



Above, an *homme fatal*. Ralph Meeker as the narcissistic Mike Hammer kisses Velda (Maxine Cooper).

## Kiss Me Deadly: Evidence of a Style

Alain Silver

At the core of *Kiss Me Deadly* are speed and violence. The adaptation of Mickey Spillane's novel takes Mike Hammer from New York to Los Angeles, where it situates him in a landscape of somber streets and decaying houses even less inviting than those stalked by Spade and Marlowe in the preceding decades of Depression and War years. Much like Hammer's fast cars, the movie swerves frenziedly through a series of disconnected and cataclysmic scenes. As such, it typifies the frenetic, post-Bomb L.A. with all its malignant undercurrents. It records the degenerative half life of an unstable universe as it moves towards critical mass. When it reaches the fission point, the graphic threat of machine-gun bullets traced in the door of a house on Laurel Canyon in *The Big Sleep* in the 40s is explosively superseded in the 50s as a beach cottage in Malibu becomes ground zero.

From the beginning, *Kiss Me Deadly* is a true sensory explosion. In the pre-credit sequence, a woman stumbles out of the pitch darkness, while her breathing fills the soundtrack with amplified, staccato gasps. Blurred metallic shapes flash by without stopping. She positions herself in the center of the roadway until oncoming headlights blind her with the harsh glare of their high beams. Brakes grab, tires scream across the asphalt, and a Jaguar spins off the highway in a swirl of dust. A close shot reveals Hammer behind the wheel: over the sounds of her panting and a jazz piano on the car radio, the ignition grinds repeatedly as he tries to restart the engine. Finally, he snarls at the woman, "You almost wrecked my car! Well? Get in!"

As in Aldrich's earlier *World For Ransom*, the shot selection and lighting provide immediate keys to the style, to *film noir*. But in *Kiss Me Deadly*, the opening dialogue between Hammer and Christina is the significant component in establishing another sort of hero: one that is sneering, sarcastic, and not really a hero at all.

HAMMER Can I have my hand back now? (Pause.) So, you're a fugitive from the laughing house.

CHRISTINA They forced me to go there. They took away my clothes to make me stay.

HAMMER Who?

- CHRISTINA I wish I could tell you that. I have to tell someone. When people are in trouble, they need to talk. But you know the old saying.
- HAMMER "What I don't know can't hurt me?"
- CHRISTINA You're angry with me aren't you? Sorry I nearly wrecked your pretty little car. I was just thinking how much you can tell about a person from such simple things. Your car, for instance.
- HAMMER Now what kind of message does it send you?
- CHRISTINA You have only one real lasting love.
- HAMMER Now who could that be?
- CHRISTINA You. You're one of those self-indulgent males who thinks about nothing but his clothes, his car, himself. Bet you do push-ups every morning just to keep your belly hard.
- HAMMER You against good health or something?
- CHRISTINA I could tolerate flabby muscles in a man, if it'd make him more friendly. You're the kind of person who never gives in a relationship, who only takes. (sarcastically) Ah, woman, the incomplete sex. And what does she need to complete her? (mockingly dreamy) One man, wonderful man!
- HAMMER All right, all right. Let it go

What kind of man is Mike Hammer? *Kiss Me Deadly's* opening dialogue types him quickly. Christina's direct accusation of narcissism merely confirms what the icons suggest about "how much you can tell about the person from such simple things": the sports car, the trench coat, the curled lip, the jazz on the radio. Aldrich and writer A.I. Bezzerides use the character of Christina to explain and reinforce what the images have already suggested, that this is not a modest or admirable man.

The dialogue also reveals that Hammer knows exactly who he is and the image he presents: "What kind of message does it send you?" It sends the one Hammer wants to send, a message which Christina, the "fugitive from the laughing house," can discuss directly. This is a first hint of what will be something of a role reversal in the way men and women speak. The older male characters, the Italian house mover and Dr. Soberin, will use figurative images and make mythical allusions, rather than speak directly about people and objects. The younger women, Christina, Velda, and even Carver, usually say what is on their minds.

The dark highway of the opening is a kind of narrative limbo: the elements of the plot have not yet been brought into line, let alone focused. Certainly, contem-

porary viewers brought with them expectations about character and plot both from the underlying novel and from the conventions of *film noir*. The opening selectively underscores aspects of those expectations while withholding detail. Visually, the discussion of the "laughing house" and Hammer's materialism is shot entirely in a medium two shot of Christina and Hammer, either from the front or rear, in the cockpit of his car. The viewer is not distracted from the character interaction, in which Hammer "loses" the verbal sparring: he is effectively "put down" by Christina until he must tell her to "let it go." *Kiss Me Deadly* has no clearly defined landscape at this point to use as a textural reinforcement. The countryside and the rural gas station are all unidentified settings. They are open, shadowy, and, even within the fringes of the station's neon lights, menacing. Generically this last trait primes the viewer for Christina's murder under torture and Hammer's near death.

In terms of subject/object tension, the Aldrich/Bezzarides conception of Hammer is both more objective and "anti-Spillane." Spillane's use of first-person prose is certainly in the hard-boiled tradition.

All I saw was the dame standing there in the glare of the headlights waving her arms like a huge puppet and the curse I spit out filled the car and my own ears. I wrenched the car over, felt the rear end start to slide, brought it out with a splash of power and almost ran up the side of the cliff as the car fishtailed. The brakes bit in, gouging a furrow in the shoulder, then jumped to the pavement and held. Somehow I had managed a sweeping curve around the babe.

This offhanded objectification of women is in play from the novel's first paragraph. This attitude along with Spillane's lurid sadomasochism and his rabid anti-Communism in the shadow of McCarthy are legendary. From the opening Aldrich and Bezzerides take the events and little else. Spillane's recurring protagonist, Hammer, provides the predetermined viewpoint of the narratives. Hammer's deprecations and wisecracks in the novel are not detached or objective descriptions of people and events and are part of his "color." Aldrich and Bezzerides abandon most of this also or rather, in Aldrich's preferred method, they "stand it on its head."

Of the opening dialogue only one line—"They forced me...to make me stay."—is from the novel. But much more is changed than just the words. In terms of plot, elements such as the Rossetti poem or the radioactive "great whatsit" are inventions of the filmmakers. Among the characters, Nick the mechanic is wholly original. In terms of attitude, Hammer becomes a grinning predator, the antithesis of Chandler's urban knight and with survival instincts sharper even than Sam Spade's. Even Spillane's Hammer has some glimmer of sympathy for a "damn-fool crazy Viking dame with holes in her head" and follows the trail of those who tried to kill him, out of simpleminded outrage at their misdeeds: "I wouldn't need to

look at their faces to know I was killing the right ones. The bastards, the dirty, lousy bastards!" The film Hammer is incorporated into a more sophisticated system that combines the undertone of *film noir* with Aldrich's moral determinism. While Hammer wants to know "what's in it for me," all around him crime breeds counter-crime, while thieves and murderers fashion the implements of their own destruction.

For Spillane, Hammer's very name revealed all: a hard, heavy, unrelenting object pounding away mindlessly at social outcasts like two penny nails. The filmmakers refine this archetype slightly: Hammer does think, mostly about how to turn a buck. Christina is arguably the most conventionally "sensitive" of the picture's characters. She reads poetry and, although mockingly, lyricizes her own predicament. It is not without irony that she is the "loony," the one institutionalized by society, yet quickest to penetrate Hammer's tough-guy pose. In that first scene, she helps to reveal that the hero of the film *Kiss Me Deadly* is closer to other characters in Aldrich's work than to Spillane's. He inherits the cynical greed of Joe Erin in *Vera Cruz* and anticipates the transcendent egomania of Zarkan in *The Legend of Lylah Clare*. As Ralph Meeker's interpretation propels Hammer beyond the smugness and self-satisfaction of the novel into a blacker, more sardonic disdain for the world in general, the character becomes a cipher for all the unsavory denizens of the *noir* underworld.

The informal inquiry into Christina's death by the unidentified government agents expositionally establishes that Hammer's professional as well as personal conduct is unscrupulously self-seeking: "Who do you sic on the wives, Mr. Hammer?" Throughout much of the scene, Hammer is framed in the shot's foreground, sullenly staring at a blank wall off camera, ignoring the baiting remarks. His snide retort—"All right. You've got me convinced: I'm a real stinker."—is effectively true. Because the committee members have made more than a few gibes about Hammer, his response does not yet alienate the viewer. But a dichotomy between audience and the "hero's" viewpoint is building, is creating a subject/object split which runs counter to the first person elements of the novel. Hammer first asks, "What's in it for me?" as he speaks to Pat Murphy in the corridor after the inquiry. That utterance completes the character composite: Hammer is certainly not like Callahan in *World for Ransom*, not another selfless "Galahad" as he begins a quest for "something big," for the private eye's grail.

