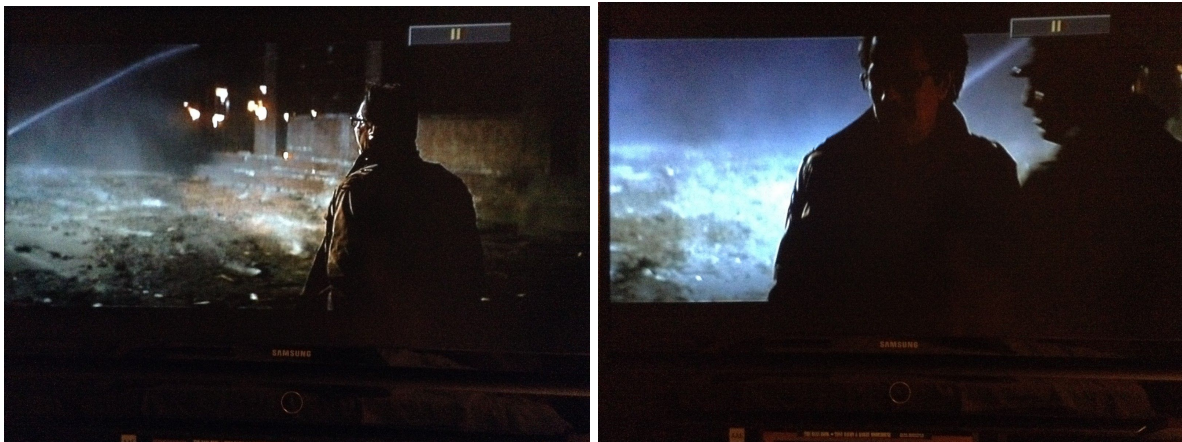
The shot was captured on a wide lense since the space within the Z-axis has been stretched in all directions for a theatre-like experience or a stage play. This effect helps transform the setting into something much larger than in real life and conveys the overly large emotions that the characters are going through. The depth of field is in shallow focus to support the idea that in Gordon's perspective, the world is but a blur as he copes with the situation that just happened with the passing away of Rachel. This shot can be referred to as a follow-focus as we do so following Gordon walking across the ruins of the warehouse.

As has been the case for the majority of these shots, the lighting in this shot is low key with low contrast. It's a shadowy world that Gordon wanders through pondering what to do next. His whole world is merely a blur as he thinks upon Rachel's passing and the flood of emotions that come with the process of grief. There is an unmotivated light to the right of screen that is added for the purpose of making the scenery a shadowy, fog-like atmosphere. The color usage is a fusion of blues, reds, whites encompassing Gordon that conflict with his inordinately brown and gray attire. It is meant to draw attention to Gordon who is far removed from the police backdrop and instead is thinking on the the series of events that have led to this moment in the film. As the colors encircle Gordon, he remains in dark shades and hues, which plays into his character's current emotional and mental state.

The screen is composed with a heavily balanced frame along the X-axis as the patrol cars are lined up back-to-back along the middle of the screen. Then there is Gordon who is in the very forefront of the frame, yet off to the left as the out of focus police officer is off to the right. Gordon at a slow, thoughtful pace as the police officer is at a fast, determined pace. Thus, creating a dynamic composition on screen. So as the horizontal (X-axis) and vertical (Y-axis) planes are combined, they create a shape on-screen that resembles a cross of salem on its side. With two prominent figures walking from right to left across a horizontal axis of patrol cars and in the middle of the two men is yet another patrol car, albeit darker than the others.

The shot is edited similarly to the other shots in that it cuts on the action of Lau's facial reaction to the Joker's antics, but then cuts on the walking of Gordon and a police officer walking across screen. The shot also ends with this same action and movement on-screen. This helps with keeping a consistent sense of story and has an emphasis on editing, which happens to play to one of Nolan's strengths. The time is set in real time showing Gordon's side of what is taking place in the story unfolding on-screen. With all of this said, the setting is sad and somber as the valiant heroes of this tale have lost badly to the infamous Joker who is just taunting them in their defeat. No one, but the Joker has a smile on their face on this very dark night.

