

Film Title:

**DOUBLE IDENTITIES**

**Logline:** A young reporter stumbles across a big story, but it's too late before he realizes he's already in too deep.

**Film Production Role:** Cinematographer

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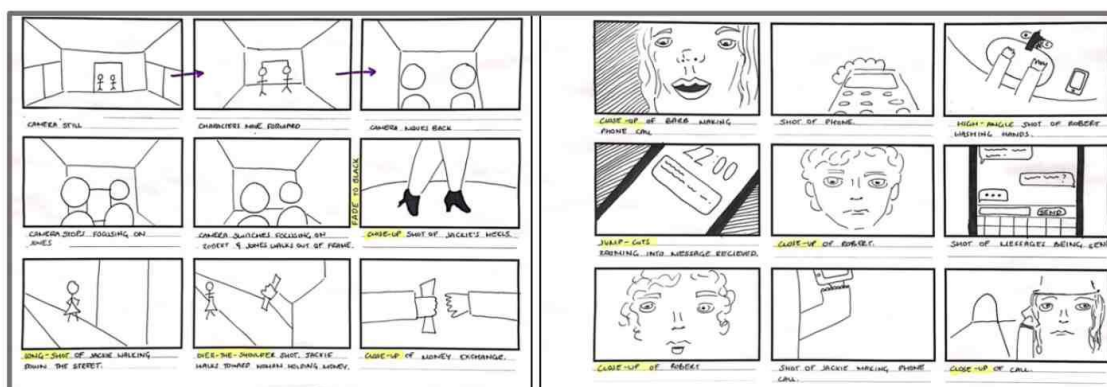
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Word Count: 1994

**ROLE AS CINEMATOGRAPHER**

This was not my first time adopting the role of cinematographer and by this point I had already cultivated a certain cinematographic style, using similar techniques and making them fit the genre of our film. Firstly, I began by studying the techniques of different cinematographers I found interesting, hoping to incorporate their style into my own. I also hoped to include a variety of shots in order to reflect the dynamic, yet dark nature of our film’s storyline.

My first step in the film-making process was creating a storyboard (Fig. 1). My main objective was to have a wide shot variety and to transmit different kinds of emotions through every scene, based on its composition. I also made sure to scout for the right locations beforehand in order to get an idea of what the final shots would look like.



**Fig. 1: Section of storyboard for film *Double Identities***

One of the cinematographers that inspired me the most was Robert Surtees and his film *The Graduate* (1967). When picturing the character of Barb, in our film, I couldn’t help but think of Mrs Robinson and her character’s attitude. In the 1960s film she embodies a cunning and seductive woman who is rather dominant of her surroundings. I therefore envisioned similar characteristics for Barb. The variety of close-ups in *The Graduate* prompted me to do the same in *Double Identities*. In the film the close-ups seek to emphasise the anxiousness and claustrophobia

of Benjamin's life and I wished to emulate a similar effect through my close-ups (Fig. 2), drawing focus to Robert's uneasiness and concern, especially during the interrogation scene.



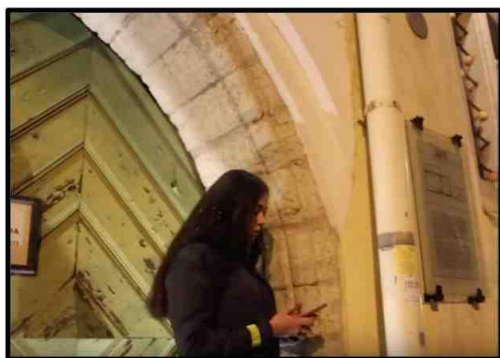
**Fig. 2: Close up shots during interrogation scene**

One of the more challenging shots was the opening scene with Richard and Mr. Jones (Fig. 3). This entire shot was done in a single take and had to be hand-held, making it really difficult to maintain a steady grip on the camera and getting a good result. I had to re-do the shot multiple times until I obtained a stable clip that worked well. I managed to do the shot by sitting on a wheel-chair and being pushed back while the actors walked toward me. It seemed like a questionable idea at first, but after several takes, I obtained a good result. It was an effective shot because the movement of the camera would make the audience feel like they're following the conversation. Moreover, the shot further emphasises the busy work-space Robert is involved in and the short-term attention his boss, Mr Jones, pays to him.



**Fig. 3: Office scene hand-held shot**

Interestingly, in one of the downtown shots (Fig. 4) I really admire the geometry of the arch which transmits a feeling of mystery and seclusion. While I did want to include symmetry (Fig. 5) in my shots, I decided to alternate with a few images that had sharp geometric shapes and therefore, interjected the monotonous symmetry of the film, heightening the tension. Additionally, the low-angle of the downtown shot (Fig. 4) hoped to emphasise the power of the female character. The idea of her seeming to tower over the camera makes the audience feel more vulnerable, hopefully evoking the power of the female characters.



**Fig. 4: Downtown shot of arch**



**Fig. 5: Downtown symmetrical shot**

While the storyboard was essential in creating a smooth itinerary and guide for the filming, there were a few adjustments made during production, meaning some of the shots were changed (Fig. 6). Nonetheless, all these changes were intentional and, in some cases, surprisingly successful. For instance, one improvised shot was at the end of the kidnapping scene.



