

The shots of goodfellas

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1. Medium long shot, framed slightly below the axis showing main characters exiting car.
2. Short slow tracking shot from the characters' POV toward the trunk of the car.
3. Short slow tracking shot away from the trunk of the car toward the characters, eventually framing into a two-shot of Jimmy and Tommy.
4. A pan to the right toward Henry who moves into frame and toward trunk.
5. A medium shot showing half of Henry in the frame as he opens the trunk to reveal the dying body inside.
6. A medium two-shot of Tommy and Henry as Tommy moves in holding knife to finish the murder. This pans to the right along with Tommy to reveal the actual stabbing of the body.
7. A medium shot of Jimmy watching Tommy.
8. A medium shot of Tommy pulling the knife away and backing from the trunk as Jimmy moves into the frame and shoots the body with a gun.
9. A very quick shot of Henry reacting to the firing of Jimmy's gun.
10. A close-up of the bloody covering of the body inside the trunk.
11. A medium shot of Henry looking toward Jimmy and the back at the trunk before walking over to shut the lid of the trunk. His face is momentarily hidden behind the upraised trunk as his hands reach to pull it shut.
12. A quick track into a medium close-up of Henry's face.
13. Henry's medium close up in freeze-frame as "Rags to Riches" begins playing.

The specificity of the shots in the opening scene of Goodfellas are perfectly modulated to reveal the irony of the Henry Hill's opening narrative assertion:

" As far back as I could remember I always wanted to be a gangster."

Scorsese chose to begin the film on the night of the downfall of these characters for a reason; Goodfellas does not glorify the gangster lifestyle like The Godfather.

The framing of the short tracking shot (Number 3) from a three-shot to the two-shot is vital for the psychological state of mind of the audience that must be willing to accept the perhaps fictional assertion that the man through whose eyes the story will be told was not as bloodthirsty and violent as those around him. The movement away from directly including Henry in this show to bringing Tommy and Jimmy together is a distancing device that subtly creates a sense of audience participation with Henry's character.

At no point in the editing of the incredibly violent opening sequence of Goodfellas is Henry Hill ever included in the finishing off the murder of the man in the trunk. The audience has no way of knowing who this man is or what part he will play or why he was killed. For the audience can't possibly know he was a completely innocent witness to a crime rather than a wiseguy himself. Because this is the opening scene that essentially introduces the audience to the main characters it is imperative that Henry is not only never seen taking an active role in the murder, but is seen to react to Jimmy's nod of the head to open the trunk in the first place as Jimmy is his boss. The reaction shots of Henry responding to the brutality before him rather than taking part also serves to further intensify audience participation in part because of the murderous glee with which Tommy kills and the quick sneer that appears on Jimmy's face before he shoots the corpse.