Hammer is a quester. He is not an outsider in the *noir* underworld or any equivalent of a mythic "other world." If this is a foreign or alien milieu, Hammer is at home there. For Hammer, the dark streets and ramshackle buildings are a questing ground which is conspicuously detached from the commonplace material world. Deception is the key to this world. Deception not detection is Hammer's trade. His livelihood depends on the divorce frame-up and the generally shady deal. Deception is Lily Carver's game also, from the false name she assumes to the vulnerable pitch of her voice to the pathetic way she brings her hand up

against her face like a wing of Christina's dead canary. Failure to deceive is what costs Christina and others their lives.

This deception and uncertainty, as in most *noir* films, lay the groundwork for *Kiss Me Deadly's* melodramatic tension. The plot-line has all the stability of one of Nick's "Va-va-voom's," so inversion becomes a constant; and subsurface values become central concerns. In this milieu, the first "torpedo" set to go off when a car key is turned necessarily posits a second rigged to explode at a higher speed. From the viewer's objective vantage, the shift from one level of appearances to another is occasionally discernible. An early example is the transformation of the sensual Carver, first framed behind a bed post and swinging a hip up to expose more of her leg through the fold of the terry cloth robe, then becoming shrill and waif-like for Hammer's benefit. Usually, though, the viewer is also deceived.

For those on a quest in the *noir* underworld, instability is the overriding factor and disjunction is the rule. The sensational elements in *Kiss Me Deadly* follow this rule. The craning down and the hiss of the hydraulic jack as the screaming Nick is crushed under the weight of a car; the pillar of fire that consumes Lily Carver; the eerie growl of the black box; even a simple "Pretty pow!" as Nick jams a fist into his open palm—these random acts have no organizing principles. They transcend context to deliver a shock that is purely sensory. Still they fit homogeneously into the generic fabric and the subversive whole of the narrative.

Most of *Kiss Me Deadly's* visual devices are derivations from the generic styles of Aldrich's prior work in *World For Ransom* or *Vera Cruz*: high and low angles, depth of field, constriction of the frame through foreground clutter. The long take or sequence shot, however, is used more extensively and more specifically than before. There are four examples of it in *Kiss Me Deadly*, all of which might be classed as interrogation scenes: Pat Murphy's first visit to Hammer's apartment, and Hammer's questionings of Harvey Wallace, Carmen Trivago, and Eddie Yeager. The specifics of the shots vary, from the slow traveling into close shot during the brief discussion with the truck driver, Wallace, to the elaborate tracking and panning in Hammer's apartment, shifting characters front to back and left to right in an uneasy search for equilibrium. In no sequence shot does Hammer get answers to everything he asks; yet each takes him to the brink of some discovery.

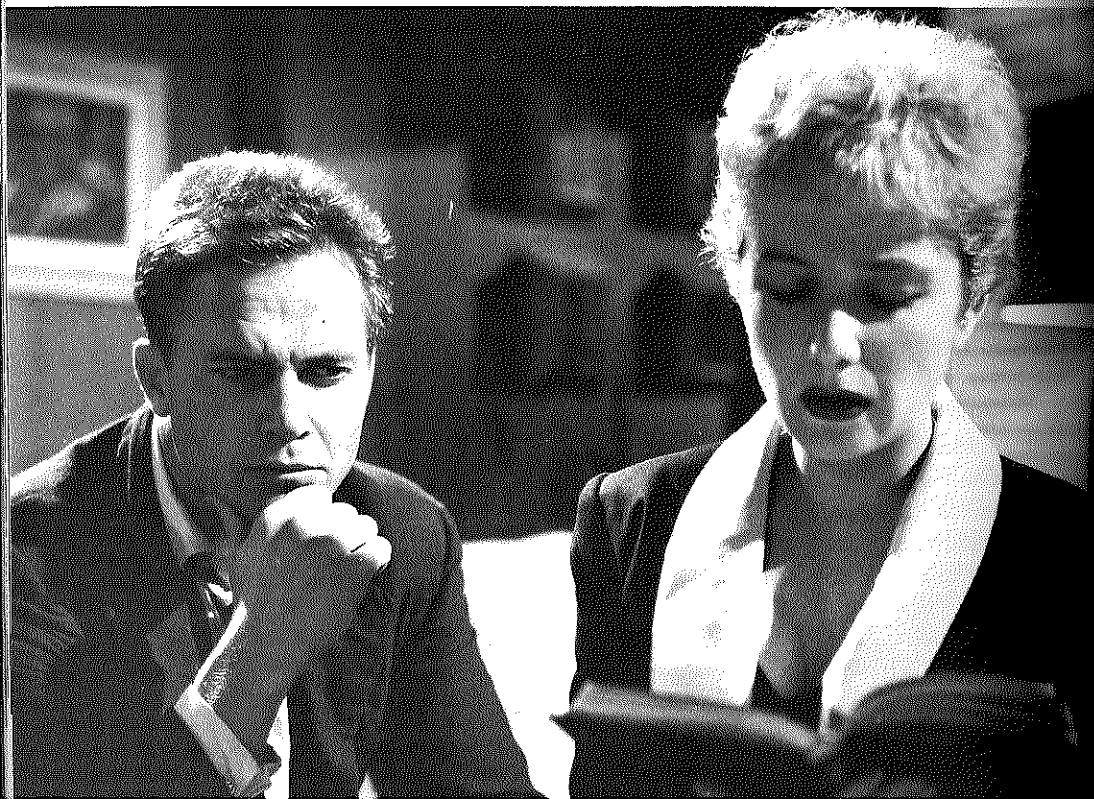
More than anything else these shots serve as a sort of punctuation in the narrative line. In the scenes with Trivago and Yeager especially, the sustained camera seems to externalize a reflective pause. Hammer only half listens in these scenes, wandering about and sampling Trivago's wine and spaghetti or, with Yeager, glancing over at the sparring match. They also create visual pauses at odd intervals. While they diminish tension on the one hand by preserving a level of stasis or consistency, barring the cut and the extreme angle, they reinforce it on the other, playing first with the viewer's expectancy of the cut and then with the interior movements of the camera. As the possibility of a change in angle is removed only

for a set period that cannot exceed the length of the sequence, so the pause is a baited one, barely allowing Hammer and/or the audience time to “catch their breath.”

As in *World for Ransom*, the trap is a part of *Kiss Me Deadly's* figurative scheme. Again, its constructs are primarily visual. But the elaborate “capture” of Callahan in the earlier picture is distilled down to single shots in *Kiss Me Deadly*. For example, in the high angle long shot of Hammer outside Lily Carver's room, the dark foreground of stairway and balustrades are arrayed concentrically about Hammer's figure and seem to enclose him. Usages such as this contribute to *Kiss Me Deadly's* figurative continuity of instability or inversion and the lurking menace, all set up in the opening sequences.

What most distinguishes *Kiss Me Deadly's* figurative usage from that of earlier and many later Aldrich films is the added dimension of an explicit, aural fabric of allusions and metaphor. The Christina Rossetti poem, “Remember Me,” is a recurrent example. Other background sounds are keyed to character. The Caruso recording with which Carmen Trivago sings is the Flotow opera, *Martha*. Another classical piece plays on the radio in Christina's room as the manager remarks,

Below, Lily Carver (Gaby Rodgers) reads “Remember Me” to Hammer (Ralph Meeker).



“She was always listening to that station.” A prize fight is being broadcast in the background when Evello and Sugar Smallhouse are killed.

While these sounds may not be as fully incorporated into the narrative structure as the poem is, all provide immediate textural contrast if not subsidiary meaning. The sibilant tone of Evello's gasp as he is killed echoes the hiss of the car jack in Nick's murder. As tropes both recall in turn the equation of vitality with a “deep breath” made by the old mover. The play of sounds and meaning can create other anomalies. For instance, at one point Velda approaches Mike asking, “But under any other name, would you be as sweet?” and he, not paying attention to her, says, “Kowalski.” On one level, all these can be appreciated as textural noise or *non sequiturs*. On another, they are conscious metaphors and puns.

