

Snap Me Deadly: Reading the Still Photograph in Film Noir

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"In the photograph, something has posed . . . and has remained there forever, . . . but in cinema, something has passed . . . the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images."

—Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Introduction

Photography appears everywhere in film noir, its stunning range of technologies matched by the frequency with which photographic images crop up as plot devices in well-known films such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1942), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Call Northside 777* (1948) and in less-familiar pictures, including *I Wake up Screaming* (1942), *Nocturne* (1946), *The Brasher Doubloon* (1947), and *Beware, My Lovely* (1952). The impressive volume of these titles is matched, moreover, by the multiplicity of photographic practices film noir spotlights, including photojournalism, courtroom procedure, forensics, publicity photos, glamour shots, X-rays, snapshots, pornography, and military observation. These films, and their interest in particular photographic genres and practices, are part of what we describe as film noir's photographic

fix.¹ In what we estimate to be one-fifth of the roughly 500 films that comprise the classic noir canon, photography appears as a crucial element in the film's narrative and thematic development, making film noir the only genre to consistently—we might even say obsessively—return to its parent medium. Much as criminals are reputed to haunt the scenes of their crimes, film noir persistently returns to the still photograph as a site of meditation, asking viewers to consider photography's place in modern American life. Indeed, film noir's position vis-à-vis American culture is defined through its use of photography. Ever since 1946, when French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton coined the term "film noir" to refer to the particularly stylized, thematically bleak crime movies exported from Hollywood to European cinemas after the end of World War II, film noir has been a contestedly "American" product. Film noir's national identity is a fascinatingly complex issue that an essay of this length cannot hope to untangle.² Yet, as we examine the photographic subtext in a number of films, we find that while these movies attempt to distance themselves from the American cultural values they associate with photography, they share more with these values than they are willing to acknowledge.

In this paper, we will investigate treatment of two photographic armatures of American culture in the 1940s—the domestic photo and the glamour portrait—as depicted in film noir. Both photographic genres are linked to feminine realms because family photographs are typically taken and archived by women, while the glamour photograph's purpose is to create an icon of female desirability. Through its incorporation of these genres, film noir often positions photography as a feminine "other" against which it can valorize its narratives of manly prowess, rough and ready gun play, and brutal wisecracking. Film noir employs family photos to denigrate a particularly American form of nostalgia about the family and small-town existence; it uses glamour photos to indict Hollywood's construction of fantasies about women. On one level, therefore, these films seem to distance themselves from naïve notions of the middle-class family as a stable, monolithic unit as well as from Hollywood ideals of femininity. Our first argument in this essay, then, is that these photographic genres become an important foil against which noir films can promote their own chronotope of cynicism, urban decay, and alienation. Indeed, as we argue in our conclusion, it is no coincidence that these two feminized genres appear so frequently in films from the canon; easily dismissed as antithetical to its own aesthetics and ideology, domestic and glamour photographs enable film noir to promote the illusion of its own "original" look. And while these two types of photos appear frequently, the one photographic genre to which film noir is most indebted for its stylistic and thematic essence—street photography of the 30s and 40s—as almost never incorporated as a plot element or visual prop. While family and glamour photos are appropriated to help film noir define its identity by asserting what it is *not*, street photography, with its emphasis on crime scenes and urban dislocation, is noir's still-image precursor. Street photographs do not appear within film noir

plots precisely because the movies themselves are already enacting the genre's styles and obsessions.

At the same time, however, film noir does systematically conduct an inquiry into its own affective and cognitive disposition by way of photography. Indeed, film noir provides an especially interesting space in which to study the relation between photography and cinema, not only because photographs appear so frequently in these films but because of film noir's notorious reflexivity. In his most recent book, film theorist Garrett Stewart offers a fascinating meditation on the relationship between movies and photographs, beginning with the essential point that while every movie is comprised of photographs, the meaning of cinema depends precisely on the abrogation of its parent medium—that is, in order for the illusion of cinematic movement to work, the viewer cannot recognize the photographs that make up a movie as a whole. In this sense, photography operates as cinema's ghostly other, or to borrow Stewart's phrase, its "specular unconscious" (1999, 1). Given the elusive nature of this relation between photography and cinema, Stewart argues, one can only study it in those refractory moments in which the film pauses to meditate upon the photograph by way of either an inset photo or a freeze frame. Stewart locates most of his examples from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, a period in filmmaking typically credited as Hollywood's most avant-garde and thus the most likely to produce movies that offer more experimental treatments of photography. With the exception of Fritz Lang's *Fury*, Stewart ignores classic film noir altogether. And yet, as we will demonstrate here, film noir offers a wealth of examples that express an awareness—however uneasy or contradictory—of cinema's obvious and obviated debt to its parent medium.

I. The House that Noir Built: Family Photos

Family photos make frequent appearances in film noir and provide the genre's most oppositional undertext. Susan Sontag notes that photography became a ritual of family identity at the time when industrialization began radically changing domestic life: as extended kinship relations devolved into nuclear families, photographs emerged as important symbols of connection with a larger, vanished clan (1990, 32). Yet the family photograph's effect is not simply to memorialize lost relationships. Our notion of what a family is has been largely fabricated by, and disseminated through, photography. Marianne Hirsch observes that our sense of who fits into the family, as well as a myth of the family as secure and monolithic, is based to a great extent on the "inclusive, affiliative look" of family pictures. Indeed, "the camera has become the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and self-presentation" (1999, xvi). Photography apotheosizes the familial unit as a spiritual assembly based on values that are directly opposed to those typically associated with film noir: the photos represent simplicity, privacy, and intimacy, as opposed to the obscure, morally compromised space of noir. While family photos ask viewers to identify with the

pictured figures, noir repeatedly insists on the alienation and isolation of its protagonists. Family photos are employed for prideful social display—they boast to the viewer of their subjects' status within a bourgeois hierarchy. "Portraiture," as Suren Lalvani explains, "is always about public display, even if the photograph is limited to private consumption." Portraits of individual family members, therefore, "display the gendered body engaged in the performance of that destiny which is linked to the assumption of a proprietary self" (1996, 59-60). Film noir, in marked contrast, implies a world where degradation, shame, and secrecy are the normal emotions of the majority. Given this opposition, when family photographs appear in noir, we often sense that the photographs' ideological message and the film's narrative are in thematic contestation.

This opposition occurs with greater frequency than most critics have acknowledged. In fact, the general assumption about film noir is that it rarely depicts the family. Janey Place, for example, has argued that "On the rare occasions that the normal world of families, children, homes and domesticity appears in film noir it is either so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction . . . or so dull and constricting that it offers no compelling alternative to the dangerous but exciting life on the fringe" (1998, 60). Yet in our examination of noir, we find a rich spectrum of films that use photography to summon up familial and domestic realms. In *Sorry, Wrong Number*, for instance, Barbara Stanwyck's room is filled with photos of her and her husband—wedding photos, honeymoon photos—and photos of her father. Similarly, in *Beware My Lovely*, the domestic space presided over by Ida Lupino bristles with family photographs. *Kiss of Death* counterpoints photographs of a hold-up man's children with the D.A.'s comment that no crook could produce such sweet-looking kids, while *Dark Passage* emphasizes Lauren Bacall's attachment to her father with a scrapbook of images of him. While these visual punctures in the moving film may seem incidental at first, they effectively provide what Garrett Stewart calls an "alternate screen," asking us to imagine the characters in different contexts or even setting up a photographic surrogate that challenges the film's own narrative. Film noir's stylistic incorporation of photographs frequently reinforces this rupture in the imagistic continuum by emphasizing the photo's non-filmic qualities; framed against film noir's dynamic lighting, shadows, and angles, family photographs appear as static texts whose own set of conventions is markedly different from the film's. In this way, film noir draws our attention to what photographic theorists have only recently begun to address—that family photography must be understood as a visual archive with its own distinct codes, its own discrete norms of looking. Thus, much like the way film noir is touted to defamiliarize the American urban landscape, it also interrogates the accepted meanings of family presented by the ubiquitous domestic photograph.