Shot 8: Commissioner Gordon & the Burning Warehouse



Start Frame: [1:36:26] - End Frame: [1:36:39]

The duration of this shot is two seconds long and is a Medium Shot. The reason for this decision concerning the shot size is to show where Gordon is in the film setting-wise and to help understand where he is not only in the physical sense, but in the mental sense especially. The shot is close enough to let the audience connect and understand Gordon's worldview, but is far enough to set up the world he lives in on-screen.

The shot is much longer than the previous shots displayed and thus has a lot more to it in general than past shots. As a whole, it differs from the already mentioned shots within this sequence of contiguous shots in that it relies heavily on sound, while the other shots rely heavily on visual cues. The focus for this shot's analysis will deal with the sound primarily. The score takes a dip as it submits to the crucial revelation that Gordon has concerning the Joker's plans in the movie.

In the background ambience, a fire hoze seen on-screen can be heard putting out a fire on the burnt warehouse. The dialogue is the key to this shot here because of the vital information revealed to the audience. The sound is all crafted and tweaked to fit the purpose of revealing Gordon's stunning revelation: this was the Joker's plan the whole time.

The dialogue exchange is started by the police officer analyzed earlier that was hurriedly following behind Gordon who is out of it and contemplating the loss of life due to the Joker. The police officer says off-screen "Back at the MCU, the Joker's gone." Gordon then replies: "With Lau? The Joker planned to be

caught. He wanted me to lock him up in the MCU.” As Gordon says his last line, he rushes through the shot past the police officer who appears on-screen when Gordon goes by him. With the exchange in mind, let’s dissect it for further analysis.

The police officer comes to Gordon urgently telling him that the Joker has escaped jail. Gordon next replies with a question that assumes Lau escaped with him, as if he already knew he had escaped in the first place. Showing him rapidly connect the dots, Gordon next says his epiphany out loud for the audience’s sake. Lastly, the shot sound-wise ends with the wailing of a police car’s sirens. The sirens come into the shot as Gordon says his last line and is leaving the screen. The sirens themselves are thrown in abruptly as if they are now haunting Gordon, as well as showcasing the immediacy of the situation.

The dominant contrast in frame is Gordon, while the subsidiary contrast is the background of a fireman extinguishing the flames from the warehouse fire using selective focus. The shot is all about what Gordon is about to reveal to us about the Joker and the film’s main plot. Gordon at first is walking at a slow pace like in the last shot up the Y-axis and into the Z-axis, but then pauses as he listens to the police officer delivering the bad news. He turns to incline his ear to the terrible news along the X-axis and then reflects on the information before making sense of it all. He bolts through the Z-axis towards the screen, to the left on the X-axis, and down the Y-axis past the police officer. The motion is very much in a downward diagonal motion as he moves past the police officer.

The positioning of Gordon is at a social distance with his back to the camera and us at first to draw attention to the wreckage up ahead. He then turns in a ninety-degree turn towards the police officer he had his back to in a right to left motion. The camera is at a tracking shot that journeys across the X-axis to make it feel as if we are right there as the police officer delivering the news to Gordon. The camera moves with Gordon because the epiphany is told to us and we need to track with his report of critical information for us to grasp, in order to understand the rest of the film.

The angle for this shot is at eye level because it adds to the mirage that for a bit we think we are there with Gordon long enough to hear his revelation of information. This causes the viewer feel apart of the story as it unfolds. The shot is created using a wide lense and forms a grand theater-like scope for our hero Gordon to inhabit. The depth of field is in shallow focus, but specifically in follow-focus as we tag-along with Gordon during his moment of revelation about the Joker’s plan.

The shot is lit in low key lighting from the motivated source of the police car headlights, but at the same time unmotivated because of the light illuminating the firemen putting out the warehouse flames. The shadows are in a low contrast as they are diffused throughout the set-place. It is an unnatural and dark feeling that the lighting gives the audience as we travel with Gordon through the murky waters of morality that are being disturbed by the Joker’s manipulation.