As with Callahan, “chance” is a factor. As Hammer says, “If she hadn't gotten in my way, I wouldn't have stopped.” Velda's statements about the “great whatsit” and “the nameless ones who kill people” reinforce the sense that the vagaries of chance or destiny, a word which the mythically-minded Dr. Soberin would likely have preferred, are an underlying constant. Soberin himself is one of the most consciously allusive characters in Aldrich's films. He brings up the notion of rising from the dead after Christina expires: “Do you know what that would be? That would be resurrection.” He mentions Lazarus again during a conversation with Hammer. The old moving man also speaks of “the house of my body” that can only be left once. These concepts run parallel to Hammer's own search for meaning in the cryptic pentameter of the Rossetti poem: “But when the darkness and corruption leave/A vestige of the thoughts that once we had.”

Myth becomes a surface value entirely in the case of the “great whatsit.” What Pat Murphy utters—a “few, harmless words...just a bunch of letters scrambled together, but their meaning is very important... Manhattan project. Los Alamos. Trinity.”—are as much words to conjure with as Soberin's pedantic analogies. Soberin's references to Lot's wife and “cerberus barking with all his heads” are too archaic and unfrightingening to keep Gabrielle/Lily Carver from opening her own Pandora's box. In the final analysis, the “great whatsit” contains pure phlogiston. The quest for it becomes the quest for the cleansing, combustible element, for the spark of the purifying fire that reduces the nether world of *Kiss Me Deadly* to radioactive ash.

As modern myth, as anti-myth (discussed in more detail in the Addendum), and/or as *film noir*, *Kiss Me Deadly's* narrative outlook is equally somber. “A savage lyricism hurls us into a world in full decomposition, ruled by the dissolute and the cruel,” wrote Borde and Chaumeton in *Panorama du Film Noir Américain*, then “to these savage and corrupted intrigues, Aldrich brings the most radical of solutions: nuclear apocalypse.”<sup>1</sup> *Kiss Me Deadly* is also a key to the development of Aldrich's visual style. In this “apocalyptic” context, the choices of angle, framing, staging, lighting, and all the other elements which constitute a visual style are all in play in a particularly expressive way.

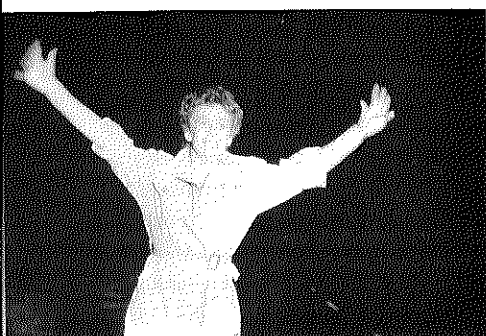
### Nine Elements of Style in *Kiss Me Deadly*

[Based on an outline developed with Janey Place]

1. **Angle.** A low angle point-of-view shot, such as that of the feet of Hammer's captors (see **Frame 9**), also functions to withhold critical information—the faces of the men—and to have the viewer co-experience Hammer's mental note-taking of his only clue: the style of Soberin's shoes. Framing works with the choice of angle in that, objectively, both the fact of the viewer empathy with Christina, who the dialogue reveals has just been tortured to death, and the position of her white, lifeless legs in the center of the frame draw attention away from the aspect of the dark shoes in the surrounding foreground.

This low angle is "motivated," that is, the camera is placed on the floor to simulate Hammer's semiconscious sprawl. In contrast, the ground level medium shot when Sugar interrupts Hammer's examination of the shoes in Evello's bathhouse (26) represents a director's and not a character's point-of-view. That angle similarly restricts the visual information which the viewer receives (how Hammer renders Sugar unconscious remains an off-screen mystery), while the tilt upward combines with a shorter focal length lens to distort perspective and exaggerate the magnitude of Sugar's fall.

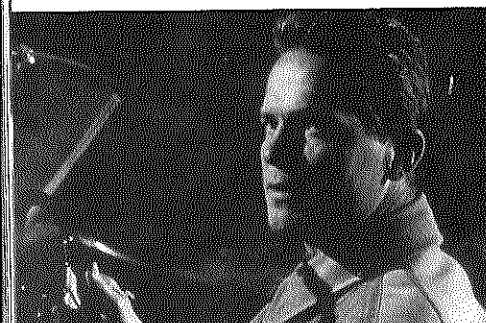
The tilted angles in the hospital room (10, 11) alternate between directorial and char-



Above, Frame 1



Above, Frame 2



Above, Frame 3; below, left and right Frames 4 and 5

ROBERT ALDRICH

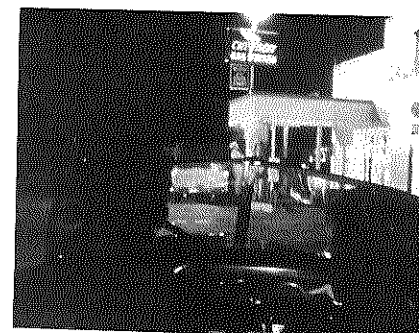
Produced and Directed



acter point of view. As a disembodied voice calls Mike's name, the sequence begins with an optical device used over a shot of Velda and the nurse. A rippling effect through an image from the character's point of view is a convention for awakening from a dream or returning to consciousness. The tilting off from horizontal approximates the imbalance which Hammer experiences as he comes to; but that tilting is carried over into a shot which includes Hammer (10). The shift between "first person" and "third person"—the scene ends in the former mode (11)—serves to objectify the unusual angle. As first-person usage and its conventions are undercut, the split between Hammer's viewpoint and that of the narrative is accentuated.

The use of an extreme high angle or overhead, as in Hammer's first visit to Carver's apartment (19), even more significantly restricts the reading or denotation of a shot. Because it shifts away from connotations of either dominant force or point of view, which may be present in a low or eye-level setup, such a shot moves towards an omniscient perspective. By association, by interaction with the shot's material content, this shift can cause the viewer to sense, subconsciously at least, that he or she is looking down on the scene from a deific or deterministic vantage.

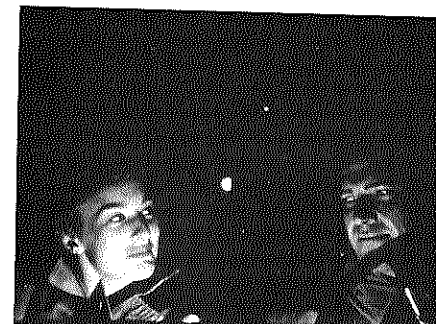
The most frequent use of other than eye-level camera placement in *Kiss Me Deadly* is the slight high and low angles which clarify interpersonal relationships. In certain medium close two shots, the camera aiming down at



Above, Frame 6



Above, Frame 7



Above, Frame 8; below, left and right Frames 9 and 10





Above, Frame 11



Above, Frame 12



Above, Frame 13; below, left and right Frames 14 and 15



Nick (14) or at the morgue attendant over Hammer's shoulder implies that he intimidates or controls them to some degree. When Velda comes to Mike's apartment, the more extreme angle over him down at her (47) is appropriate to the degree in which he dominates her. Even as he looks away from Velda in her own bedroom (32), Hammer still dominates. Conversely, the very similar shots aimed upwards at Carver (35) or Pat Murphy (39) or over Carver at Hammer (34) all reverse that effect to suggest a weaker position on his part. Angle combines with framing and/or cutting for enhanced effect.

**2. Framing.** The recurrent use of objects and faces in the foreground of various shots, either as indeterminate shapes or held in focus by depth of field, creates a visual tension. These elements both conceal a portion of the rear ground and compete with more "significant" content for viewer attention, as with Christina's legs, mentioned above (9). Conversely, the severe cropping in a close shot of a battered Ray Diker (17) at his front door or a medium shot of Carver aflame in the beach house (44) concentrate viewer attention by forming a kind of natural iris. The first shot of Hammer (3) framed off center against the night sky anticipates more severe manipulations.

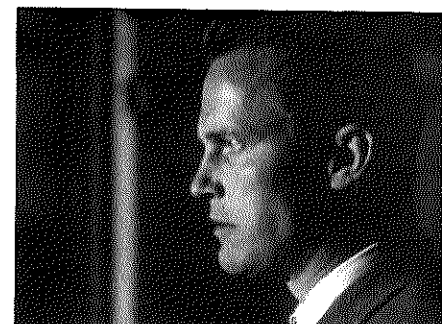
On a connotative level, the foreground clutter of the stairs, banisters, and corridors present in high angle long shots of both Hammer alone (19) and later with Carver (28) occupies a larger portion of the frame relative to the smaller human figures. Rather



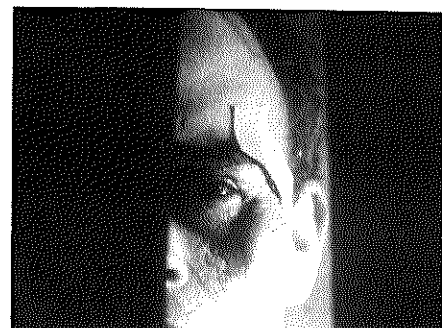
than forming simple black wedges, they have a textural presence made up of highlights and a confusion of angular shapes. The characters at frame center thus appear caught in a tangible vortex or enclosed in a trap.

