

FA 49K

FILM NOIR

Instructor: Tuba AY

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Lectures: Thursdays 1.00-4.00 pm at JF 108

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Film Noir is a particular mood, tone and sensibility predominant in Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s, a period that falls between the end of the Great Depression and the beginning of the Cold War. This course is a comprehensive study exploring classic American Film Noir from its roots in German Expressionism, French Poetic Realism, Depression era Gangster Films and American Hard-boiled fiction that shaped its visual, narrative and thematic characteristics, to its legacy and resurgence as Neo-noir and Technoir from the 1970s onwards. Through the analysis of various films from different phases of classic noir, this course intends to reveal how film noir became a challenge to 'Classical Hollywood' with its mode of production and stylistic expression, and how it became a critique of American society under the impact of World War II by addressing questions of morality, sexuality, gender and identity.

Course Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Define film noir with a broad and detailed knowledge of the fundamental aspects of the 'form' of film noir, including key techniques of film style and narration.

- Place film noir in its historical and cultural context with an understanding of the transformation of film noir across time.
- Identify the continuing noir influence in different visual mediums after the classical era (film, TV series, video games, graphic novels etc.) and its infusion with other genres.

Course Policies:

- Attendance is strictly required and **failure to attend lectures more than 5 times will result in a final grade of F.** Excused absences are those that have been discussed with me ahead of time or for which you can provide reasonable documentation. In addition, class participation and excellent attendance can make a difference if student is hovering between two grades. **Mind that coming in late is disruptive, so please be on time.**
- You are responsible for viewing the film on your own before the class meeting. If you cannot find the movie please contact me earlier.
- You are required to read the material assigned on the syllabus in order to fully understand the weekly lecture and to prepare for the class discussions. **Check the Moodle course page often as there may be additional resources to read or to watch.**
- Make-up exams are only possible for medical reasons and will be administered when a proper medical documentation is submitted by the student in order to justify their absence. Do not demand to take a make-up exam if your grades are low.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense, which can result in a failing grade for the class. Acknowledge all reading and research sources in your bibliography section and use quotation marks for your citations in your text as the guide in your paper handout indicates. **Otherwise, the paper you submitted will not be graded.**
- If you want to get in touch with me, best way is by e-mail. If you need to discuss something at greater length, you can meet with me by appointment.

Required Texts:

You can find your readings on the Moodle course page aligned according to the major topics listed in the weekly syllabus below.

Course Requirements and Grading System:

Paper I	%30
Paper II	%30
Final	%40

The second paper mentioned above will be submitted a week later than the date of the final exam. **Papers received later than due date will be penalized one letter grade per day.** Late submissions after three days of its due will not be accepted. You will be given a detailed hand-out regarding the subject of your papers along with some important rules of citation that will prevent you from being condemned of plagiarism by the Turnitin system.

WEEK 1 Introduction to Film Noir

Film Noir: A Genre or a Sensibility?

Readings:

- Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir", *Film Genre Reader III*, 229-242.
- Frank Krutnik, "Genre and the Problem of Film Noir", *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity*, 15-29.

THE ORIGINS OF FILM NOIR

WEEK 2 German Expressionism and Strassenfilme; Émigré Directors and their influence in Hollywood

Film: *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931)

Readings:

- Mark Bould, "Out of the Past: The Prehistory of Film Noir", *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City*, 20-31.
- Andrew Dickos, "German Expressionism and the Roots of the Film Noir", *Street with No Name: A History of the Classic American Film Noir*, 9-41.

WEEK 3 French Poetic Realism and Italian Neo-Realism

Film: *Le Quai des Brumes (Port of Shadows)* (Marcel Carné, 1938)

Readings:

- Andrew Dickos, "The Inception of Film Noir in the French Cinema of 1930s", *Street with No Name: A History of the Classic American Film Noir*, pp. 42-59.
- Alastair Phillips, "Crisscrossed?: Film Noir and the Politics of Mobility and Exchange", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 94-109.

WEEK 4 Pre-Code American Gangster Films and Hard-boiled Detective Fiction of the 1930s

Film: *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932)

Readings:

- Thomas Leitch, "Historical and Cultural Overview", *Crime Films*, pp. 18-39.
- Andrew Dickos, "The Hard-Boiled Fiction Influence", *Street with No Name: A History of the Classic American Film Noir*, 96-115.