We might go so far as to argue that when film noir employs family photographs, it almost always signals the "death"—either the literal physical demise, or a profound spiritual change—of the subject. As if illustrating Barthes' fa-

mous concept of the “anterior future”—that tense that allows us to look at any photograph and see that its subject “is dead, and . . . is going to die” (1981, 78), film noir routinely employs photographs as a narrative trope to signal a character’s impending danger. George Marshall’s *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) is a compelling case in point, as it highlights a pair of family photographs, one of which becomes a clue to a murder. The film illustrates how the horrors of war have been repeated and domesticated in the form of infidelities, alcoholism, and murder. In this climate, photographs of loved ones, though displayed repeatedly, are violently evacuated of tender sentiment and function instead as markers of alienation or incipient threat. Helen Morrison (Doris Dowling), the estranged wife of returning G.I. Johnny Morrison (Alan Ladd), displays in her apartment a double frame holding a portrait of her husband in military uniform and their dead son Dickey. In one frame we see a heroic soldier figure, in the other a darling child. These are common household objects, props we might expect to see in any home during World War II as visual shorthand for the strong affections among family members. The camera grazes over the images, recalling Stewart’s observation that “panning across or tracking in upon an internally demarcated photographic space may appeal to the viewers as a summons into a world beyond and behind the screen world” (1999, 13). The “behind screen world” suggested by the conventional images is one devoted to praising masculinity in its infantile and adult manifestations. Narratively, the photos’ position in Helen’s bedroom suggests that she is tenderly attempting to fill the gap left by her son’s death and her husband’s absence with their images.

Yet the images are so stereotypical as to be nearly anonymous. The photo we glimpse of Johnny could represent *any* soldier; much as the military has subsumed the individual Morrison into a military collective, the portrait renders him as an abstract outline of maleness. Annette Kuhn has remarked that a photograph of a soldier is “a piece of ceremonial portraiture in which ceremonial dress signifies that the moment being celebrated . . . subsumes the individualities of the individuals in the picture to larger communities, to attachments that both include and go beyond the lives of the picture’s subjects” (1999, 196). The single individual is thus bound to history, and in this case to the narrative of World War II, as much as to the family that displays his image. Furthermore, while Johnny’s photo is at first kept as a private image in Helen’s house, its conventional pose illustrates Allen Sekula’s observation about the inherently public nature of portraiture; the photographic family portrait “extends, accelerates, popularizes and degrades a traditional function,” which might best be typified as the “ceremonial presentation of the bourgeois self” (1990, 345). Johnny’s image is a marker or prop that identifies his social class as much as it is an image of an actual man. Its function within the film’s narrative at this point is simply to support what the plot has revealed—that Johnny is indeed a decorated navy man. In typical noir fashion, however, *The Blue Dahlia* soon takes what in

another context might appear as a jingoistic icon of American military force and transforms it into a symbol of marital and social dissolution.

In its fixity, which contrasts with the film's motion, the photo appears to depict an instant that is "obviously filed away in a past yet farther remote from us than the screen's constructed rectangular present" (Stewart 1999, 10). And yet, as the narrative of the Morrises' marriage unfolds on film, we see that the problem is not so much that the image of Johnny represents a dead past, but that Helen's use of the photo as proof of wifely respectability masks a radically different truth. The film makes a point of contrasting the living man to his own image in a scene where Johnny picks up the framed double photo. Visually, this moment emphasizes the stiffness and formality of the pictured soldier, flattened as all photos are by the frame, which Alan Trachtenberg argues not only "designates closure, [and] self-containment," but also "signifies at the lower levels the alienation of the sitter's appearance from the sitter's being" (1989, 190). By juxtaposing the returning Johnny with the elaborately framed picture, the film appears to call attention to the photograph as an image devoid of substance, less truthful than the living characters it can only represent in its frozen eye. We soon learn, however, that the photographs' distanced abstraction is indeed an accurate reflection of how emotionally removed Helen Morrison is from either of the pictured figures. Neither the husband nor the child mean anything to her; estranged from Johnny and actively engaged in an extramarital affair, she displays the images solely to lend herself an air of conventional respectability. They are literally just props used to make Helen's home look like the domestic space of a conventionally respectable woman.

As Johnny holds the framed pictures, the film camera zooms in to a close-up of the child's face, which it holds for several seconds. Here we see an instance of what Stewart identifies as "cinema prosecut[ing] its on-screen image by allusive recourse to its photographic basis" (1999, 41). And although the enlarged image of the child's face does not quite occupy the full screen, the closeup pulls in tightly enough that the photograph's filmed frame falls just inside the screen's edge, as if the two media were in contestation for the boundary of the visual field. In those brief seconds where photos occupy the entire picture plane, Stewart contends, they effectively displace the film's primacy. Furthermore,

A photograph appears to contain its image, we might say, whereas a film constrains what it places on view, to keep back all that might from moment to moment crowd upon its moving visual field. One effect of a photograph filling the cinematic frame is to deny this cinematic "constraint"—in its sudden coincidence with the borders of the photographic "enclosure"—any sense of a world impinging upon it from offscreen, any latent indexing of the contiguous. This is to

say that the film camera may seem almost to trespass upon the photograph's space without at all broadening the perimeters of the scopic field. (1999, 42)

The marked frame of the photograph suggests that there is nothing left to include in the photo. The cinematic edge, on the other hand, is permeable, transgressable at any moment by characters entering the lens's visual field. By showing the frame of Dickey's photo just within the film's edge, *The Blue Dahlia* juxtaposes these extremes of fixity and permeability, creating tension and an uneasy sense that the closed familial world represented by the static child's image is about to be sundered.

Indeed, cynically at odds with our expectations of what it means when a mother displays images of her children, Dickey's picture is instead symbolic of noir's disjunctions where, as Vivian Sobchak writes, "a diacritical contrast exists between impersonal, discontinuous rented space on the one hand and the familiar, unfragmented space of domesticity on the other" (quoted in Pfeil 1994, 229-30). Tossing back a martini, Helen announces to Johnny that Dickey was killed, not by diphtheria as she had originally said, but in a drunken car wreck with her at the wheel. Stewart makes the claim that photographs are "death in replica," while films are "a dying away in the process" (1999, 152). *The Blue Dahlia* illustrates this: Dickey appears only within the photograph, not in the film itself. The tragedy of his death is heightened by the deadly aura of the photograph, which encases him like a coffin. Likewise, the photograph of Johnny anticipates his death, or at least the demise of the personae represented by the photo; by the film's end, he is no longer a soldier, no longer a spouse. The film suggests that in an environment of such displacement, the meanings of family photographs are radically at odds with sentimental expectations.

The connection between photography and death becomes more explicit after Helen is found murdered, when the film brings to narrative prominence a note she has scrawled on the back of Dickey's photo to identify her killer. Roland Barthes calls the photograph an "invisible envelope" (1981, 6), which brilliantly describes how insignificant the materiality of the photograph is in relation to its referent; here, in contrast, the photograph's value resides *only* in its materiality because its referent means nothing to Helen. At this point, the narrative teases us by suggesting that while the photo fails as a memorial to Dickey, it at least serves—though not, ironically, because of anything it pictures—to identify the guilty party. In the film noir landscape, even the most innocuous-seeming images become clues to murder. As Stewart notes,

Whether as pirated snapshot or newspaper photo, whether transacted as blackmail or used in identification (corpus delicti or otherwise), the two-dimensional image—in its lifeless flatness—punctuates the receding shadows of back alleys, seedy

bars, after-hours offices, all those nervous, bereft spaces that characterize the genre. Now clue, now fugitive trace, now fetish object, the inset photograph intrudes upon these penumbral zones of solitude and disquiet with the nagging black and white fact of its captured and often inculcating past. (1999, 59)

In *The Blue Dahlia*, that tendency is presented in the extreme as a narrative written on the back of a photo. The film thus completely takes over the photograph's other possible meanings as a marker of familial love or memorial to the lost, writing its own plot on the image. Whatever meanings the familial image may have had in other contexts give way to the plot's imperatives.