The shot of Hammer at Soberin's feet (48) is a telling transliteration of the novel which relies on framing, decor, *mise-en-scene*, and the association of sound and image for its full effect. Spillane wrote. "They had left me on the floor.... Something moved and a pair of shoes shuffled into sight so I knew I wasn't alone." In the film, Hammer is unconscious and in the shot, so that it cannot be subjective. Instead of being on the floor he lies on a bare set of bed springs suggestive of a cold, metallic decay. The shoes are below. While Soberin's stentorian voice drones on about resurrection, the springs cast a maze of shadows enmeshing his feet and Hammer's face in the same tangled web.

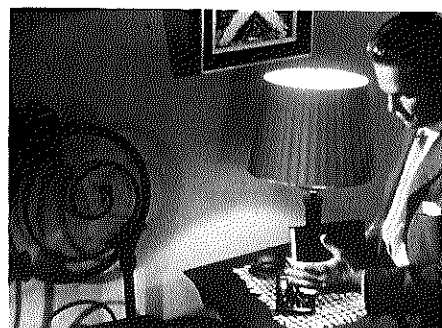
**3. *Mise-en-scene.*** The staging of the elements in a shot or the *mise-en-scene* combines with framing and depth of field to further define Hammer's relationship to his environment and other characters. He has a tendency to stare off towards a point outside the frame. Instances vary from the three shot in the morgue to the interview by federal investigators after the accident (12, 13) or when he awakens Velda after learning of Nick's death (32). All suggest a high degree of alienation. His inability to look at people at critical times contrasts with his professional but manic interest in examining the fixtures of a strange room, as when he goes to



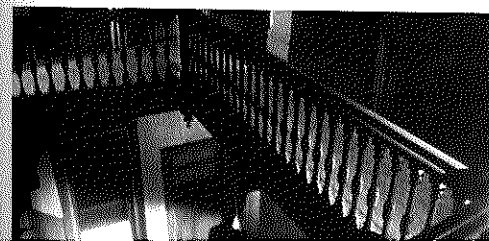
Above, Frame 16



Above, Frame 17



Above, Frame 18; below, left and right Frames 19 and 20





Above, Frame 21



Above, Frame 22



Above, Frame 23; below, left and right Frames 24 and 25



Christina's (18) or interviews Carmen Trivago (27), pausing in the latter instance to sample wine and sniff spaghetti but seldom glancing at the other person in the shot. Hammer is not only estranged from his environment but alienates others with his deportment, as in Velda's emotional outburst about the "great whatsit" when he tells her of Nick's death then sits sipping milk on her couch.

The choice of setting and the use of real locations reinforce this sense of alienation. The general decay of the city coupled with specific usages such as the flashing street lights and isolated gas station (6) create, as mentioned earlier, an overtone of lingering menace. The pan up from the street lights is to Ray Diker's decrepit Victorian house perched on a dark hill. The departure from the gas station leads to death for Christina.

Other usages comment metaphorically on the confusion of identities. The mirrors and panning movement when Hammer visits Velda in her exercise room create a complex of confusing doppelgängers. As the shot opens, the viewer sees two sets of figures as Hammer steps into the room. The pan reveals that neither set was "real" and displaces them with the actual people reflected in still another mirror (21). Even as Velda elaborates figuratively on the possible consequences of his investigation and speaks of a "thread" leading to a "rope" by which he might well "hang," she spins around on the pole. The mise-en-scene, her action and the

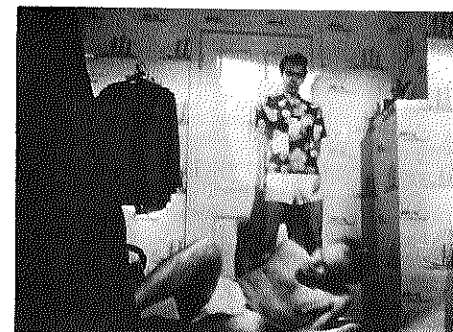


setting, actively undercuts the surrounding reality.

At least one identity-transfer, that of Hammer and Christina, which is suggested narratively by their interaction in the first scenes, is elaborated upon by the staging. Specifically, the X-shaped pose which Christina assumes as she flags down Hammer's car (1, 2) is recalled in the painted figure seen on the wall of her room when Hammer examines it (18). That figure, bisected by the lamplight, is reflected in turn in the later image of Hammer tied to bed at Soberin's beach house (33).

Hammer's answering machine, which was a very unusual device in 1955, is part of his dissembling lifestyle. When he first listens to playback from the wall-mounted, reel-to-reel tape recorder, Hammer stands leaning against the living room wall (49). He and the machine are on the right and left of a medium shot with his shadow between them. The machine becomes a second shadow, another self, an embodiment of the mechanistic, emotionless aspect of Hammer's psyche. The framing and mise-en-scene reinforce this relationship. In a later scene, when Murphy comes to Hammer's apartment, Hammer is in the left background in front of the machine. (50). With his coat off, the gray tone of Hammer's shirt and the device behind him blend, so that it appears perched on his shoulder or even growing out of it.

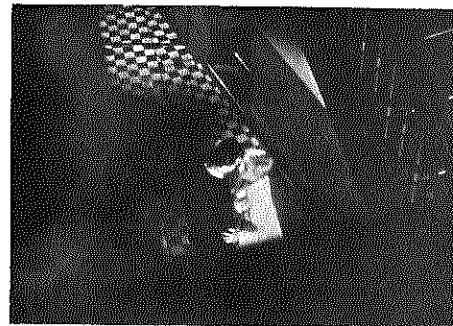
On a less symbolic level, much of the mise-en-scene simply adds a layer of distracting action behind that in the foreground. The



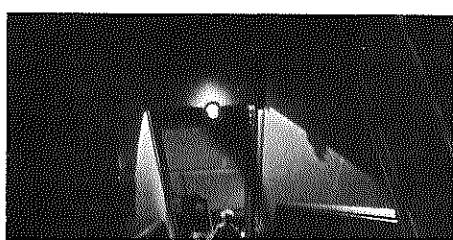
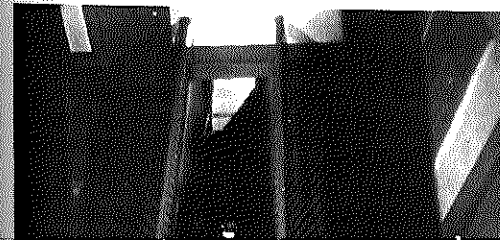
Above, Frame 26

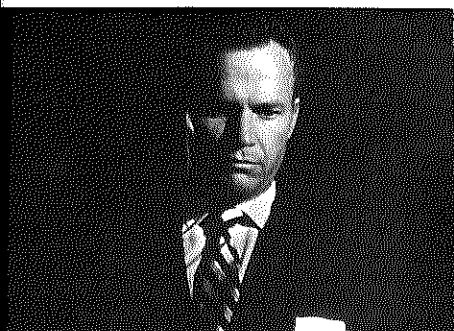


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Above, Frame 28; below, left and right Frames 29 and 30





Above, Frame 31



Above, Frame 32



Above, Frame 33; below, left and right Frames 34 and 35



use of depth of field to keep the sparring and shadow boxing in the background in relative focus as Hammer interviews Eddie Yeager (24) injects a constant, unsettling motion into the shot which could reflect the inner disturbance of both men, just as the sudden droop of Yeager's cigar conveys his dismay at the mention of Evello's name. When Hammer walks over to the side of the gym to make a call, the shadow of a large bag swaying on a rear wall in the center of the shot (25) perpetuates the distraction.

**4. Lighting.** All the shadows, whether in the gym, more obviously in the shot of Soberin's shoes, or more subtly in the shadow cast over Hammer's face when he stops at the roadblock (5), are stylistic corroborations of Velda's sense of impending danger. Other elements of lighting function similarly. The low light on Hammer and Christina conform to a convention of visual expression which associates shadows cast upward of the face (8) with the unnatural and ominous, the ritual opposite of sunlight. The low light when Carver opens the box of radioactive material (43) is, most appropriately at that moment in the film, hellish. Her demonic aspect as she screams anticipates her immolation by Soberin's "brimstone."