The color in the shot is quite similar to the 1995 crime drama *Heat* that was a major influence in all aspects and has been noted as an influence by Nolan in press-release interviews. The numerous hues and shades

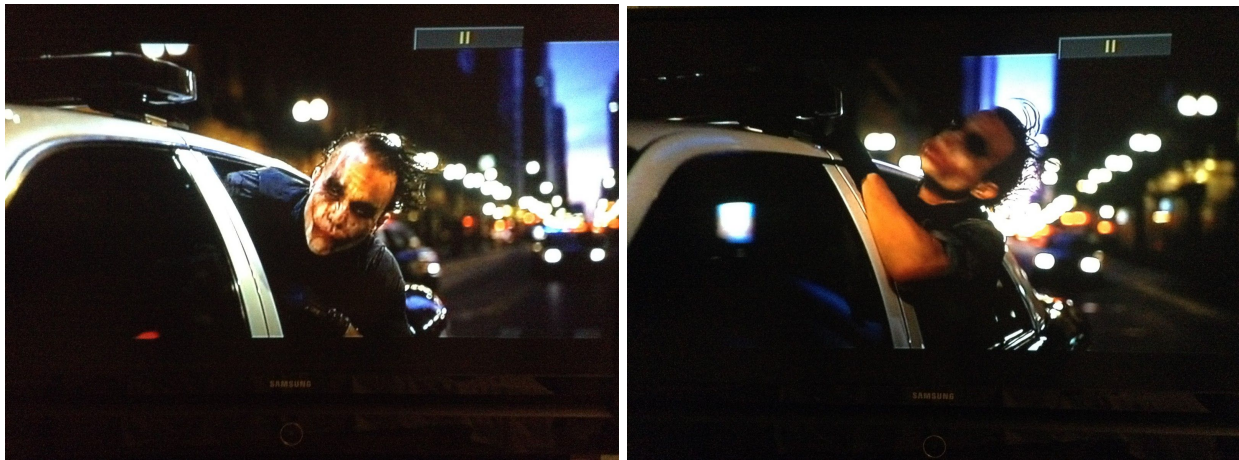
of brown, blue, gray, orange, and the like are quite toned down to bring a sense of realistic grit to the film. An attribute that can be found in *Heat*, but the overall film itself is dipped in a blue tint.

This stylistic choice of applying a blue tint can be seen throughout *The Dark Knight*, but specifically in Shot 8. A homage to Mann's work and at the same time serves a thematic purpose because the blue tint usually shows up throughout the film when the protagonists are on-screen (i.e. Shot 8: Gordon), while the warmer colors are apparent when the antagonists are on-screen (i.e. Shots 1-2: Two Face & Shot 9: the Joker).

For screen composition, the primary leading line is the waterline from the firehose the two firemen are using which goes from them to the fire in the warehouse, but is right next to Gordon at first glance. Thus, pointing back to him and the movement of our eyes goes as follows: firemen, waterline, warehouse fire, Gordon. This leading line goes along the X-axis as well. The shot is edited like the conventionally used way in this set of twelve contiguous shots by cutting on the action. As an action-fueled, crime thriller this makes perfect sense to edit in this style to keep the flow of the film going at a high rate.

The time is unaltered as it is set in real time and is apart of a logically driven film, not an emotionally driven film that may mess with the timeline (i.e. *Memento*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*). In totality, this shot allows the viewer to empathize with the protagonists as they cope with their humiliating and costly loss to the Joker. This idea will be flipped on its head when we see the other side of the coin which is the Joker relishing in the moment of his absolute domination causing chaos as the ultimate agent of chaos.

Shot 9: Joker Patrol Police Car



Start Frame: [1:36:40] - End Frame: [1:36:50]

The duration of this ninth shot is a stunning block of ten seconds and is a Medium Shot fixed on the Joker. This certain shot is employed to not only establish where the Joker is within the city of Gotham and the world he inhabits, but to also allow the audience to witness him behave like a mad dog wagging his head out the window. It is a rebarbative effect that he has on us as we observe this psychopath roam around with no care in the world. While everyone else suffers, he is free to have no emotional attachment over the consequences of his

actions. For those moviegoers that watch up to this scene in the film, they will finally realize the frightening truth about the Joker: he is apathetic to human agony. It is as if he has lost what it means to truly be human.