FILM NOIR DURING WORLD WAR II (1941-1946)

WEEK 5 Visual and Narrative Style and Content of Film Noir;
Studio expressionism

Film: *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944)

Readings:

- Frank Krutnik, "Film Noir and America in the 1940s", *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity*, 56-72.
- Patrick Keating, "Out of the Shadows: Noir Lighting and Hollywood Cinematography", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 267-283.

WEEK 6 The Hard-boiled detective and the Noir Hero

Film: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946)

Readings:

- Steven M. Sanders, "Film Noir and the Meaning of Life", *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, Mark T. Conard Ed., 91-105.
- Gaylyn Studlar, "The Corpse on Reprieve: Film Noir's Cautionary Tales of 'Tough Guy' Masculinity", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 369-385.

WEEK 7 The point of view, subjectivity and moral complexity in film noir; B-movie minimalism and noir style

Film: *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945)

Readings:

- Geoff Mayer, "Film Noir and Studio Production Practices", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds. pp. 211-228.
- Paul A. Cantor, "Film Noir and the Frankfurt School: America as Wasteland in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour*", *The Philosophy of Film noir*, 139-161.

WEEK 8 Women's Picture meets Film Noir: Women's Noir

Film: *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945)

Readings:

- Yvonne Tasker, "Women in Film Noir", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds. pp. 353-368.
- Mark Osteen, "Femmes Vital: Film Noir and Women's Work", *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and the American Dream*, 94-109.

First Paper Due!

POST-WAR FILM NOIR (1946-1958)

WEEK 9 Femme fatale and Homme fatal: the changing gender power relations in post-war American culture; the return of the Past; on-location shooting and changes in noir style

Film: *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946)

Readings:

- Ian Jarvie, "Knowledge, Morality and Tragedy in *The Killers* and *Out of Past*", *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, Mark T. Conard Ed., 163-185.
- Jans B. Wager, "The Killers (1946): Quintessential Noir?", *Dames in the Driver's Seat Rereading Film Noir*, 39-52.

WEEK 10 Film *Gris* and the Left Noir; HUAC and the Hollywood Blacklist; the semi-documentary style in film noir (1947-1952)

Film: *Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston, 1950)

Readings:

- Mark Osteen, "Left-Handed Endeavour: Crime, Capitalism, and the Hollywood Left", *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and the American Dream*, 110-122.
- Charles Maland, "Film *Gris*: Crime, Critique, and Cold War Culture in 1951", *Film Criticism* 26.3. (2002).

- Brian Neve, "The Politics of Film Noir", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 177-192.

WEEK 11 Psychologically disturbed and psychotic anti-heroes; the Noir City as an entrapment device; 3rd person narration as a narrative device

Film: *Night and the City* (Jules Dassin, 1950)

Readings:

- Andrew Dickos, "The Noir in America", *Street with No Name: A History of the Classic American Film Noir*, pp 61-70, 75-82.
- Donna Peberdy, "Acting and Performance in Film Noir", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 318-334.
- Murray Pomerance, "The Climb and the Chase: Film Noir and the Urban Scene - Representations of the City in Three Classic Noirs", *A Companion to Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer & Helen Hanson Eds., 406-419.

WEEK 12 Nihilistic Cold War narratives; self-awareness and paranoia in film noir

Film: *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955)

Readings:

- Jans B. Wager, "Kiss Me Deadly (1955): Apocalyptic Femmes", *Dames in the Driver's Seat Rereading Film Noir*, 63-71.
- William Luhr, "Kiss Me Deadly", *Film Noir*, 123-145.

THE LEGACY OF FILM NOIR

WEEK 13 Neo-Noir, Retro-Noir, and Tech-noir; The Noir Angst in the Post-Vietnam era; Commodification of Neo-Noir after 1980s and onwards; Postmodern nostalgia and fragmentation

Film: *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014)

Readings:

- Jerold J. Abrams, "Space, Time, and Subjectivity in Neo-Noir Cinema", *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, Mark T. Conard Ed., 7-20.
- James Naremore, "Noir in the Twenty-First Century", *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, 278-310.
- Jans B. Wager, "Sexing the Paradigm: Women and Men in Noir", *Dames in the Driver's Seat Rereading Film Noir*, 19-28.