Side light is used conventionally to reflect character ambivalence. For example, in the low angle medium close shot of Hammer looking down at Nick's body (31). Framed against a night sky, Hammer is both literally and figuratively isolated in surrounding darkness. The half of his face cast in shadow is

emblematic of an impulse to abandon the search generated by the sudden death of his friend, an impulse which accounts for the sense of loss and indecision that he manifests in the remainder of the film.

Lighting combines with framing to create the constricting wedges and trap-like arrays of foreground material mentioned above. In the hard shadow line which cuts across the top of the frame and obscures Hammer's face in his first visit to Carver's apartment (20), it functions independently of framing to instill a sense of peril and comment on the interaction of characters and objects. The lamps which form a dark triangle behind Carver, as she prepares to open the "great whatsit" (41), define visual geometry that is deterministic in implication: i.e., her head is "directed" to align itself with the apex of the triangle.

**5. Depth of Field.** The presence of depth in the medium close two shot of Hammer and Yeager permits a distracting rear ground which draws attention away or externalizes character emotion. A more "active" use of depth is found in the close two shot of Christina and the gas station attendant (7). Because his profile is present in the left foreground, he is not only more noticeable than the boxers in the gym but he severely restricts the amount of the frame in which she can move. As such he externalizes, even as he exchanges pleasant words with her, the pervasive sense of constriction which she experiences as a fugitive.



Above, Frame 36



Above, Frame 37



Above, Frame 38; below, left and right Frames 39 and 40



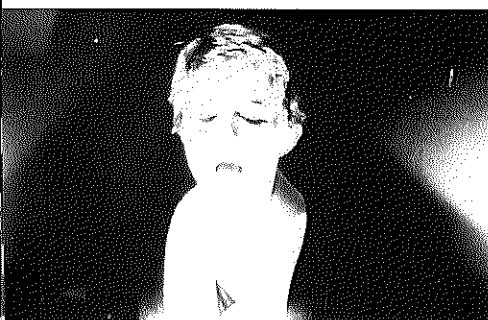




Above, Frame 41



Above, Frame 42



Above, Frame 43; below, left and right Frames 44 and 45



The depth of field in Hammer's first call on Carver situates him by the door while she reclines in the near ground holding a gun on him (20). Despite the potential for violence expressed by the gun, the angle (low) and the deep focus define a large field in which Hammer can move back and forth. Unlike other objects or clutter in the foreground, Carver's head and the three bars in the bed frame work against each other. The center bar separates her both from Hammer and from her gun, which she holds awkwardly. The left bar cuts into her head. The right bar completes a rectangle in which Hammer, posed comfortably with his hands in his pockets, is alone with the gun but not threatened by it. Lacking constriction, he can come forward out of the shadows to smile at Carver from the edge of the bed and establish his dominance over the scene.

Conversely, the lack of depth caused by a long focal length lens when Hammer is followed by an unidentified man (16) intensifies the sense of isolation and real danger implicit in the lonely street at night. Detached from the rear ground, which is both out of focus optically and blurred by the panning movement following him down the sidewalk, Hammer cannot flee into the surrounding decor but is held in the shallow plane of the lens and must turn to face his assailant who is photographed in that same plane.

**6. Optical.** The most unusual optical device in *Kiss Me Deadly* is the title sequence. Over a shot of Hammer and Christina in his car, the main title ("DEADLY/KISS ME"), cast



names, and technical credits all appear and move across the screen from top to bottom, stacked to be read bottom line first, like signs painted on the roadway (4). Superficially, the confusion of titles with road signs is little more than gimmicky; but the dual inversion of conventional titles, which is justified as a gimmick, is also appropriate to the kind of unnatural or otherworldly events which follow in the film.

Most of the transitions in *Kiss Me Deadly* are accomplished by fades or direct cuts. The dissolve from Hammer looking out the window of his apartment to him kissing Velda in the center of the room is unusual for two reasons: it overlays two shots taken from the same camera position, outside the window (15) which Hammer's POV reveals is on an upper floor; and it represents a kind of projection/wish fulfillment in which a character imagines or anticipates an event and the dissolve reveals what he was anticipating.

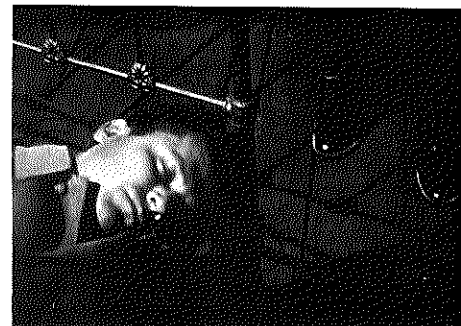
**7. Camera Movement.** Camera movement, both traveling and panning, figures in many of the sequences already discussed, such as the mirror shot of Hammer and Velda or the attack on Hammer in the street. Occasionally, the camera will move sideways "under" an establishing shot to introduce objects into the foreground and restrict the open area of the frame, for example, the bed post in Carver's room. At other times, as with the sequence shot of Hammer's interview with the truck driver, Wallace, the camera moves slowly inwards, reducing the dimensions of



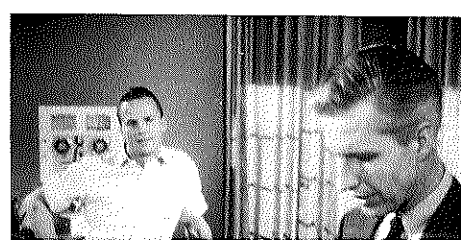
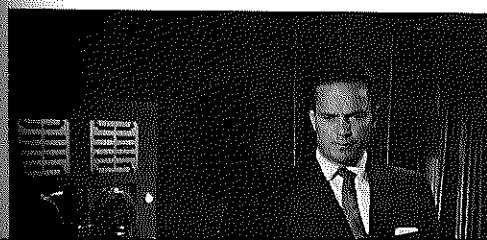
Above, Frame 46



Above, Frame 47



Above, Frame 48; below, left and right Frames 49 and 50



the frame around the characters and intensifying its "closure" or constriction (25) even as the duration of the shot adds tension. An even more dynamic usage is the boom down towards Nick as he is crushed, in which the viewer becomes an active participant in his murder, by literally being in the position of the car as it kills him.

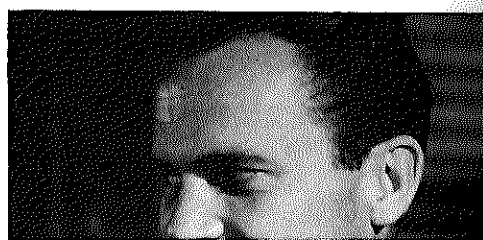
**8. Duration of Shot.** Various aspects of the three sequence-shot interviews with Wallace, Eddie Yeager, and Carmen Trivago have already been mentioned. As discussed earlier, the withholding of a cut in each sequence introduces a tension between the viewer's expectation of a "normally" occurring cut and its absence, so that when the withheld cut finally arrives subconscious tension is released. Even shorter shots, as when Carver shoots Hammer and he slowly twists and falls (40), can be slightly "abnormal" as Aldrich holds the angle for a few extra beats.

In the scene with Trivago, sequence-shot tension is accentuated both by the literal violence of the events when Hammer breaks his record to extort information and the frenetic motion of the continuous traveling back and forth in his long, shallow room. Even while the shot is held, the image changes as characters reposition themselves; and clutter such as Trivago's clothes on a line (27) impinges and recedes in the foreground. In the scene with Yeager, the sequence shot binds together a number of "individual" shots (23, 24, 25) linked by traveling and panning and each affected by its respective framing, lighting, depth, etc.

**9. Montage.** As with duration of shot, montage is primarily a binding mechanism in *Kiss Me Deadly*, joining or opposing other elements of stylistic expression for a compound effect. A simple example that epitomizes the most basic power of montage as posited by Kuleshov is found in two shots from Hammer's questioning of the morgue attendant. As the man reaches down to put the key he found in Christina's body back into a desk, Hammer slams the drawer shut on his hand (51). The shot is powerfully violent in itself, even though neither man's head or shoulders is visible. Aldrich cuts to a close-up of Hammer grinning (52), and in a single shot captures all the sadistic impulses of Spillane's character. To the silent evocation of abstract meaning which Kuleshov defined, Aldrich adds the additional dimension of sound, so that Hammer grins not just at the sight of the morgue attendant's crushed hand but at his screams and whimpers as well. Later Aldrich combines an insert (42) and a sound effect to transform the "great whatsit" into a living, growling beast.