Yet the photo contests the role thrust upon it by the plot: as we find out in the film's final moments, Helen has fingered the wrong man, and the suspect identified on the back of the photo is *not* her killer. The film's conclusion suggests that Dickey's picture refuses to stay still within *any* assigned definition: while it certainly defies the sentimental expectations of what it means when a mother displays an image of her child, it also resists easy assimilation as a clue. Instead, the rapidly changing roles this photo assumes indicate the degree to which a photograph is determined by context. In film noir, all photos become evidence. Yet, as *The Blue Dahlia* makes beautifully clear, what photographs give strongest proof of is their ongoing contest with film for narrative meaning.

Like *The Blue Dahlia*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* can be read as a critique of romantic family mythology reified by photographs. Important to the plot development are an old studio portrait and a snapshot of a baby, both of which are presented as evidence of essential personality. Each photo is introduced by a rapturous narration in which a character explains the image's emotional significance to the family as a whole. Hitchcock makes certain, however, that viewers are aware of plot elements that complicate or contradict the characters' nostalgic accounts. The film's narrative thus turns on the fact that both images hide a darker reality.

Charles Oakley (Joseph Cotton), a handsome young man who has murdered several wealthy widows, is tracked by detectives and decides to hide out with his sister's family in Santa Rosa, California. He assimilates easily into their community because its inhabitants are too charmed by his smooth exterior and obvious financial resources to notice the increasingly blatant peculiarities that suggest he is not what he pretends to be. Years have passed since his doting, maternal sister has seen him, and with money and gifts that viewers quickly realize are stolen from the murdered women, Charles poses as a successful businessman. Soon he becomes something of a local celebrity, donating money to charities and presenting talks to the town's social club.

Shadow of a Doubt suggests that valorization of material prosperity, combined with a photographically-bolstered view of the family as an idyllic unit,

actually allow criminality to flourish. Strikingly, the film employs very few of the classic noir stylistic devices such as low-key lighting and extreme angles. Only in the film's opening and in one short scene set in a bar does it "look" like noir. In fact, its continual high-key lighting, balanced compositions, and emphasis on the family's cheerful occupation of its domestic space suggest that we might read the film as an extended album of family photographs. It is only slowly that these domestic vignettes are intruded upon by the noir world of Uncle Charles. This meeting of sunny domesticity with the noir world echoes events in Hitchcock's own life. Elsie Mitchie observes that *Shadow* was made at a point when Hitchcock had become partially assimilated to American culture—he had purchased a house and was considering applying for citizenship. "It is thus from his own marginalized position as an outsider who chose to become identified with a new mother country," Mitchie writes, "that Hitchcock represents the American family as a locus of idealized fantasies but also fears about merging and safety" (1999, 31).

In an early scene centered on a photograph, Hitchcock suggests that Santa Rosa is a place where unpleasant historical facts lurk behind a façade of mawkish familial illusions. Soon after his arrival, Charles presents his sister Emma (Patricia Collinge) with an antique photograph of their parents. The photo is a grim *memento mori*; representing a dead couple, it is further linked to mortality by its close association with the lavish spoils of Charles' murders, which he bestows upon the family at the same time. Noting that the photo has been locked away in a bank vault, Charles then presents his niece Charlie (Teresa Wright) with an enormous emerald ring that viewers soon realize has recently been worn by one of his victims. In fact, the association of the photo with Charles' other stolen goods implies that perhaps the photo itself had another owner; depicting a generic, stiffly posed nineteenth-century couple, the photo contains no markers that clearly indicate who the couple was. The conventional codes that govern family portraits inspire viewers to make connections and see themselves and their kin in domestic photos. The affiliative look earlier noted by Hirsch suggests that we recognize likenesses even in images that *do not* depict our own families. When Emma, prompted by Charles, recognizes their parents in the image, is she actually recognizing them? Or is Hitchcock suggesting that Emma's sentimental gullibility is easy prey to Charles' more devious understanding of the photograph's flexibility?

Charles presents the antique image to Emma as a keepsake of a golden age when humans operated under a different code of ethics. He places it in Emma's hands while eulogizing how "things were innocent back then, simpler and lovelier." Interestingly, Charles' sentimental narration of the photo echoes a phenomenon Hirsch observes in children of Holocaust survivors. These children's lives are shaped by events that occurred before their births, yet which profoundly affected their childhoods. Hirsch coined the term "postmemory" to refer to second-hand recollections that are separated "from memory by generational dis-

tance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (1997, 22). Given this definition, it is not surprising that postmemory is often triggered by or mediated through photographs. Yet, as with photographs themselves, two obvious complications of postmemory are the struggle between subjective and objective interpretations of history, and a tendency to nostalgize the traumatically-displaced past. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock emphasizes that the antique photo was taken in 1888³—a date infamous for the Jack the Ripper murders. The picture of the quaint-looking, old-fashioned couple thus contributes to a romanticized mythology of the past and obscures an ominous truth, much as Charles’ physical beauty hides his double identity as a vicious stalker of women. Charles himself appears to be genuinely nostalgic for the past he reads in the image; cold-blooded as he is with living people, he too succumbs to the ideology of family photographs. In this sense, the photograph might even be read as a catalyst for his murders; as Charles reveals in a later conversation, he has idealized notions of how women and families should behave. When real life doesn’t conform to this—when women outlive their wealthy husbands and transgress Victorian social boundaries by looking for a younger man’s companionship—he feels justified in murdering them.

As we consider the obfuscating cloud photography casts over memory in *Shadow of a Doubt*, it is fascinating to observe that Hitchcock emphasizes the degree to which women are the controllers and guardians of family photographs and, hence, of the myths that surround them. Indeed, as Nancy West has demonstrated, the Eastman Kodak company specifically targeted women consumers in the advertising for its box camera from the late 1880s through the first World War; Kodak’s ad campaign, which pledged “you push the button—we do the rest,” was geared to appeal to a female market presumably timid about camera technology. Through its exceptionally successful ad invention, the “Kodak Girl,” Eastman suggested that taking and collecting domestic photographs was not only a hobby for women; maintaining and enlarging the family photo archive with snapshots of family members was a responsibility that the self-respecting wife and mother would never shirk (2000, 94). It is appropriate, given this history, that Hitchcock presents Emma as the person in charge of determining what photographs may be taken in her house. In one scene, government agents hot on Charles’ trail pose as reporters interviewing “average American families.” Though one of the agents holds the camera, Emma dominates the photo session and prevents the men from approaching Charles. As her desire to control the photographic image suggests, Emma invests photographs with profound value.

Emma is especially dependent on photographs to illustrate her ideals of family life. Because of this, she is easily taken by Charles’ ruse. A society matron and mother whose attachment to her much-younger brother throbs with



Figure 1: *Shadow of a Doubt*. Courtesy of Universal Pictures, Co., Inc.

oedipal impulses, Emma is shown to be so reliant on photographically bolstered notions of kinship that she doesn't notice the obvious threat Charles poses to her family. At one point, she calls for the only extant snapshot of Charles, taken when he was a baby, and now a prized possession of young Charlie. Holding the picture of a conventional golden-haired innocent, she narrates a maudlin account of an accident that occurred the very day the photo was taken. To Emma, the accident marks the boundary between the shy, quiet baby Charles and the daredevil boy he later became. Yet, as in all Hitchcock films, ascribing personality development to a single event like an accident seems too arbitrary and simplistic. Scott McQuire writes of a

cultural preoccupation with the “decisive moment,” as if tracing events to a putative source could somehow purify their meaning, and thereby alleviate the problems of interpretation which bedevil all claims to historical truth. What remains striking is the extent to which such an understanding of time, extending to the hypothesis that life itself might be comprised of a series of singular moments, seems peculiarly photographic in conception. (1998, 144)

Aware of the problems inherent in such a perception of time, Hitchcock focuses his camera on the image as Emma “explains” her brother's shift in per-

sonality, thus asking us to maintain a critical distance from that explanation and, consequently, to view the photograph ironically. What the film implies is that Charles always possessed violent capacities, even as a child. The cute snapshot offers a more palatable version of his identity, but Emma's recollection is clearly shaped by the generic image rather than by the boy himself. Hitchcock makes sure that by the time Emma produces the baby picture, the audience has figured out that Charles did not come by his wealth in any legitimate way. As a result, Emma seems blindly foolish to obvious reality. That she refuses to connect Charles with the series of life-threatening "accidents" that beset her daughter emphasizes how dangerous her investment in the domestic fairytale promised by the snapshots really is.

