

MIT Student
11.139, Spring 2015
Film Notes: *The Naked City*

The director of *The Naked City* was Jules Dassin. The film was released in 1948 and was set in New York City at that time. The film was shot on location.

Five adjectives or phrases to describe the sense of the city portrayed in the film: dirty (both in terms of cleanliness of the city as well as the amoral city occupants). Diverse. The film includes scenes of the suburban outskirts, the slums, as well as wealthy apartment complexes. Dense. Sprawling. I suppose this film does an apt job of portraying all the contradictions of the city, as it zooms in to focus on one individual's story at the beginning and then fades back out to NYC itself to remind us of the impressive vastness of such a densely populated urban space. A place that breeds eccentricity.

One remarkable scene was tracing Willie Garzah's escape from his apartment in the Lower East Side of New York to his climb up the Williamsburg Bridge. I was just very impressed and perplexed by how that scene was filmed. Where was the camera placement to film certain shots, such as how he clambered over the backyard fence and then crawled under a hole in the wall? By locking down the camera, we could see just how swiftly Garzah was escaping because he was so familiar with the Lower East Side territory, but we also saw how awkward Halloran was as he pursued him (though a lot of the tension of that shot was wondering *if* and *when* Garzah was going to be caught). The moment when Garzah ran down the street and the camera panned to follow him was also impressive. By varying shots of different heights and pressing the camera closer and closer to the characters as Garzah got closer to being caught, the tension ratcheted up, and we got varying points of view of the city itself and its occupants as he escaped to the Williamsburg Bridge.

I also thought the beginning where the phone lines were being connected to expedite the plot development from the crime scene to the detective's office was a very clever cinematic trick.

Two questions I would like to discuss in class: do you think the film would have worked differently for you if the producer hadn't narrated the film throughout and more-or-less held our hands through the plot? Is the film making a comment about the two detectives' approaches to determining the murderer (one by physically using energy to scour the city, the other precisely narrowing down suspects and getting people to confess) a device to show off the many facets of city life? Is there a better way to doing police-detective work?

The opening shots reminded me of *West Side Story's* opening shots. I assume the former was a cinematic influence on the latter, which also encompassed the stories of many diverse people living in New York City. I was also reminded of Gene Kelly's *On the Town*, because that film also consciously used cinematic techniques to show off many architectural feats in the city.

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11.139 / 11.239 The City in Film
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