While angle creates the basic meaning in the shot of Carver aimed upwards

Below Frames 51 and 52



over Hammer's shoulder (35), montage intensifies it when it is intercut with a shot of Hammer aimed down over Carver's shoulder (36). As in his interview with the federal men (12, 13); his discussion with Velda (32); and the other instances already described, in this latter shot Hammer looks away distractedly. This reverse not only reveals his expression but elaborates the force of Carver's dominance or direction of Hammer at that point in the film, a force which links the two separate shots. As an overlay (46) reveals, the shot of Pat Murphy over Hammer (39) is composed identically to that of Carver over Hammer. It defines a similarly dominant moment and is complemented by and intercut with another angled shot of Hammer over Murphy's shoulder.

There are many "normal" reverse shots in *Kiss Me Deadly*, such as the cut from Christina facing the oncoming headlights (1) to behind her (2), where the context is highly charged. At other times a shift of angle from high to low may merely accompany a simple change in camera position as with Hammer's interrogation (12, 13). Even more severe shifts in angle occur in the intercuts as Hammer discovers the "great whatsit" in a locker (37, 38) and as he and Carver hurry away from her building (29, 30). These extreme high/low shifts compel the viewer to reread the shot and create a visual undercurrent of rupture and instability.

As many of these examples demonstrate, the interaction of montage and angle, framing and staging, lighting and depth of field create a multiplicity of stylistic expressions. In the sequence shot in the gym, eight of the nine elements of style contribute towards the totality of literal and figurative meaning:

**1. Angle:** The sequence shot opens with an eye-level view of a man punching a bag, follows a figure who crosses the shot to a stairway, and then tilts down to a high medium shot of Hammer coming up. It levels off again as Hammer reaches the top of the stairs and remains at eye-level for the remainder of the shot (22). The angle shifts at the beginning to disorient the viewer, which in turn subtly connotes, even in broad daylight and in a large room full of other people, the instability and menace all around.

**2. Framing:** The framing adjusts to follow Hammer in the beginning, then is balanced in the two shot with Yeager (23). Hammer is on the left when he places a call later (24), so that the shadow of the bag can occupy the center of the shot. Hammer is the narrative center and mostly the visual center. But other people and objects distract from that and reduce his implicit control over past, present, and future events.

**3. Mise-en-scene:** Yeager begins the interview with a smile on his face and his cigar pointed upwards. His expression sours and the cigar drops down when Hammer mentions Evello's name. The presence of numerous others in the background raises the noise level and distracts visually from the principals who are static in the foreground (23). The subtle chaos again bespeaks an underlying instability and loss of control.

**4. Lighting:** Full light is used throughout the section with Yeager, but many dark areas and a bright spot formed by the street door below accompany the high angle of Hammer on the stairs (22). The full-lit background combines with mise-en-scene and depth of field to permit the distraction in the two shot (23). A separate key light casts the shadow on the wall during Hammer's phone call.

**5. Depth of Field:** There are three instances: in the high angle of Hammer (22) allowing him to be recognized while still near the bottom of the stairs; in the two shot (23) keeping the rear ground fairly well-defined; and in the phone conversation picking out sharp shadows on the wall behind.

**6. Opticals:** The fade which concludes the sequence shot is followed by a shot of Evello's pool, revealed when a woman in a black bathing suit walks away from the front of the camera.

**7. Camera Movement:** Tilting, panning, and traveling are used as Hammer moves up the stairs and into the gym. The shot remains static for some time as he speaks with Yeager, then a side-traveling follows him to the phone.

**8. Duration of Shot:** The sequence shot serves to concentrate and reinforce the tension and character interaction created by the other elements. This is particularly true given the amount of movement and re-framing and refocusing in the shot, all of which add to the difficulty of using one take for the entire sequence. Each element of movement works with the lack of a cut to enhance the tension.

**9. Montage:** None in this sequence shot, opened and closed by a fade.

### Addendum

Since this article first appeared twenty years ago, *Kiss Me Deadly* continues to be one of the classic period's most discussed films. In the "Postface" of a new printing of their text, a decade after Paul Schrader called it "the masterpiece of film noir,"<sup>2</sup> Borde and Chaumeton wrote: "1955, the end of an epoch. *Film Noir* has fulfilled its role by creating a particular disquiet and providing a vehicle for social criticism in the United States. Robert Aldrich gives this happening a fascinating and shadowy conclusion, *Kiss Me Deadly*. It is the despairing opposite of the film which, fourteen years earlier, opened the noir cycle, *The Maltese Falcon*."<sup>3</sup>

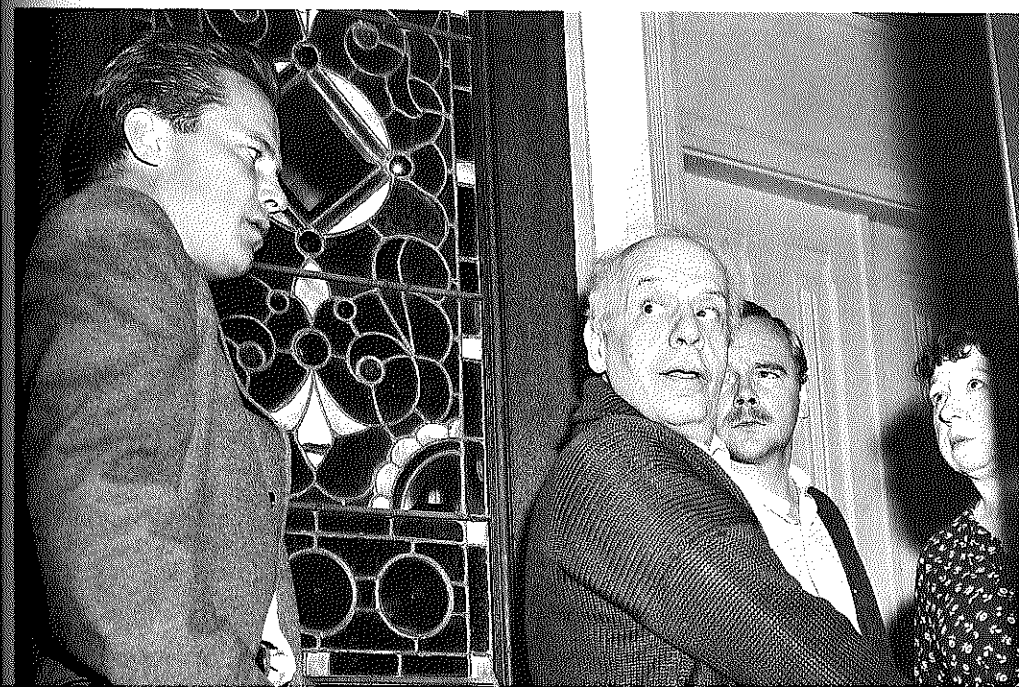
One of the most discussed aspects of *Kiss Me Deadly* is its ending, which the filmmakers themselves referred to as "Let's go fission."<sup>4</sup> Borde and Chaumeton were a bit more effusive when they spoke of "savage lyricism" and "nuclear apocalypse." Before going further, it should be noted that unfortunately both the 16mm prints and the video version of *Kiss Me Deadly* are missing scenes no. 305 and 307.<sup>5</sup> As I mentioned in the third edition of *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, some commentators most notably Jack Shadoian in *Dreams and Dead Ends* and J.P. Telotte in *Voices in the Dark*, have questioned

whether Mike and Velda stumble into the surf. Shadoian even suggests that since many of Raymond Durnat's recollections are wrong, so is his version of the ending.<sup>6</sup> Telotte does not know "whether such accounts indicate the existence of an alternate ending for the film or simply represent the kind of creative recollection—prodded by wish fulfillment—that often marks film commentary."<sup>7</sup> One might wonder why any commentator would "wish" for Velda and Hammer to survive. Certainly audience expectations might be for that survival; but in terms of narrative irony, it would seem most apt for Hammer to witness the apocalypse which he and others have wrought [see Aldrich's remarks below].