Other filmic critiques of photography arise in a subplot in which we learn that Charles has a deep fear of being photographed. On one level, the narrative suggests that Charles avoids the camera for fear that a photograph could be used to identify him as the murderer. On a deeper level, Hitchcock asks viewers to link Charles' obsessive fear of photographs with Emma's syrupy reliance upon them. Brother and sister, like many nineteenth-century aficionados, seem to regard the photograph as a mirror that passes through the materiality of the body to reflect the fleeting, secret workings of the soul. Clearly, Hitchcock himself is dubious of such grand claims. Photographs, the film implies, serve only to conceal the truth and mask ugly realities.

In fact, photography is so insistently presented as the tool of obfuscation in *Shadow of a Doubt* that it seems Hitchcock is asking viewers to recognize the limitations of the still image and, conversely, to valorize filmic representation. All the while that Charles refuses to be photographed, we realize, he's filmed by Hitchcock's camera. What does Hitchcock wish to imply by foregrounding this opposition between the photographic and the cinematic? That no one can escape his all-seeing directorial gaze? That film is more powerful and more truthful than the still photography it contains? That film is capable of showing the complexity of human intrigues in a way that the photograph, subsumed as it is by nostalgizing impulses, cannot? Each of the above, we believe. At the end of *Shadow of a Doubt*, none of the family but young Charlie knows about Charles' crimes. Undeterred by her swooning adolescent attraction to her uncle, and unswayed by his bribery and threats, Charlie slowly pieces together the truth. Yet there is no place within her family's own myth of middle-class American respectability for her to reveal such realities. As a result, when Charles attempts to push her from a moving train and is himself killed, Charlie is certain that the truth would crush her doting mother and must pretend his death is another accident. The family whose identity is dependent upon photographic appearance of conventionality could not, Hitchcock makes clear, bear this young girl's grim knowledge.

Yet, while Hitchcock is certainly correct in his presentation of family photography as the primary site for the construction of domestic myths, this contest between the film and its photographic undertext is not resolved simply by blam-

ing the still image and exonerating film. *Shadow of a Doubt*, like so many other noir films, incorporates family photos as a means of exposing the naïveté of such myths, establishing the family as a convenient foil against which it can promote its own fascination in urban decay and social alienation. In so doing, film noir handily deflects the charges of nostalgia that might otherwise be directed at its own tendency to aestheticize. In his essay on the “homelessness” of film noir, Dean MacCannell makes the following observation:

Caught in the interior space of film noir, a merely ordinary person would want to flee to the suburbs, to Levittown or Orange County, California. But as the fantasy frame for a reality that is represented as “harsh,” “cold” or “stark,” in the end its “grittiness” becomes the basis for its deeper appeal to the ego: it presents a version of everyday life in the city that is adequate to the ego’s exalted view of itself. Perpetually exposed to imaginary risk and opportunity, the noir hero proves himself mentally and physically. The groundless “nostalgia” these fictions provide historically disconnects us from the real sources of our suffering while catering to our sense of self-importance. (1993, 281)

By aestheticizing the very “ugliness” it explores, film noir makes such social realities as homelessness, corruption, and violence into peculiar objects of beauty. Caught up as we are in its compelling narratives, however, it is much harder to recognize such wistfulness within film noir than it is to identify it in family photographs. As if to distract us from its own sentimentality, film noir exploits the clichéd prettiness of the domestic image, suggesting that its own aesthetic offers us a truer, harder look at American life. By doing this, it encourages us to forget that film noir is born of an aesthetic and narrative impulse that is, ultimately, equally liable to the charge of nostalgia.

II. Smile, My Lovely

If family photographs operate as film noir’s most oppositional undertext, glamour photography haunts the noir screen as its dangerously similar Other. The domestic photo’s associations with naïveté, simplicity, and familial stability make it a relatively easy target for noir’s trenchant critique of photography’s place in American culture. Glamour photographs pose a more difficult challenge. Whereas domestic photos are typically the catalysts for a particularly American form of nostalgia about family life and small-town existence that noir rejects, glamour photographs, like filmic images of the *femme fatale*, are designed to evoke sexual desire from male viewers. And while family photos are generally criticized as amateurish and rudimentary, glamour photos tend to incorporate some of the same techniques as cinema and are typically produced by

male professionals whose relationship to their female clients resembles the relationship between Hollywood director and star. Family photos idealize the mother figure as the unifying force behind the domestic sphere, and in so doing emphasize her role as keeper of the photographic archive rather than subject of it; glamour photographs, in contrast, isolate and fetishize the body of the female subject. Finally, family photos claim authenticity while glamour photos flaunt their status as purveyors of fantasy—something film noir does the moment the sexualized woman appears onscreen, her image often undercutting the films' claims to a gritty urban realism.

Glamour photography and film noir thus share a range of important characteristics. And yet, in Edward L. Marin's *Nocturne* (1946) and H. Bruce Humberstone's *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941), glamour photos are deployed as convenient foils, associated with the very narcissism and sexual allure for which noir loves to punish its female characters.⁵ The women pictured within these portraits are represented as self-absorbed, delusional, or over-ambitious, victims of a culture whose overvaluation of the photographic image reduces women to sexual objects. Like many noir films, these movies castigate their female characters for participating in the making of fantasy images, thereby opposing their conventional narrative of punishment with glamour photography's invitation to narcissism. Yet, film noir's own fascination with the sexual woman complicates this attempt at critical distance. Like the deadly seductress whose erotic power the male protagonist cannot resist, glamour photography emerges in these films as cinema's own irresistible object of attraction. Indeed, both films imagine photography as noir's feminized Other, dangerous and in need of policing.

While a range of noir films, including such famous titles as *Murder, My Sweet*, incorporate glamour photographs into their plots, *Nocturne* and *I Wake Up Screaming*, although lesser known, offer rich points of contrast. As a detective story, *Nocturne* structures its linear investigation of a murder case entirely around eleven photographs of women, placing photographs as feminized clues through which the male detective can demonstrate his superior investigative skills. As Ronald Thomas notes, "At the center of virtually every detective story is a body upon which the literary detective focuses his gaze and employs his unique interpretive powers. His goal is to explain an event that seems to be inexplicable to everyone else" (1999, 2). On one level, then, glamour photographs operate in this film as seductive yet passive "bodies" to be read, feminized objects upon which male lovers, photographers, and detectives demonstrate their interpretive powers. On a second level, however, *Nocturne* employs reflexive cinematographic moments that briefly empower the feminized still photos in the face of the encompassing film's detective plot. While *Nocturne*'s narrative is linear and its end ultimately conventional (the detective marries the "good" girl), the film's most interesting moments are experimental loci in which glamour photographs dominate the filmic plane. These moments offer a counter narrative, an allegorical story in which the silent, objectified woman not only

resists the interpretative powers of the detective but also represents photography's resistance to certain kinds of cinematic narrative.