The sound design in this shot starts with the sirens of the police patrol cars that can be heard in the previous shot with the use of a simple L-cut. What can be also heard once the cut has happened is the swerving of the police patrol cars' tires skidding across the streets as the Joker and his gang make their escape. After these sounds have been heard, all of the noise is dialed down to a simple ominous frequency that draws our eyes and ears to the Joker's primal behavior. The orchestra of music that usually accompanies Nolan's work is completely thrown out for a moment as the only thing heard is the eerie humming that points our concentration to the Joker swinging about.

The dominant contrast within this shot is the rapid movement of the Joker as he flips his head out of the police patrol car window and enjoys the rush of wind. Added to this is the camera being attached to the vehicle he is driving in and it adds a sense of fluidity as he swings back and forth. Naturally, the human eye looks at whatever moves, so when the Joker jumps into frame from the car as quickly as he does it catches our full focus and places it onto him. This is actually a perfect segway to how the Joker moves on-screen.

The movement itself is very jolly, yet alarming as he is truly enjoying himself during this whole story. He loves the anarchy and chaos of it all. He literally wags his head around with his hair as if trying to savor and indulge in the moment. His movement matches his methodology as does the overall movement on-screen. He starts off to the left a bit inside of the police patrol car, but then shifts across the X-axis to center frame. As this movement is happening, the actual car is shifting back and forth with no sense of direction. It is like the Joker's line where he refers to himself as a dog later on in the movie. This dog reference is put into full effect here in this shot.

The Joker is at a personal distance from us and stays relatively in the same position of the screen, excluding his grand entrance from the car door window. The camera is stationary as it is attached to the police patrol car itself, but this effect adds to the sway seen on-screen. The camera angle is eye level with the Joker and is meant to make us feel the way the Joker must feel during this sequence in the police patrol car. The lense that is used is a wide lense as it creates a wider atmosphere for the character to abide in.

The shallow focus is implemented in order to make the viewer look at the Joker's shenanigans. More so, it is a follow-focus because the central focus is on the Joker gliding by and the car he is riding in. We are on the journey with him to unknown places. As such, the lighting complements the depth of field with low key lighting from the motivated source of not only the city lights, but the police patrol car lights as well. The shadows being soft and diffused adds to this visual look, along with the murky nature of the Joker's lack of a moral compass.

The color usage is a combination of an abundance of colors. There are spots filled with reds, oranges, whites, and blacks all throughout the frame. These collections of colors help set the warm, yet queasy feeling within those who watch this shot because the effect makes us unsure about the Joker. There are some prominent leading lines in this shot, such as the car itself at the angle displayed points back to center frame where the Joker

lies. Also, the light poles within the background of the frame create parallel leading lines that point to the Joker, with both leading lines going from left to right.

It is an open form as the leading lines go down the X-axis into the night skyline and from our view currently looks neverending. Although the shot itself is unbalanced because the composition is weighted onto the left side of frame with very minute details to the right of frame. Since the Joker and his gang are speeding into the left of frame, we can infer that his future actions will lead to negative results with more lives at stake. The Joker is driving to hell as some may put it.

This shot cuts on action, both the starting cut and the ending cut. It is a simple technique that is almost exclusively used here. And up to this point almost feels montage like, but not quite there yet. The time is most certainly real time, even with the sound being heavily messed with to emote a specific feeling in us. Bottom line, the Joker is winning and at this point looks unstoppable as he is the most formidable thing our protagonists have ever faced. In the spirit of this, the Joker soaks in the wind crossing his face as he drives into the darkest depths of the human condition. Licking his lips as if to mean he has tasted victory and there is no turning back now.