Even critics who accept the existence of this ending have further compounded the problem by such assertions as "the studio added a final shot still there in some prints showing Hammer and Velda standing amid the waves."<sup>8</sup> Here Robin Wood suggests that Aldrich did not want these two cuts in the finished picture. In a more recent book Edward Gallaferri asserts that a "gesture to the benign couple remains in some prints."<sup>9</sup>

These shots should be in all the prints, and Aldrich never regarded them as any sort of gesture. While they had never seen a complete print, Edward Arnold and Eugene Miller asked Aldrich about the ending, and he replied, "I have never seen a print without, repeat, without Hammer and Velda stumbling in the surf. That's

Below, Hammer (Ralph Meeker) follows the old mover (Silvio Minciotti) to the doorway of 325 Bunker Hill, where Mr. and Mrs. "Super" (James McCallian, Jesslyn Fax)



the way it was shot, that's the way it was released; the idea being that Mike was left alive long enough to see what havoc he had caused, though certainly he and Velda were both seriously contaminated."<sup>10</sup> Viewers of the laser disc of *Kiss Me Deadly* can catch a glimpse in the theatrical trailer included at the end of the disc of one shot of Mike and Velda in the surf as the house explodes.

In comparing *Kiss Me Deadly* with Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat*, Robin Wood remarks that "the sledgehammer sensibility that is both the strength and weakness of *Kiss Me Deadly* prohibits any nuance."<sup>11</sup> Even Andrew Sarris' early assessment suggests an uncontrolled atmosphere: "Aldrich's direction of his players generally creates a subtle frenzy on the screen, and his visual style suggests an unstable world full of awkward angles and harsh transitions."<sup>12</sup> Wood's critique may reflect the same ambivalence towards Aldrich's authorial consciousness and/or political correctness as Raymond Borde had when he questioned Aldrich's beliefs in 1956: "We've been discouraged so often that we are wary of American liberals. Like most left of center Americans Aldrich can evidently deceive us from one day to the next."<sup>13</sup> Borde's concern about being deceived did not diminish his enthusiasm for *Kiss Me Deadly* as expressed in *Panorama du Film Noir Américain*. In 1968 Sarris also believed that *Kiss Me Deadly* was a "most perplexing and revealing work...a testament to Aldrich's anarchic spirit."<sup>14</sup>

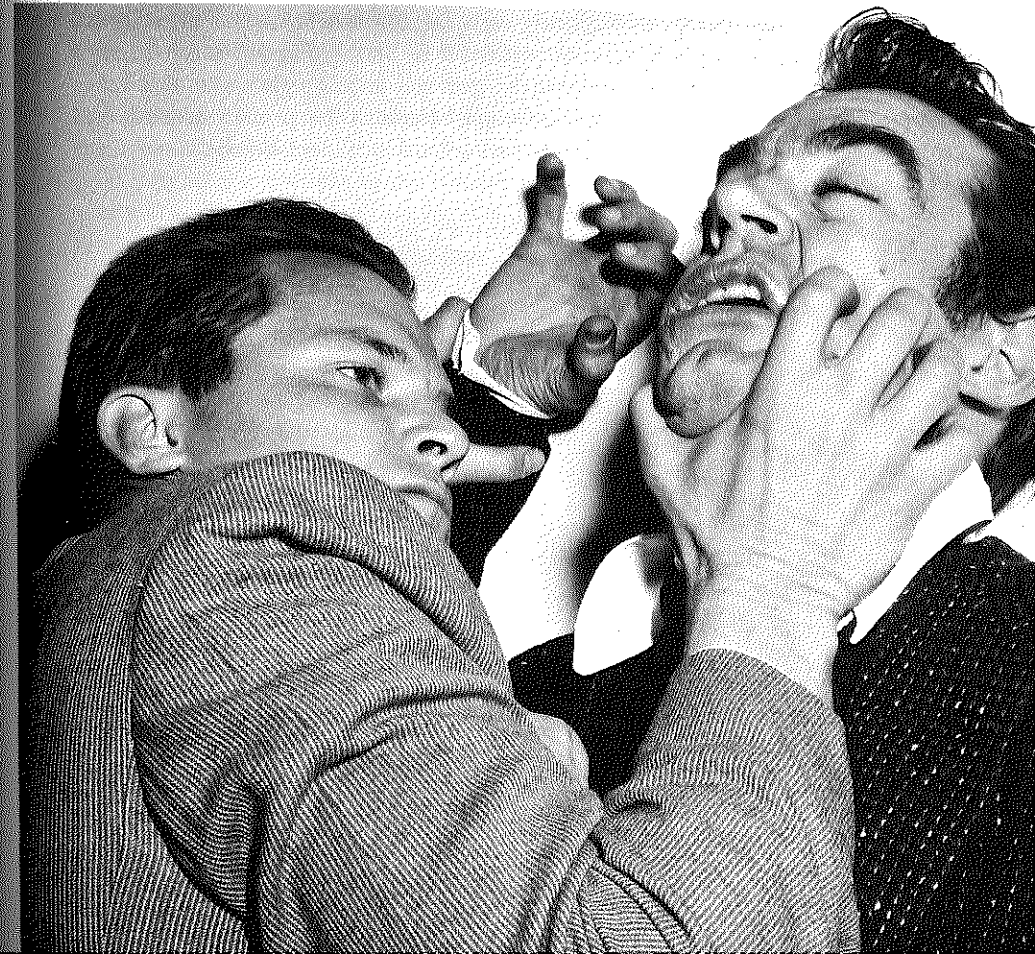
Whether Aldrich or A.I. Bezzerides were leftists, anarchists, or any other type of "ist" outside of the context of the films themselves seems less of a concern for more recent commentators. Perhaps this is because *Kiss Me Deadly* typifies those rare films which transcend critical modalities. Borde and Chaumeton, Schrader, Durgnat, Sarris, Wood, and scores of other critical writers all agree on the merits of the film. Structuralist, formalist, feminist, auteurist, and Marxist critics alike have all found something to admire in it. A quarter of century apart, Borde and Wood both remark on how Aldrich transformed Spillane's solipsistic and reactionary novel into something remarkable. Whether or not *Kiss Me Deadly* does anticipate the freeform narratives of the New Wave or, it could be argued, the self-conscious stylistic de-constructions of later Godard, it is undeniably multi-faceted and complex in attitude.

For many observers the mixture of *film noir*, McCarthyism, and "va-va-voom" has, to use Sarris' celebrated analogy from *The American Cinema*, caused a confusion between the forest and the trees. Borde sensed it when he wrote that "on the extreme right, certain imbeciles have identified this *thriller* as the quest for the Grail."<sup>15</sup> Shadouin may not have been aware of Borde's assertion but was reacting to my comment [see p. 212 above] when he wrote that "Hammer is the inheritor of a superfluous culture and a superfluous role, a modern, ironic Galahad whose quest leads him to a fire-breathing atomic box."<sup>16</sup> Telotte takes up this issue and ultimately concludes that "like Perceval, Mike fails as a quester."

As I suggested twenty years ago, *Kiss Me Deadly* obviously is a quest for a *noir* grail. Whether or not Hammer "fails" as a quester is less important than the quest

itself. From his name to his survival of the assault to his ability to overcome Evello's thugs, Hammer clearly has, as Shadouin notes, mythic qualities; but in myth some protagonists succeed and others fail. Aside from the question of "Subject/Object split and First Person Usage," which was a sub-head in the *Film Comment* article, my other context in originally writing that Hammer is not another Galahad but is a quester was Aldrich's *World for Ransom*.<sup>17</sup> In that film Julian March, the principal antagonist, actually says to the white-suited hero Mike Callahan: "You shouldn't play Galahad. You're way out of character." Ignorant of more distant past behaviors to which March may be referring, the viewer has only seen Calahan shelter a woman who betrayed his love and risk his life for the good of society. The irony in Marsh's comment is that for Calahan "playing Galahad" is not

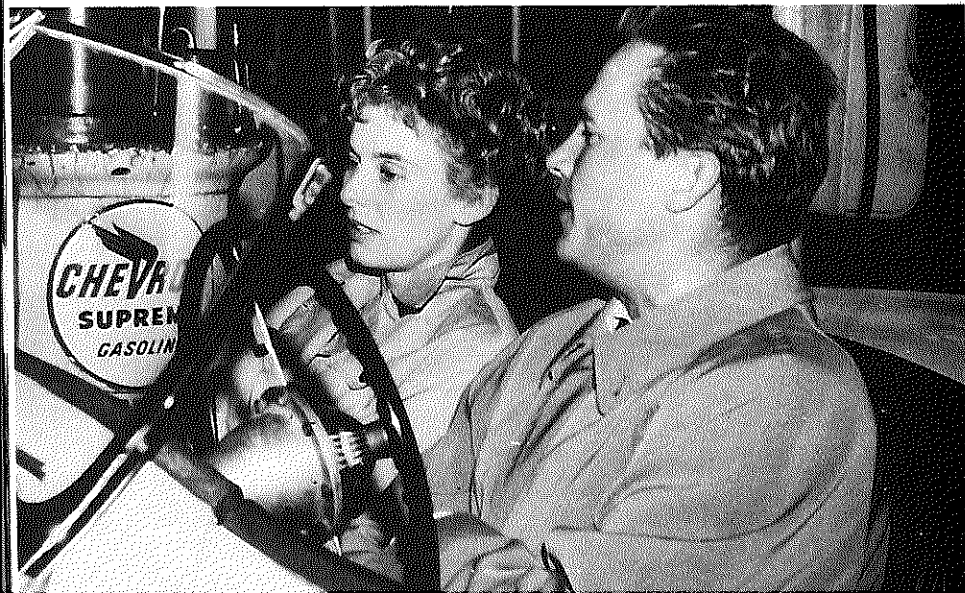
Below, a modern "knight" or "Galahad" at work: Hammer (Ralph Meeker) grapples inelegantly with Charlie Max (Jack Elam).