Set in Hollywood, California, *Nocturne* critiques glamour photographs through the eyes of detective Joe Warne (George Raft), whose shifting response to them parallels their transmutation in the film from icons of feminine beauty to murder clues suitable for the landscape of film noir. In the opening scene, a womanizing composer named Keith Vincent (Edward Ashley) plays the piano while looking at a row of nine studio portraits of his former lovers, explaining to his tenth soon-to-be-cast-off companion—who is mostly hidden from our view—how he met each one. He recounts his romantic conquests—"I've had girls before. That one was half-Spanish. Followed me all over South America"—as he glances at each photograph with obvious conceit. Bored by the attentions of the actual women, he apparently regards these images as convenient souvenirs of his sexual escapades. The silence of the photographs thus reinforces the absence of the women who, because they are not present to tell *their* side of the story, are subject to the narrative agency of the male ekphrastic artist. He, moreover, subsumes each individual portrait into the same tale of sexual conquest, acting as if the mute object awaits the redundant ventriloquism of his voice. The photographed feminine body is thus a cipher for the male narrator. But the composer's recital is itself silenced when a woman we *cannot see* apparently shoots him and then, as we later discover, removes her photographic image from the wall and stages the murder as a suicide.



Figure 2: *Nocturne*. Courtesy of RKO Radio Pictures Inc.

Three and a half minutes into the film, therefore, the photographs radically shift status. No longer icons of beauty that testify to Vincent's sexual prowess, they now become clues to his murder. *Nocturne* immediately cuts to a shot of Warne standing in front of the photographs, studying them with his professional analytic gaze. While everyone else involved in the case scrutinizes Vincent's remains for clues, Warne reads the images of women as signs of possible homicide, both body and photograph transformed here into textual evidence. Like the corpse, the photograph becomes a silent, inanimate figure upon which the masculine authority of the police can fashion its narrative.

Once subject to the words of a womanizing man, then, these photos are now subordinated to the narrative of the law and the gaze of male authority. Yet, just as the composer's boastful recounting is stifled by a fatal gunshot, the detective's attempt to interpret the photographs fails. While the other policemen in the room rattle off their (incorrect) interpretations of what happened, Warne remains silent, apparently unable to glean information from the photographs he so carefully inspects. Instead, the extraordinary loveliness of each image challenges him to maintain his analytic gaze.

Each one of the nine photographs seems like an *objet d'art*, the face of its subject rendered both perfect and ephemeral. In a striking tracking shot in which the camera hovers right behind Warne's shoulder as he looks at the photos, the film invites us—along with him—to admire eyelids lowered languidly, waved hair spilling over a bed of white fur, jewels that sparkle off black evening dresses. As the camera pans by them, each photograph gradually becomes enlarged so as to fill the entire screen. This technique not only grants an overwhelmingly erotic power to each photograph; it also imparts photography with a temporary primacy over cinema. Here, the permeable cinematic edge is blocked, or stopped, by the impenetrable frame of the photograph. Because photographs do not seem to allow any impingement from the outside world upon their perimeters, enlargement of them here reinforces their impenetrability by the detective—implying at the same time that the film itself is the only space where clues to the murder can enter.

Looking at these images along with Warne, and simultaneously observing the rigidity of his face, we wonder whether his professional composure in the wake of the photographic image is only a façade. Our curiosity is satisfied in the following scene, where the photographs are used to expose his personal feelings. When the detective returns to his cramped apartment and the aged mother with whom he lives, he ponders the photographs in an elaborate scene designed to emphasize his loneliness and sexual frustration. Unlike Vincent, Warne apparently leads a celibate life, and while he never verbally acknowledges his disappointment, the photographs tell us a different story. As Warne lies prostrate on his bed in the middle of the night, the glamour photographs are represented as dreamy images that float in darkness. No longer statically viewed

on a wall, they are shown to us here in a much more dynamic presentation, suggesting that they have become embodiments of the detective's secret longings.

More than this: they have also become *film*. Projected within the darkness of Warne's bedroom, blurring one into the next in a cinematic montage that undermines their status as still photographs, the women's portraits become cinema. Another space is opened here, a photochemical rather than narrative space. Each image is enlarged, motorized, even lent the illusion of three-dimensionality. Nearly filling the filmic frame, the photographs move towards us and then beyond the screen, doing what an actual photo cannot do but what a cinematic image always eventually does: escape our gaze. This shift from photograph to cinema seems to mark a psychological divide for Warne, suggesting that the celibate and self-controlled detective has now become enthralled by the feminine image, which, as it haunts his psyche, also threatens at this point to overtake the space of the movie itself. Refusing to sit still, the photograph has been transformed into film still. In this reappearance of the suppressed photograph—that filmic unit between photography and cinema—*Nocturne* briefly hints at cinema's own debt to photography.

After this point, the film allows still photographs to assume increasing complexity. Originally silent and undecipherable, then threatening to the detective's rigid, masculine façade, the photographs now become symbols of deception. In the following scene, Warne begins to track down each of the nine photographed women for an interview, hoping that one of them will provide him with vital information to the case. The interviews all prove futile. What Warne discovers instead is that there is a radical disjunction between the images produced in the portraits and what seem to be the actual circumstances of the women's lives. When the detective investigates the first of the nine women, for example, he discovers her to be a haggard waitress working in what she herself calls a "crummy joint." Her cinematic image is a puncturing, in Barthes' sense of the "punctum" or obtuse meaning, providing details that wound any obvious meaning, opening up a plurality of readings and references, forcing us to rethink not only her individual photograph but all the others as well. Were these women simply beautiful, sexualized objects? Or were they each made over by the composer, whose transformation of them was certified by a photograph? Did these women lose their attractiveness once Vincent rejected them? The photographs, once merely silent, now seem like false documents.

Interestingly, it is not until Warne deduces from marks on the wall that a photograph is *missing* from Vincent's apartment that he begins successfully tracking down the murderer. The missing photo quickly becomes the gap in the plot, the mysterious identity that, once discovered, will presumably solve the case. It becomes the ekphrastic center, a mug shot, the "black hole" around which its investigation will be conducted. Like Warne, we imagine that the lost photograph must show another beautiful woman—and perhaps, this time, an exact correlation will exist between the photographic and cinematic image.

Our expectations are fulfilled in a dazzling metacinematic scene in which Warne visits the photographer's studio where the portraits were made, and where he asks to see the picture that was most recently completed for Vincent. From Warne's viewpoint, the camera takes us into the darkroom, where we watch the photographic image develop in a solution bath before our eyes. Then, in an extraordinary use of a dissolve, the still picture in the solution magically gives way to its cinematic successor, replaced by a moving image of actress Frances Ransom (Lynn Bari) emerging from a swimming pool. Cinematic automatism vivifies the still image while at the same time giving birth to it. The film shows the photograph's production, then shows photography evolving into cinema, as if by tracing this succession film could flaunt its power over its parent medium. Seeing that Frances is every bit as beautiful as her photograph, we are immediately encouraged to suspect her as Vincent's murderer.

Nocturne's belated introduction of Frances Ransom implies that the film's earlier preoccupation with photos of other women (and, particularly, with their status as fetishes of beauty) will now be displaced by attention to the filmic image of one woman, which will provide us with more clues about her character than any photograph ever could. In this regard, the photos in *Nocturne* function as foils, allowing the mechanisms of the film that contains them—its movement, editing, *mise-en-scène*, and multiple views—to show off its more complex representational capacity. The plot supports this reading. It is clear from the outset that Warne finds Frances attractive; he interrogates and courts her at the same time, polishing off his battery of questions with a rough embrace and a kiss. In Frances, he discovers the locus of his unarticulated desire. Importantly, this desire comes from within the film, not through a photograph. Whereas the other women's photos earlier testified only to his loneliness, the transformation of Frances' photo into living image suggests that his solitude will now be alleviated.

And, indeed, photos are done away with at this point; no longer an integral part of the plot, their glamorous identity is destroyed by the noir film that contains them. From now on, they are treated only as clues—a point reinforced at the conclusion when Warne solves the murder by accidentally discovering a photograph of Ransom's sister, Carol Page (Virginia Huston), whose jealous husband actually killed Vincent. As in *The Blue Dahlia*, what's written on the back of the photograph—a note to Vincent that proves her portrait was indeed the missing one—becomes more important than the photographic subject herself. Ransom's photograph, we discover, was created only as a red herring to deflect attention away from her sister. As if reinforcing the photograph's loss of potency as an icon of erotic control, Warne simply folds up the sister's image and puts it in his pocket, his gesture symbolic of how the detective has neatly folded up the case. Glamour photos will not bother him anymore; he has the "authentic" image of Ransom, whom he'll marry.