**Fig. 6: Low-angle shot of the glasses during kidnapping scene**

This low-angle shot was the perfect end to this scene, and I came up with it during the filming process. From this I learnt that improvisation isn't something to be scared of in cinematography and can turn out very well. This shot adds a very dramatic end-note to the kidnapping scene, creating a suspenseful effect. The glasses in the foreground draw focus to the danger Robert's in. Meanwhile, the heels of the three women in the background seek to emphasise the power and domination the women hold in the story and how they're tough yet graceful at the same time. This shot ties back to the initial intent of implementing Feminist Film Theory into the shots, using visuals to grant power to the characters at different points in the story.



**Fig. 7: Example visuals of the use of 'rule of thirds'**

Judging from the images above (Fig. 7) I was very careful with the composition of each shot and always relied heavily on the 'rule of thirds', using these reference points to guide my filming. For instance, in the two images above I used the vertical lines on the grid to position the actors and by doing so was able to place different focuses on each one. In the right-hand image I changed the focus during the shot moving from the foreground (focusing on Robert) to the background, focusing on Barb and the girls.

I am extremely satisfied with the work I have produced as cinematographer for a number of reasons. Though some shots remained difficult and challenging to film I managed to get out of

my comfort zone and experiment with new ways of filming. Moreover, not only did I include a wide range of shot angles and composition, but I also managed to communicate the difference in power dynamics of the characters through my cinematography, which is all I could hope for after adopting this role.

I also believe that I resolved certain difficulties well and made sure to take multiple shots of the same scene in order to ensure that I would have a wide range of possibilities to choose from. Aside from the challenges I'm also proud of my ability to deviate from the storyboard and engage in more experimental or spontaneous shots which I consider very successful.

## **COLLABORATIVE WORK**

### **Intentions**

When brainstorming ideas for our final film project (Fig. 8), our group couldn't help coming back to the genre of film-noir. The movement, which came about during the 1940s, post war, was characterised by femme fatales, gangsters, crime, romance etc. With the birth of this new genre, many of the mainstream conventions of film were broken. There was the shifting of gender roles and portrayals as well as the introduction of new cinematographic rules. Nonetheless after watching films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* and *Gilda*, we concluded that women continue to be depicted in a similar way; vulnerable, manipulative and objectified. Aside from bending some gender stereotypes, they were still sexualised through the male-gaze. For this reason, we decided that we could re-invent the concept of film noir by applying feminist film-theory to our story. We began by looking at the typical characters of film-noir; the anti-hero, the femme fatale, the villain and the girl next-door. We stuck to the basic frame of film noir but then decided to shift the course of the story. The twist of our film is that the women are the predominant villains. The double-agent character of Barb also makes her personality even more interesting as she's able to play multi-faceted role of the suburb house-wife as well as the female crime-lord.

The core production team was made up of myself (as cinematographer) as well as the writer and editor. Together we decided to have our film set in an undefined decade between the 40s and 00s, since we wanted to incorporate film features from a wide variety of movements and combine them together, experimenting with colour, sound, editing and writing. Our goal was to fabricate a suspenseful, dark and empowering film that would reflect the main principles of Feminist Film Theory as well as convey some identifiable features of different film movements such as French New Wave and Postmodernism.

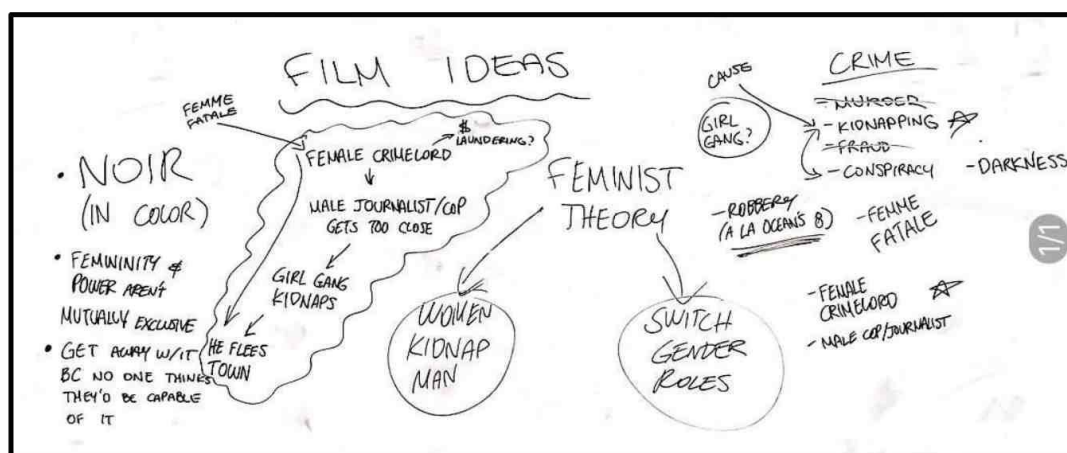


Fig. 8: Brainstorm of ideas for film storyline

Collectively, we were inspired by a series of films such as *Death Proof* (2007), by Quentin Tarantino and a number of crime-inspired films such as Ridley Scott's infamous *Thelma & Louise* (1991). Though the storyline of our film was mostly inspired by these female characters, we also wished to incorporate elements of earlier film movements such as the image of the *femme fatale* and include the dramatic conventions of film noir.

