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### The Illusion of Power

From the very first line, “as far back as I remember, I always wanted to be a gangster”, Scorsese illustrates a world where crime looks like freedom, power feels unchallengeable, and consequences seem far-fetched. Through his precise visual style and immersive sound design, Scorsese brings to life both the seductive appeal and the inevitable decay of Henry Hill’s journey through the world of organized crime. In his film *Goodfellas*, Martin Scorsese implements mise en scène and sound to illustrate both the tantalizing nature and the downfall of mob life, consequently, revealing the illusion of their success.

Beginning with the film’s opening scenes, Scorsese’s use of mise en scène draws the viewer into a world that is alluring yet dangerous. Throughout the film, the camera moves seamlessly through luxurious restaurants and nightclubs filled with vibrant colors, tailored suits, and expensive jewelry. The allure of mob life is portrayed in the tracking shot as Henry escorts Karen through the back entrance into a room that seems to open just for him (*Goodfellas*, 31:44-33:08). The setting, lighting, and movement all reflect Henry’s developing fixation with status and power. On the other hand, whenever Henry visits Sandy’s dark and dim home, where Henry’s cocaine is being cut and packaged, it foreshadows the underlying paranoia (1:28:16-1:28:53). In this setting, Henry has to put up a facade, acting as if he is in love with Sandy so that his cocaine business can thrive off of her dirty work. At the same time, he has a wife at home who has to know that Henry is going off and cheating on her just to keep his

business thriving. Scorsese illustrates that mob life is characterized by a split between enticing appearances and destructive realities through the use of contrasting environments.

Another essential factor in this contradiction is sound. With the lively rock and pop music, Scorsese's soundtracks create an energy that romanticizes the mob lifestyle. During the Copacabana scene, "Then He Kissed Me" plays with a smooth, steady rhythm as the camera glides behind Henry and Karen, making every hallway turn feel effortless and controlled (31:44-33:08). The music doesn't just accompany this scene; it makes the audience feel the ease of Henry's power. Later, that same confidence created by the music disappears when "Layla" plays over the montage of lifeless bodies in abandoned cars and freezer trucks. The gentle piano contrasts with gruesome visuals, revealing the cold reality that lies beneath the flashy lifestyle. Scorsese also employs voiceover narration, which is taken almost directly from the book, to reveal Henry's shifting state of mind. Early on, Henry's tone is calm and confident as he explains how they "paid off cops... lawyers... judges. Everybody had their hands out" (Pileggi 95), revealing a world that feels organized and controlled. But near the end, his narration becomes distraught that his life will be over and that he will be found by the rest of the mob and killed for betraying them. At one point, he can barely think because all he can think about is what he should do with his newfound normal life in witness protection. The increasing volume, rapid editing, and frantic narration make the viewer feel Henry's paranoia as his empire, which he thought was untouchable, began to collapse around him. Instead of directly stating that mob life leads to downfall, Scorsese lets the sound trap the audience in Henry's chaotic mind.

Both *Goodfellas* and *Wiseguy* demonstrate, through vivid scenes and contrasting songs, that the mob's glamour is only temporary because the same elements that make the lifestyle alluring ultimately lead to its collapse. Scorsese converts Pileggi's journalism into cinematic

language by visually contrasting glamour and destruction. In the beginning, Henry's world feels limitless because of his endless money, respect, and freedom, but the deeper he falls into crime and addiction, the more he loses control. Scorsese and Pileggi make it clear that the elements that make mob life so alluring are the same forces that lead to betrayal and ruin. Ultimately, the world of organized crime is not a path to success but a carefully constructed illusion that is waiting to fall apart.

Works Cited

Pileggi, Nicholas. *Wise Guy*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. 2011.

Scorsese, Martin. *Goodfellas*. Warner Bros., 1990.