Figure 3: *Nocturne*. Courtesy of RKO Radio Pictures Inc.

If *Nocturne's* conclusion, with its rejection of photographic in favor of more powerful filmic representations, seems merely dismissive, other points in the movie present photography as positively nefarious. All ten of Vincent's women suffered bitterly after he rejected them—one even committing suicide. The film clearly implies that these women were foolish to fall for a man whose shallowness is best represented by his collection of photographs, the fantastic qualities of which belie the actual circumstances and personalities of the subjects they depict. But the real target of the film's critique is the men who turn the living women into glamour images: Vincent and Keith Shawn, the male photographer who, like Vincent, pays for his traffic in photography with his life. Like Vincent, Shawn is portrayed as arrogant and misogynistic. And like Vincent, only more so, he is effeminate and foreign, characteristics emphasized in both men to offset the detective-hero's Americanized hypermasculinity. When we first see Shawn, he is barking orders at one of his models in a kind of parodic reenactment of the neurotic Hollywood director with his female star, insulting her, telling her he knows which side is her best, and walking off the set, exclaiming "Women! I can't tell you how sick I am of women!"

The most compelling aspect of the photographer's death is the elaborate attention *Nocturne* gives to transforming the photographic studio into a crime scene. As Warne enters the studio in the middle of the night, he passes a colossal billboard (that quintessential sign of American commodity culture) with a woman's glamorous face plastered on it, the sheer size of the image, coupled

with its framing against noir's low-key lighting and shadows, making it horrifying. Here, the film flaunts its interest in exposing and exterminating the fantasies that underlie the glamour photograph. As Warne walks through the empty studio looking for Shawn, he stumbles over cameras, knocks over trays of chemicals, steps on negatives, the production site of glamour photos subject to his masculine contempt. When he finds Shawn's body strung up from the ceiling, he casually cuts it loose, letting it fall to the ground and never even bothering to inspect it. Since the plot never provides a convincing explanation for Shawn's death, we're left to imagine that the real motivation behind it is punishment, punishment for the crime of photography itself.

Nocturne suggests that by the late 1940s both cinematic and photographic institutions had bred such rampant glamour fantasies that it was no longer possible to live detached from them. It is only within the perimeters of film noir and its disciplining structure, *Nocturne* intimates, that we can maintain a critical distance from such debasement. By giving us a different nuance and texture from the glamour photograph, *Nocturne* promotes its own filmic status while at the same time reflecting on the cultural implications of another medium's tendency toward objectification. Paradoxically, however, *Nocturne*'s most compelling cinematic moments are those experimental scenes dependent upon the still photo. In the several scenes where still photos metamorphose into cinematic images before our eyes, we catch the ghostly but irresistible palimpsest of noir's repressed self.

In its gritty look at the glamour, publicity, and fashion industries in America, *I Wake Up Screaming* seeks to distance itself, like *Nocturne*, from the production and circulation of fantasy images. Filmed in 1941, several years before *Nocturne* and just at the cusp of the seventeen years in which the classic noir canon flourished, *I Wake Up Screaming* is technically extraordinary for its early use of flashbacks and its highly stylized cinematography. As such, it anticipates complex noir films like *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948) and *Out of the Past* (1947) by several years. It also anticipates film noir's notoriously scathing critique of American culture. Directed by H. Bruce Humberstone, whose films generally defamiliarize a prominent American landscape (*Sun Valley*; *Hello, Frisco, Hello*), or critique a distinctly American phenomenon (*Madison Ave.*; *The Merry Wives of Reno*), *I Wake Up Screaming* focuses on the fashion and publicity industries so as to denounce their exploitation of female desires and ambitions. In so doing, the film clearly positions photography as a conveniently oppositional medium against which it defines itself, its disciplinary impulses acting as a palinode for the unbridled female opportunism and vanity symbolized by the glamour/fashion portrait.

This last point is articulated by the very first shot of the film, which takes a photograph of model Vicky Lynn (Carol Landis) and contextualizes it within the front page of a tabloid newspaper, framed by the headline "Beautiful Model Found Murdered in Apartment." Originally designed as an iconic representa-

tion of female desirability, the model's image is here transformed into an object of forensic investigation. This opening shot thus announces *I Wake Up Screaming's* critical disdain of the glamour photograph, flaunting film noir's delight in making even the most unlikely image an object of criminal interest.

As the film develops, however, glamour photographs actually function less as crime clues than they do as *memento mori* of the murdered model. As such, they stand outside the perimeters of the investigation itself, serving instead to remind us continually of the dead woman they represent. *I Wake up Screaming* thus posits glamour photography as a much more intricate Other for film noir than does *Nocturne*. Within this visually fluid and narratively complex film, photographs absolutely refuse to sit still or to be policed by the film's plot.

What makes this observation especially compelling is that the photographs that haunt the screen of *I Wake Up Screaming* are all of Lynn, who is *already dead* when the film begins. To a certain extent, this photographic haunting speaks to the potency of the feminine image, a theme so recurrent in film noir that we can locate literally hundreds of examples, among them Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) and Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1945). Metacinematically, however, it also testifies to the power of photography in the face of cinematic repression. The photographs in *I Wake Up Screaming* resist the possibility of fusing into movement and assimilating into the filmic realm, as Frances Ransom's image did in *Nocturne*. Instead, the movie insists on returning to the suspended animation of the still image, Vicky Lynn's death emphasized by the photographs' static qualities. This is so not only because of the film's repeated use of inset photos within its *mise-en-scène* but because of how it begins and ends its flashback structure with a photograph. The flashback is thus animated and terminated by photographs of the dead woman, articulating the film's awareness that while the photo is a kind of corpse, cinema, as Garrett Stewart phrases it, is "a finality always on the cusp of revival" (1999, 152).

The first half of *I Wake Up Screaming* recounts the story of Lynn's metamorphosis from a waitress into a famous model by publicist Frankie Christopher (Victor Mature). In an urbanized, American version of the Pygmalion myth, Christopher and his two friends, a newspaper columnist and an actor—all three of them, therefore, in the business of illusion—transform Lynn into a model by dressing her fashionably, teaching her how to talk, and introducing her to New York's social elite. Remarkably, Lynn achieves the American dream of overnight success; within twenty-four hours, she has an offer from *Vogue* magazine—the most popular fashion magazine in the industry during the 1940s, and the one most associated with fetishized fantasies of desirability and beauty—to pose on its front cover (Jobling 1999, 21).

As she achieves phenomenal triumph as a fashion model, Lynn's photographic image becomes insurance for her livelihood; her business—as John Berger famously remarked about women in general—is simply "to appear." This observation is punctuated by the fact that nearly every scene in the film contains

at least one glamour or fashion portrait of her prominently displayed in the *mise-en-scène*. Indeed, in one striking shot, the camera pans languorously over a vast photo array on top of Lynn's piano. Here, a long-standing formulaic gesture in Hollywood cinema—the dwelling en route over photographs of loved ones and family—turns ironic as we realize that *every* photo on the piano is a fashion advertisement featuring her: in one photo, she sips tea on the lawn of a country estate, in another, she appears in a swimsuit frolicking on the beach. This shot recalls Scott McQuire's observation that modern American culture "has learnt the importance of and, perhaps more tellingly, the pleasure of surveying ourselves in a world in which the consciousness of one's constant visibility has never been more intense" (1998, 41). Perhaps more important, the shot suggests that American-commodity culture has completely subsumed Lynn's identity. Wrested from their original commercial context and occupying the space that normally would be given to family photos, these photographs announce to viewers that Lynn's identity is now wholly defined by her public self. She has been subsumed by what Celia Lury terms "prosthetic culture," in which photographic images function as substitutes for lived experience.