Shot 10: Firemen Assessing Damage



Start Frame: [1:36:51] - End Frame: [1:36:56]

For this tenth shot, the duration is five seconds long and the shot size is a Cowboy Shot. The Cowboy Shot is used to create a grand scope of scenery and set pieces of the destruction caused by the Joker, yet shows the more human heroes of everyday life just working another day on the job. To these firefighters, this narrative they are apart of is nothing new as they are the unsung heroes who deal with the collateral damage of shattered individuals that seek to hurt others like the Joker does in the movie.

The sound here is near silent with the exception of the the eerie and ominous sound that has carried over from Shot 9 and into this current shot. Again, with the use of an L-cut Nolan helps keep the tone of this part of the scene consistent within the thematic implications of the story at large. Consistency is the key here and now this scene is becoming a montage starting here with these firemen. The silence is key here because when tragedy and suffering do strike, what else can be said but silence.

The dominant contrast here is the two firemen assessing the collateral damage and looking for solutions to put out the fires surrounding them. The subsidiary contrast is the wreckage that cages the firemen and is a metaphor of the film really. For every fire that is put out by the good guys, the bad guys will always seek to ignite a bigger one. A never-ending cycle of burning and building.

The two firemen that are shown in the foreground inaudibly talk over and plan out how to extinguish the flames of the disaster. The two turn looking side-to-side in the hopes that they can figure out the best way to remove the damage already inflicted by the flames. They have a body language that speaks of endurance and determination to get the job done the right way.

Their proxemics and positioning of the figures on-screen is an ensemble of sorts because basically every fireman in the shot, including the two prominent firemen, are facing every direction except towards the camera. It is a group of busy-bees working hard to put out the fire. Because of this hardworking look, the firemen's mentality must be that of "we have to fix this." Here, despite the despair in the air, there is the ever so slight glimpse of beauty from ashes. The camera pans from left to right indicating a moment of hope sometime in the future. Although at the rate the pan was moving, it could be very far into the future. Either way, moving from left to right signifies a positive change as is expressed here with the camera's movement. It glides along the X-axis and tracks the two firemen discussing how to put out the warehouse fire.



The camera angle is at eye level and this was chosen by Nolan to make us understand the damage that the Joker has done, along with all the people involved trying to stop his siege on Gotham. It is an angle that evokes a sense of urgency in us to see justice served to this cynical madman. The shot was captured with a wide lense to present what atrocities the Joker has really committed. This stylistic choice can arguably be made for the mere reason that the shot resembles something similar to what Francisco Goya depicted in his famous *Peninsular War* piece. Intensity that is visually mixed

with the heartache of it all.

Here there is a shallow focus that makes us first pay attention to the foreground where the two firemen are standing and then to the other firemen amidst the damaged warehouse. A follow-focus is executed here since we follow the firemen as the shot track from left to right. The lighting here is quite reminiscent of the lighting showcased geniously in the portfolio of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio who founded this method of lighting. It can be studied in such works as *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Lit with harsh low key lighting and motivated by the fire around the frame. It has a high contrast that exhibits the harsh shadows that Caravaggio made so famous using the actual wreckage to pull this technique off.

The color palette is a mixture of blues, oranges, grays, yellows, and blacks. As mentioned earlier, the warm colors represent the antagonists of the film. Likewise, it makes logical and coherent sense to have the Joker's beautiful, yet destructive presence leave behind the hues of hellfire. The screen composition has a few peculiar elements worth a closer observation. The fire hoses in the background lead to the two firemen, as well as the twisted wreckage. The shot is weighted to the right where the two firemen take up a large portion of the screen.

The editing style is action motivated here. The first cut from the Joker wagging his head out the police patrol car to the firemen working hard to remove the fire to lastly Alfred opening Rachel's letter to Bruce Wayne (Batman). The editing is the same technique used previously. The shot is set within real time and does not alter time in the slightest.

In conclusion, *The Dark Knight* has many sequences noteworthy of mention such as the reveal of Two-Face or the bank heist that opens the film. But for this blog-post, I chose these ten contiguous shots because they convey the theme of the movie quite clearly. You either die a hero or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain. The question remains, what will you become?