More Than Night
The Visual Culture of Noir

Course instructor: PD Dr. Stefan Brandt, Guest Professor
Course number: HS 32 112
Room and Time: R 340, Tuesdays, 16-18 Uhr
Basic information: MA Modul B, Hauptseminar und Magister Hauptseminar, 2 SWS

Short description: The genre known as film noir, namely of ›dark‹ and ›sinister‹ crime films produced by Hollywood in the 1940s and 50s, has been enormously influential in the history of American visual culture. We are all familiar with its basic settings: barely lit rooms with light coming in through venetian blinds, lonesome alleys littered with garbage, gloomy detective bureaus adjacent to busy streets. Films and TV series such as Se7en (1995), Moonlighting (1985-89), Chinatown (1974), L.A. Confidential (1997), and Sin City (2005) have utilized these settings to achieve their effect. But where does the noir aesthetic come from? In which texts does it originate? The course looks at a number of classic noir tales and movies, from James M. Cain’s The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934) and Cornell Woolrich’s The Black Curtain (1941) to cult films such as Double Indemnity (1944), Detour (1945), The Big Sleep (1946), Asphalt Jungle (1950), and Kiss Me Deadly (1954). We will examine the key settings and plots of these texts and films as well as their main figures, the femme fatale and the hardboiled detective. We will also investigate the distinctive aesthetic of film noirs (low-key, black-and-white visual style, innovative techniques of narration) and discuss their cultural and political implications.

Reading Material: All main films will be made available at the Institute Library to be watched on location in the video room. A few films can also be accessed online. Crucial secondary texts will be posted on Blackboard. Additional text material can be found in Handapparat 8 (JFKI Library).

Extra-screenings: There will be a few »extra-screenings« of selected films (to be announced) on Thursday, 16-18, R 340. Keep in mind to watch all main films for the seminar.

Credit requirements:
1. Regular attendance and lively participation in class discussions plus at least 9 entries in the discussion forum on Blackboard (https://lms.fu-berlin.de/webapps/login/) (1/3);
2. Oral presentation as part of an expert group (1/3);
3. Final paper (17-20 pages) on a course-related topic (1/3).

Syllabus

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<tr>
<th>Oct. 14</th>
<th>Introduction: What is Film Noir?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Main text:</td>
<td>Steve Neale, »Film Noir«, in: Genre and Hollywood (2000)</td>
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<th>Oct. 21</th>
<th>Noir Aesthetics – The Essentials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Main text:</td>
<td>Cornell Woolrich, The Black Curtain (1941, ch. I &amp; II)</td>
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<td>Additional film:</td>
<td>FEAR IN THE NIGHT (1947, dir. Maxwell Shane)</td>
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1 All texts for this seminar can be found on the Blackboard at https://lms.fu-berlin.de/webapps/login/
Oct. 28  The Private Eye  
Main film: THE MALTESE FALCON (1941, dir. John Huston)  
Additional film: MURDER, MY SWEET (1944, dir. Edward Dmytryk)  

Nov. 4  The femme fatale  
Main film: DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1944, dir. Billy Wilder)  
Additional films: GILDA (1946, dir. Charles Vidor)  
THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (1948, dir. Orson Welles)  

Nov. 11  The B Noir – Paranoid Visions  
Main film: DETOUR (1945, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer) *  
Additional films: OUT OF THE PAST (1947, dir. Jacques Tourneur)  
SUDDENLY (1954, dir. Spencer Selby) *  

Nov. 18  Postwar Neurosis – Memory and Trauma  
Main film: THE BLUE DAHLIA (1946, dir. George Marshall)  
Additional films: THE GLASS KEY (1942, dir. Stuart Heisler)  
SHOCK (1946, dir. Alfred L. Werker) *  

Nov. 25  Guilty ‘Til Proven Innocent  
Main film: BLACK ANGEL (1946, dir. Roy William Neill)  
Additional films: IMPACT (1949, dir. Arthur Lubin) *  
THE BIG CLOCK (1948, dir. John Farrow)  

Dec. 2  Hardboiled Couples  
Main film: THE BIG SLEEP (1946, dir. Howard Hawks)  
Additional films: QUICKSAND (1950, dir. Irving Pichel) *  
THE MAN WHO CHEATED HIMSELF (1950, dir. Felix E. Feist) *  

Dec. 9  Noir Visual Strategies – The Camera as an Active Participant  
Main film: THE LADY IN THE LAKE (1947, dir. Robert Montgomery)  
Additional film: DARK PASSAGE (1947, dir. Delmer Daves)  

Dec. 16  Fatal Dénouements – All plots move deathwards  
Main film: DEATH ON ARRIVAL (D.O.A.) (1948, dir. Rudolph Maté) *  

Jan. 6  The Psychology of Noir  
Main film: SORRY, WRONG NUMBER (1948, dir. Anatole Litvak)  
Additional film: DARK MIRROR (1946, dir. Robert Siodmak)  
THE RED HOUSE (1946, dir. Delmer Daves) *  

Jan. 13  The City Noir II – The Underworld  
Main film: ASPHALT JUNGLE (1950, dir. John Huston)  
Additional film: SCARLET STREET (1945, dir. Fritz Lang) *  

Jan. 20  Noir Suspense – Strong Women  
Main film: SUDDEN FEAR (1952, dir. David Miller)  
Additional film: LAURA (1944, dir. Otto Preminger)  

Jan. 27  Noir Gangsters – Justice and Revenge  
Main film: THE BIG HEAT (1953, dir. Fritz Lang)  
Additional film: KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL (1952, dir. Phil Karlson) *  

Feb. 3  Pulp Noir  
Main film: KISS ME DEADLY (1955, dir. Robert Aldrich)  
Additional film: THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (1945, dir. Tay Garnett)  

Feb. 10  Neo Noir  
Main film: L.A. CONFIDENTIAL (1997, dir. Curtis Hanson)  
Additional films: CHINATOWN (1974, dir. Roman Polanski)  
MEMENTO (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan)  

Films marked with an * are available online at www.archive.org.