To a certain extent, then, *I Wake Up Screaming* indicts the American system that converted Lynn from working-class girl into commodified image. But, as in so many other noir films, this criticism is tempered, as we'll see, by the film's stronger impulse to punish the transgressive woman. On the one hand, the film suggests that in America, where apparently anyone can become famous overnight by having her image remade, the idea of the unique and unforgettable individual is a myth of the past. Like the aura of the individual artwork that Benjamin speculated would be disrupted by mechanical reproduction, the individual's aura is changed drastically by the photograph. Nearly everyone in the film—including Vicky's sister Jill—seems to forget about her much too quickly once she is dead. At one point, Jill warns Vicky about becoming a model, remarking that, "In this city, one week your face is on the cover of a magazine, the next it's in the trash can." Jill's comment speaks to the disposability of the individual in a society driven by the commercialized image—a disposability that even Jill, seemingly outside the culture she abhors, nevertheless supports by choosing to marry the very publicist who helped insure her sister's death. What's more, the publicist's own guilt for taking advantage of women, while occasionally criticized by various characters in the film, is ultimately discounted once he moves squarely into the position of cinematic hero. Hence, the film's impulses towards a social and feminist critique gradually disappear as the movie becomes more and more interested in exploring the potency of Lynn's photographic image while simultaneously trying to tame and even exterminate it.

The film's frequent use of glamour photographs within its *mise-en-scène* testifies not only to Lynn's exploitation but to her narcissism, a narrative transgression that Janey Place argues typifies the *femme fatale* and which is frequently punished by death: "Self-interest over devotion to a man is often the

original sin of the film noir woman and metaphor for the threat her sexuality represents to him" (1998, 56-57). Lynn commits her final "sin" when, unbeknown to Christopher and his friends, she takes a screen test and then makes plans to move to Hollywood on her own—an ambition clearly viewed by these men as a violation, because leaving New York means depriving them of further opportunities to capitalize on her face and body. Lynn is, in essence, reclaiming her image by taking the screen test. Tellingly, it is right after she takes the test that she is murdered. Wanting to be more than photograph, Lynn, ironically, becomes *only* photograph.

But while *I Wake Up Screaming*'s narrative might insist on punishing Lynn and therefore simultaneously distancing itself from photography, the film's continual return to Lynn's photographic image tells us otherwise, indicating the film's ambivalence toward both women and the medium that glamorizes them. Frequently, the camera lingers over Lynn's photos, occasionally even allowing them to fill the screen, and thus inviting viewers to participate in the very objectification of women that the narrative seems to be rejecting. Indeed, photos appear so often in *I Wake Up Screaming* that they multiply the image of Lynn's beauty and sexuality, transforming the *mise-en-scène* into a veritable hall of mirrors. One key moment illustrates this observation perfectly: in a striking shot, Lynn stands in front of a mirror putting on lipstick and gazing at her own image. The camera then pans down to show in close-up a photo of Lynn dressed in the very same evening gown, and with make-up and hair arranged exactly the same way. With a wink and a nod to the audience, the movie pauses here to alert us to its affinity with the glamour photograph, despite all its protestations to the contrary. Furthermore, by way of this inset photo, the movie suggests that it can go one better than the photograph—whereas the photo can only provide us with a miniaturized and immobile woman, the film allows Lynn to dominate the camera with her sensual movements and gestures. But the implications of this shot are even more complex. We are presented with three identical images here: the mirror's, the photograph's, and the film's. Amidst this plurality of representations, the "real" Lynn seems to disappear, replaced by her simulacra. While *I Wake Up Screaming* continually suggests that photographs are debased simulacra, at this moment it admits—however briefly—its own createdness.

I Wake Up Screaming's conventional narrative of punishing the transgressive woman thus gives way in this scene, as in several others, to the image—both photographic and cinematic—of her sexuality. Janey Place draws our attention to the frequency of strong, sexual images of women in film noir, suggesting that what we retain from movies like *Double Indemnity*, *Out of the Past*, and *Gilda* is not the repressive treatment of women—in narrative and visual terms—but the strength of women's images in the face of textual repression. We do not remember the woman's punishment, demise, or general subjection to male fantasies as much as we do the iconography and visual style that render her erotically powerful. If this is true, the photographs in *I Wake Up Screaming*

help lodge that image more permanently in the minds of viewers, effectively doubling the work of the film. Photos of Lynn not only appear in virtually every scene but they also surface in complex *mise-en-scènes* that depict Christopher battling it out with his nemesis, Ed Cornell (Laird Cregar), the detective who, knowing Christopher is innocent of Vicky's murder, persecutes him anyway (from the detective's perspective, Christopher is to blame for making Vicky "too good for him.") Even dead, then, the woman comes between two men, her photograph the iconic force that continually reminds them of her existence. If fashion photography wishes to annihilate individual identity into a plurality of images, the film affords the female image a singularized potency.

Perhaps *I Wake Up Screaming's* most striking emphasis of female iconic power emerges during a miniature film-within-the-film, in the form of a screen test. In the movie's third metacinematic passage, the police show Lynn's screen test to Christopher and his friends, each of them suspects in the murder case, to observe how they'll react. Originally designed to test Lynn's photogenicity, the screen test turns into a lie detector test as the film's camera cuts repeatedly from one scrutinizing close-up of each suspect to another. The basic premise behind the lie detector is that human beings have physical responses to stress that are beyond their control. The body can reveal the mind, and inner mental states can be rendered visible by the machine. By framing the screen test as a lie detector test, *I Wake Up Screaming* reverses traditional nineteenth-century notions that posited the photograph as an index to its subject's inner character; here, the image exposes those who *look* at it. Once again, then, the film demonstrates film noir's interest in appropriating fantasy images for forensic purposes, flaunting noir's tough rejection of the sexual woman by deploying her image as one of its technologies.

At the same time, however, there's no denying that this screening is also meant to verify Lynn's photogenic power—indeed, to even suggest the power of the represented female to transcend death. A policeman turns off the lights, and her moving image appears suddenly onscreen. Provocatively dressed, she stares out at her audience as she performs a seductive torch song. A metafilmic ratification of cinema's power, the screen test here seems to resurrect its subject, bringing the dead woman back into a permanent half-life, making Vicky into a sort of vampire, half dead, who continues to suck the life out of the men who possess her image. If this is true, then this film-within-a-film becomes something that hovers between life and death, a half-life—or, as Garrett Stewart phrases it, a "dying away in progress" (1999, 152).

The same might be said of the film that contains it—an observation that returns us to the film's opening shot. *I Wake Up Screaming* opens with a photograph of Lynn, then immediately flashes backward to narrate the story of how the living woman ended up murdered, as if the purpose of the film is to interpret the silent, female image through a verbal description. Furthermore, when the ekphrastic image is a photograph, and the verbal structure a film, photography's

death-like stasis is put into contest with cinema's capability for narrative and movement. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes makes a distinction between photography's temporality, which is "brushed by death," and cinema's temporality, which "doubles life." By opening with a photo of the now-dead Lynn and then flashing backward to show her vibrant and alive, the film alerts us to this difference between its own medium and that of photography's. Yet, in the case of *I Wake Up Screaming*, this dichotomy between photography and film is less stable than it might seem, since the flashback is, in fact, a kind of resurrection, an animation, of *dead* images. Refuting Barthes, Stewart argues that cinema is always haunted by the "life-denying photographicity at the plastic basis of the moving image" (1999, 67). If this observation is true of film in general, it's especially true of film noir, a genre whose distinguishing fascination with the flashback implies its awareness that cinema is not simply a "doubling" of "life" but a vampirish imitation of it.

It is fitting, then, that the ending of *I Wake Up Screaming* returns us home to the photographic image. In a positively ghoulish scene, we discover that the detective hounding Christopher has filled his apartment with hundreds of photos of Vicky Lynn, including an enormous one that hangs over his mantelpiece like an oil painting. These photographs—belonging mainly to that most ephemeral photographic genre, fashion—are now funerary icons in the detective's morbid shrine to the dead object of his fascination. One possible reading of this scene suggests that this gallery of portraits, overseen by the detective, finalizes Lynn's punishment. As many critics of the genre have observed, the framed portrait of a woman appears repeatedly in film noir as a safe incarnation, offering a woman under control, static, and powerless. Lynn's enshrined portrait thus testifies that her ambitions have finally been arrested and the threat they represented, controlled. Given this observation, it makes sense that a detective is presented here as the keeper of all Lynn's photographs, his job as an agent of discipline paralleled by his role as collector of photographs.