"way out of character." Superficially, that same irony does not apply to Hammer and his "what's in it for me?" attitude in *Kiss Me, Deadly*. What is actually in play in *Kiss Me Deadly* is not a standard archetype but a part of process that social historian Mike Davis describes as "that great anti-myth usually known as *noir*."<sup>18</sup> Hammer is indeed an "anti-Galahad" in search of his "great whatsit," a perfect colloquialism to stand in for and parody the fabled concept of a Grail. Wood calls Christina's perception of Hammer's narcissism at the beginning of *Kiss Me Deadly* "abrupt and rhetorical." But in an anti-mythic structure, a classic invocation of the epic hero, like Virgil's "Of arms and the man I sing" must be transformed into an antiheroic equivalent, something like: "You're the kind of person that has only one true love: you." This tension between myth and anti-myth, between hero and antihero, is one key to *Kiss Me Deadly* and the root of the complexity which Wood finds lacking. Hammer is a radically different character than many who preceded him in *film noir* and in Aldrich's work as well. For Aldrich, who often spoke of turning concepts on their heads, Hammer is the consummate anti-idealist.

Most recent commentaries beginning with Telotte have refocused on narrative issues. A simple example is a recent essay by R. Barton Palmer which consists mostly of plot summary (but, at least, he gets the ending right). Palmer's other comments, such as calling Hammer a "knight" because "he proves vulnerable to the desperation of ladies in distress" or saying "real locations...do not seem night-

Opposite, Hammer (Ralph Meeker) and Christina (Cloris Leachman) in a (pick one or more) threatening/non-threatening environment full of sexual repression/misogyny/homophobia. Actually in the cockpit of his sports car next to a gas pump, all of which are open to interpretation.



marish,"<sup>19</sup> are puzzling. Palmer does call Aldrich "perhaps the most political of *noir* directors."<sup>20</sup> This runs slightly counter to Gallafent's assertions about Aldrich's intentions. Gallafent explores the history of Spillane's prose and the evolution of Aldrich's assessment of his work through interviews; but he never cites Aldrich's most direct statement on the film's "sex and violence."<sup>21</sup> Gallafent characterizes "the release of massive physical violence"<sup>22</sup> in the scene where Hammer beats up a pursuer as an expression of Hammer's sexual frustration. In fact, complete with obscure allusions to the work of Douglas Sirk, Gallafent tries to make the entire narrative revolve around sexual frustration. One hesitates to think what unprecedented orgasmic connotations Gallafent might derive from the final explosion.

Still other commentators have taken analysis of the components of sex and violence much further than Gallafent. For one critic Hammer's violent beating of that same pursuer is an example of his repressed homosexuality in a film full of masculinized women and phallic symbols that is ultimately "homophobic as well as misogynistic."<sup>23</sup> Carol Flinn searches not for a great whatsit but for "feminine sexuality which displays itself so lavishly across this and other examples of *film noir*."<sup>24</sup> In considering "aural signifiers" Flinn raises several points. For instance, her mention of Christina's labored breaths at the film's beginning being "closer than they ought to be" and creating "a break in cinematic verisimilitude"<sup>25</sup> suggests one aural equivalent to the unusual visual elements in *Kiss Me Deadly*. Other subtle effects, such as dog barking outside Christina's house that seems to foreshadow Soberin's reference to "Cerberus barking with all his heads," understandably go unnoticed; but many obviously unusual sound elements, like Mist's loud snoring or Evello's literal expiration or even the growl of the box itself, are inexplicably overlooked amid discussions of dialogue and music.

Despite these wide-ranging critical excursions, one never gets the sense that the depths of *Kiss Me Deadly* have been fully probed. Certainly *Kiss Me Deadly* ranks with the most important examples of *film noir* by any director. It has the menace of *Night and the City*, the grim determinism of *Out of the Past*, the cynicism of *Double Indemnity*, the reckless energy of *Gun Crazy*, and the visual flourish of *Touch of Evil*. Its focus on the underlying sense of nuclear peril that haunted the end of the *noir* period could not have been more apt. If *Kiss Me Deadly* also reflects such contemporary issues as McCarthyism and moral decline, those, too, are part of the fabric of *film noir*.

As it happens, Aldrich's early career as assistant director and director coincides with the beginning and end of the classic period of *film noir*; and he would revisit many of the *noir* cycle's themes, sometimes accompanied by A.I. Bezzerides, in later films. But as a symbol of what *film noir* epitomized or of the powerful, malevolent forces lurking in the Aldrich/Bezzerides vision of the modern world, nothing would ever loom larger than a mushroom cloud over Malibu.

## Notes

1. Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du Film Noir Américain* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 277.
  2. See reprint above, p. 61
  3. Borde and Chaumeton, p. 277.
  4. Robert Justman, *Kiss Me Deadly* Shooting Schedule, November 23, 1954, p. 5.
  5. A.I. Bezzerides, *Kiss Me Deadly* screenplay, p. 130. Bezzerides wrote:  
305 BEACH - VELDA AND MIKE  
Velda helps Mike and they run through the darkness which is stabbed by sharp flickers of light. Now, as they COME CLOSER TO CAMERA, there is a tremendous explosion. Light gushes fiercely upon them. and they stop, turn.  
306 ON BEACH COTTAGE  
It is a boiling ball of fire.  
307 ON BEACH - VELDA AND MIKE  
As he holds her, to protect her from the sight. Debris from the shattered house falls hissing into the sea behind them.
- FADE OUT:
- THE END
- 1st A.D. Robert Justman refers to these two scenes as "Der Tag." In the actual film, through an optical effect the title, "The End," emerges and is brought forward out of the bright white flames engulfing the house (scene 306) and remains superimposed over Velda and Mike in the final shot (scene 307).
6. Jack Shadouin, *Dreams and Dead Ends. The American Gangster/Crime Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 349-350.
  7. J.P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark. The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 213.
  8. Robin Wood, "Creativity and Evaluation: two film noirs of the '50's," *CineAction!*, No. 20/21 (November, 1990), p. 20.
  9. Edward Gallefant, "Kiss Me Deadly" in *The Book of Film Noir* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 246.
  10. Edwin T. Arnold and Eugene L Miller, *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), p. 246.
  11. Wood, p. 19.
  12. Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), p. 85.
  13. Raymond Borde, "Un Cinéaste Non-conformiste: Robert Aldrich." *Le Temps Moderne* (May, 1956), p. 1684.
  14. Sarris, p. 84.
  15. Borde, p. 1688.

16. Shadouin, p. 273 and in Note 13, p. 350.
17. In fact, the outline of nine elements of style originally produced with Janey Place was designed around examples found in *World for Ransom*. *Kiss Me Deadly* was substituted at the request of *Film Comment*.
18. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 37.
19. R. Barton Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema. The American Film Noir* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 95/p. 96.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
21. Aldrich's reply to attacks by the Legion of Decency and other appeared as "Sex and Violence Justified" in *America*, No. 92 (May, 1955).
22. Gallafent, p. 242.
23. Robert Lang, "Looking for the 'Great Whatzit': [sic] *Kiss Me Deadly* and Film Noir" *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring, 1988), p. 33.
24. Carol Flinn, "Sound, Woman, and the Bomb," *Wide Angle*, Vol. 8, Nos. 3/4, 1986, p. 116.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Below, in a publicity pose that would have done Spillane proud, a sneering Hammer (Ralph Meeker) menaces a trussed-up Lily Carver (Gaby Rodgers). The pose suggests he is about to put the barrel of his gun in her mouth.