### Pre-Production

The story of our film involved a large number of characters and scenes therefore we had to be selective with the shots we wished to include and how we were going to make our storyline and intentions clear. Our idea was to make use of the 'dramatic irony' film technique through which we hoped to build most of our suspense and sombre drama. We managed to successfully cut down the sequence of our film by almost 4 minutes. This included taking out some unnecessary verbiage in certain scenes as well as compressing the introductory scenes for the three female characters: Sandra, Jackie and Ruby.



As we had a pretty solid production team, we had input from all three roles during the writing process. While the writer was chiefly in charge of creating a script, we worked together when deciding what parts to compress or discard to make sure our film stayed as clear and simple as possible (Fig. 9). Moreover I, as cinematographer, and the writer worked very closely together during pre-production in order to form a shared picture of how we visualised the characterisation of each character and how we could achieve this by combing the cinematography and writing. Throughout our film we also concluded that breaking the fourth wall would bring our audience closer to the characters and indicate moments of heightened tension or revelation. The two most important products of pre-production were our finalised script as well as the storyboard. Reading through the script I was able to make quick notes consisting of ideas for shots or transitions in order to get a clearer image of what the storyboard would look like.

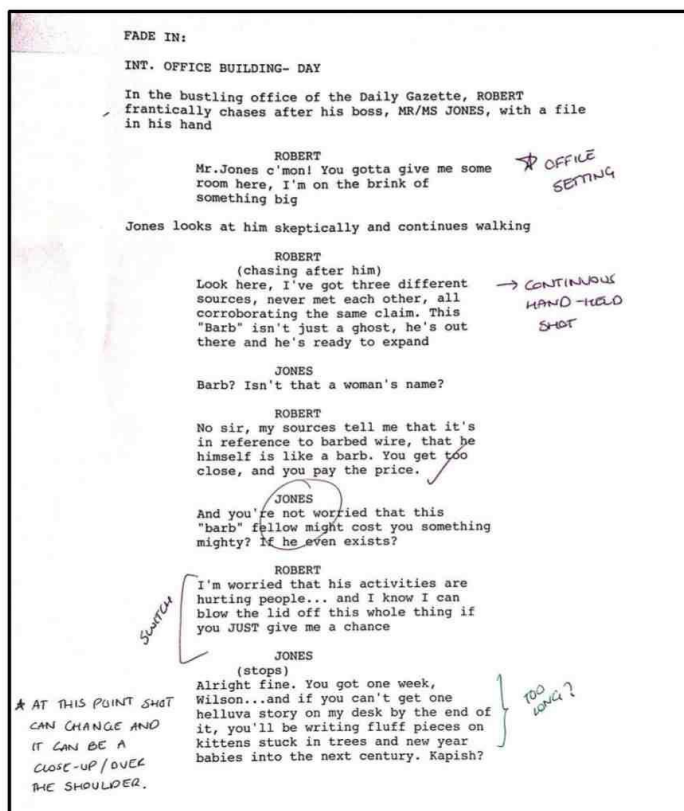


Fig. 9: Image of cinematographer's notes on writers' script

### Production

We made sure we were together during most, if not all, of the production process because we felt we could use input from all three roles. As the cinematographer, I felt that I relied heavily on the writer because she helped during the filming as she made sure the dialogue was in alignment with the acting and scene. Moreover, she made sure that I didn't forget to include any variety in shots, indicated in the storyboard. Since production is where I spent most of my time, I relied heavily on the other two members throughout the entire process. I was very proud of the variety of shots we included in the final film and the way I played with different focuses and shot compositions throughout. In this step I had to coordinate with the writer and editor in order to make sure that I was associating the right shots with the right dialogue and to facilitate the editing process for our editor

### Post-production

During post-production I worked closely with the editor in order to make sure the sequence of shots was correct and flowed well. Moreover, there were certain shots that may have been slightly tilted or bright, so by collaborating with the editor, we were able to make these small changes and play with the colour-scheme of the shots (Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10: Shot after colour correction advised by cinematographer, done by editor**

**Overall**

There was some slight disagreement during pre and post-production regarding time management and scheduling. Nonetheless these were eventually overcome thanks to our initiative as a group and good organizational skills. During post-production I also played an important collaborative role with regards to the editing process. While the editor did an excellent job, it was difficult for her to assemble the clips without the cinematographer, as there were some spontaneous changes that she hadn't recognised during production, or in the storyboard. In this case sitting down with the editor and communicating face to face was essential. I personally felt that I relied heavily on the writer to make sure I envisioned her script in a similar way and therefore obtain the most satisfactory result possible.

Overall, the work and time put into this project certainly payed off as we all managed to make the most out of our individual roles, while simultaneously relying in each other's strengths and weaknesses to end with, what we consider, a very complete and satisfactory end product.

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