And yet, this reading is undermined in several ways. To begin with, the detective's re-presentation of Lynn's photograph into a kind of oil painting—enlarged, framed, and placed over a mantelpiece with accompanying candles and flowers—provides a deeply ironic note to the film's treatment of glamour photography. An oil painting is designed for the private consumption of the person who commissioned it. It allows for the possibility of exclusive viewing and a concomitant sense of ownership (as the Duke says in Browning's "My Last Duchess," "no one draws back the curtain but I"). Yet, as a publicity and fashion photograph, Lynn's glamorous image has appeared in dozens of magazines and been seen by thousands of viewers. Its commodity status thus belies the detective's attempts to memorialize Lynn as the object of his exclusive affection and devotion.

Furthermore, the film's final return to the mortuary photograph suggests that within the interstices of film noir there always lurks the deathwork of the

stilled image, here feminized as the ekphrastic Other. Photographic fixity is lodged in contrast to a span of narrative event that never fully disengages from the suspended ocular moment. We begin with a photo of a dead Vicky Lynn, and we end with a gallery of them, testifying not only to film noir's obsession with the dead woman but to its interest in photography as its own dead center as well.

As if afraid of the implications of this scene, the film literally runs away from it—as Christopher and Jill flee from the detective's apartment only to reappear in the actual, final scene. Newly married, they enter a swank nightclub where Vicky's performance as a famous model had originally been enacted. In a series of shots exactly the same as those that featured Vicky earlier—suggesting that the film can't help but flaunt its capacity to keep on reproducing after its close call with death in the prior scene—we see a socialite spy Jill from across the room and ask the same question that she asked of Vicky—"Who is that beautiful girl?" This time, the camera cuts to Jill in close-up, her wedding gown slightly visible, dreamily saying "Mrs. Botticelli" (Christopher's original name before he, too, made himself over) as if in answer to the socialite's question. The final image of *I Wake Up Screaming*, then, is of a woman who all along rejected what her sister desired and pursued through glamour photography. Content in her new identity as wife—an identity she has assumed literally over the dead body of her sister—"Mrs. Botticelli" represents the authentic woman, created not by photography but by its supposedly more responsible offspring. But the feminine image we remember most is of Vicky Lynn—whose photo is shown in virtually every scene, and whose image opens—and *nearly* closes—the film.

Conclusion

In his essay "Film Noir on the Edge of Doom," Marc Vernet speaks to the difficulty of escaping from clichés about film noir's progenitors. He says:

Film noir is, then, an affair of heirs disinclined to look too closely at their inheritance, who take pleasure in regularly putting back into circulation topoi like the femme fatale, the shining pavement of the deserted street, unexpected violence, the private detective. . . . Doubtless there is something true there, but what that truth relates to remains a question. . . . What is completely strange about discourse on *film noir* is that the more elements of definition are advanced, the more objections and counter-examples are raised, the more precision is desired, the fuzzier the results become; the closer the object is approached, the more diluted it becomes. The result is that the energy deployed passes entirely into refuting or circumventing objections and not into searching for a more solid foundation. (1993, 2, 4)

One of the foundations that film noir scholarship has clearly overlooked is photography, both in general terms and in terms of specific photographic genres and practices. While critics, for example, have discussed *ad nauseum* the influence of German Expressionism on film noir, very little scholarship has been done situating film noir within the context of photographic history and theory.⁶ This dearth of critical attention is especially surprising, given how relentlessly photographs appear in the noir canon, as we have shown here. Perhaps one explanation for this lack of study is that very ubiquity; because film noir consistently employs photographs as plot devices or visual props—almost, as in the case of *I Wake Up Screaming*, to the point of cluttering up its *mise-en-scène*—photos appear to function in film noir merely as narrative devices or set ornaments, subject to the plot's masculinized drive towards detection and resolution. Film noir thus diffuses the ontological, aesthetic, and sociological debt owed to the still photo—although, as we have described, hyper-reflexive instances do occur regularly wherein the films' photographic basis is made explicit.

Much scholarship is needed in order to theorize photography and film noir as mutually constitutive discourses and practices. One obvious area for investigation is the link between film noir and street photography, that subgenre of news photography preoccupied with urban locales, crime, and nighttime activities to which, of all photographic genres, film noir bears the most important connections.⁷ At this time, this association has been noted only by photography scholars, and only in cursory ways. Practiced in the 1930s and 40s by such photographers as Weegee, Dan Willard, Charles Payne, and William Rynders, the style and content of street photography shares unmistakable parallels with film noir: the alleys lit by a single flashbulb-like light source, the oblique angles, the attention to vacant, yawning spaces, the grainy screen surfaces reminiscent of tabloid newspaper images. What's more, film noir's rich exchange with street photography has important implications for thinking about the canon's national identity. James Naremore has recently refuted the claim that film noir is distinctly American in origin; as he notes, its influences come from sources as diverse as Argentine crime fiction and European surrealist art. While Naremore's arguments are compelling, it is important to keep in mind those progenitors of film noir that *are* distinctly American. Street photography is, arguably, the most American, as well as the most masculinized, of all film noir's sources.

Paradoxically, while film noir shares such an important kinship with street photography, it also resists incorporating this particular genre into its plots and *mise-en-scène*. Willing to meditate upon domestic photography, glamour portraiture, pornography (*The Big Sleep*), surveillance technology (*The House on 92nd Street; He Walked by Night*), and even x-ray photography, (*Crack-Up*), film noir rarely appropriates the street photograph as a narrative or visual device. This, we conclude, is because film noir's debt to the genre is so encom-

passing. While film noir obsessively frames other photographic genres as foils for its own style and content, American street photography frames film noir.

Notes

1. Among the noir films that feature photography, in addition to those discussed in this essay, are *Beware, My Lovely* (1952), *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956), *The Big Combo* (1955), *The Blue Gardenia* (1953), *Crack-Up* (1946), *Dark Passage* (1947), *D.O.A.* (1950), *The File on Thelma Jordan* (1950), *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), *The Scar* (1948), *Sleep, My Love* (1948), *While the City Sleeps* (1956), and *The Wrong Man* (1956). While this is not an exhaustive list, it illustrates the ubiquity of photography in films spanning the noir canon.

2. In his recent book, James Naremore (1999) complicates noir's supposedly "American" identity by emphasizing, through a staggeringly rich amount of material, film noir's cultural ubiquity—a ubiquity that stretches as far as Argentina, for example. See especially the Introduction and Chapter One of his book.

3. Perhaps Hitchcock was enjoying a bit of leg-pulling here; 1888 is also the year that witnessed the advent of the Kodak company in America.

4. Elsie B. Mitchie (1999) argues that *Shadow of a Doubt* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* present the only positive maternal images in Hitchcock's oeuvre. While Emma is certainly not malevolent, she's harmfully distracted by her brother's charming façade and blind to what her more attentive children notice.

5. The photographs featured in the film break down into two categories that can be subsumed under the classification of "glamour" photography. Some of the images are traditional studio portraits, wherein the "product" being offered to the viewer is the female subject as erotic symbol. Others images highlighted in the film are fashion photos. Yet the fashion images, which we are asked to imagine advertising a product within the world of the film, come across to the film's viewers primarily as further glamour images of Vickie Lynn.

6. One exception is Stewart's discussion of Lang's *Fury* in his book, *Between Modernism and Screen*; another is Ronald R. Thomas's fascinating essay, "The Dream of the Empty Camera."

7. This subject constitutes one of the chapters in our book manuscript on crime film, photography, and early twentieth-century tabloids.

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