Course Description:
The status of film noir, a 1940-50s American film phenomenon named by French critics, remains hotly debated. Was it a genre, a thematic movement, or a stylistic innovation? Was it the product of post war malaise? Was it knowingly existentialist? Was it a voice from society’s underside? Did it admit disrupted gender roles? Was it perverse? Was it American? And, finally, how has it intensified and morphed in more recent filmmaking? We address such topics as international and interdisciplinary influences, philosophical and psychological references, artistic and literary precursors, historical and cultural resonances, war-time and post-war culture, industrial and technical implications, semantic and syntactic elements, adaptation and remake, authorial conduits, production economics, genre hybridity, narrative structure, urban locations, racialized space, masculinity in crisis, and the femme fatale. Students learn the vocabulary and grammar of film and how visual codes within spatial-temporal articulations produce meaning and expression. We also examine film noir’s relation to modernist literature, hard-boiled fiction, tabloid and photo journalism, expressionism, Realism, and surrealism, and contextualize film noir within larger frameworks of Hollywood film and American society.

Film is a medium that combines a number of arts. It lies at the intersection of art and technology and of art and mass culture, and at the boundaries of the national and the global. Film is also a medium that coincides with and contributes to the invention of modern life. By exploring the expressive and representational achievements of cinema in the context of modernity and mass culture, students learn the concepts to grasp the different ways in which films create meaning, achieve their emotional impact, and respond in complex ways to the historical contexts in which they are made.

In keeping with the Core Curriculum guidelines for an education that provides students with an understanding of the Foundations of Contemporary Culture, this course is driven by several goals:
1. to introduce students to a wide range of creative work in one medium, cinema, with reference to others, especially literature and the visual arts. Here, the course will introduce the students to film noir as both thematic and stylistic mode.
2. to provide students with formal approaches to the study and appreciation of works of cinema. Students will read texts that concentrate on the formal resources of film and that show these at work in the concrete operations of specific films. There will be a recurrent emphasis in the course – through readings, through lectures, through the work of teaching assistants in section – to examine the possibilities of close stylistic reading of film. Students will engage in exercises that break down film sequences into their expressive components.
3. to provide students an appreciation of how stylistic analysis and close reading, and the interpretations that derive therefrom, need to be grounded in historical and social context.
Extracts of contemporaneous documentaries will speak to the cultural context of film noir and extracts from later neo-noir films will offer historical contrast. Readings will consider film noir’s relation to post war audiences.

4. to develop students’ critical judgment and powers of interpretation through writing assignments and small-group discussion.
5. to stimulate students to pursue ongoing engagement with the arts by, among other things, constant reference in course lecture to the legacy of classic Hollywood cinema for more recent developments in the arts;
6. to encourage students to use such resources of New York City as the many museums, the rich networks of art cinema, film festivals, and so on.

Plagiarism is a serious offense that can lead to failing the class and possible further disciplinary action. Acknowledge all reading and research sources (as well as ideas that you get from others in class lectures, presentations, discussion, etc.) with footnotes or endnotes.

Use electronic devices to text, play games, or surfing the web will not be permitted in class and will be an occasion for failure in the course. Your laptops are not permitted in the classroom so please leave them home.

Your health and safety are a priority at NYU. If you experience any health or mental health issues during this course, we encourage you to utilize the support services of the 24/7 NYU Wellness Exchange 212-443-9999. Also, all students who may require an academic accommodation due to a qualified disability, physical or mental, please register with the Moses Center 212-998-4980. Please let your instructor know if you need help connecting to these resources.

NYU Classes: This course has an NYU Classes site and students are responsible for using it to obtain materials, check for changes and updates, post reports, etc.

Requirements:
There are a set of requirements for this course (see syllabus for due dates):
#1 a two-page paper. 5% of grade (described below).
#2 a three-page paper. 10% of grade (described below).
#3 a five-paper paper. 15% of grade (described below).
#4 a ten-page paper. 20% of grade (described below).
#5 an in-class mid-term of one-hour. 10% of grade.
#6 a final exam. 20% of grade.
#7 attendance for all lectures and screenings; participation in recitation sections. 20% of grade.

NOTE: Failure in any one requirement can mean failure for the course. In other words, you must complete all assignments with a passing grade in each.

Writing Assignments:
With the following assignments, you are to build a critical analysis of a single film noir (that does not appear on the syllabus). Below are the breakdown of assignments and some possible questions to address for each one.
#1 paper: Do some broad research (e.g., throughout your textbooks and/or on the web) to choose a film noir that you would like to work on. Write a two-page paper. What film have you chosen? Why does it attract you? What do you think qualifies it, stylistically and/or thematically, for the category of film noir. What seems to generally have been written about this film and from what angle? How might you approach the film critically? Please attach to your first paper the plot summary and production history for the film that is available on-line at the AFI Catalogue’s site (available through Bobcat).

#2 paper: Screen the film you wrote about for the first assignment and write a three-page paper. Select a single sequence from your chosen film that you think is particularly significant in terms of how it uses cinematic resources to make its thematic point(s). Provide a close textual analysis of that sequence noting if/when/how it conforms to or differs from noir style as particularly discussed in one or more of the course’s assigned readings. Provide time code for the clip’s start and end points (preferable) or other adequate location information.

#3 paper: Write a five-page paper. Why is your chosen film worth writing about in the context of this course? What aspect, issue, or debate about film noir is addressed by studying it? Are there particularly significant uses of cinematic form in your film? Does the film engage a historical, philosophical, or aesthetic specificity? Are there particularly significant ways the film seems to confirm to or expand upon the notion of film noir? Are there published analyses of the film that you find useful -- either to expand upon or disagree with?

#4 paper: Rewrite the previous two assignments (papers 2 and 3) and work them into a full and coherent ten-page analysis of your chosen film. What is significant thematically or stylistically about your film? How does it fit into the category of film noir and what role does it have there? Focus your argument(s) sufficiently to allow precise explication.

The following BOOKS are required for this course, plus additional articles (indicated on the syllabus with *) that are accessible on our NYU Classes site posted via the Resource tab.


#1 WED JAN 24 Setting the Scene
READINGS: (for this week only, readings are due in time for recitations; for all other weeks, readings are due in time for lectures)
FEATURE SCREENING:
*The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941, 100’)

#2 WED JAN 31 The Triangular Noose
READINGS:
Luhr, *Film Noir*: Chaps 1 & 2.
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*: Chap 3.

**FEATURE SCREENING:**
*Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944, 106’)

**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*Last Seduction* (John Dahl, 1994)
*Blood Simple* (Coen Brothers, 1984)

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**#3 WED FEB 7 NOIR VISUAL STYLE**

**READINGS:**
Luhr, *Film Noir*: Chaps. 3 & 4.
Naremore, *More than Night*: Chap 1: Section -- Noir is Born
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*: Chap. 4 & Chap 12: Sections on Expressionism and Surrealism

**FEATURE SCREENING:**
*Murder, My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk, 1945, 95’)

**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*Crooked Way* (Robert Florey, 1949)
*You Only Live Once* (Fritz Lang, 1937)
*Panic in the Streets* (Elia Kazan, 1950)
*M* (Joseph Losey, 1951)
*Stranger on the Third Floor* (Boris Ingster, 1940)
*Point Blank* (John Boorman, 1967.)

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**#4 WED FEB 14 WAR / NOIR MASCULINITY**

**READINGS:**
Naremore, *More Than Night*: Chap. 3: Sections Bourbon and Snakes
*Corber, Robert J., “'Real American History': Crossfire and the Increasing Invisibility of Gay Men in the Cold War Era.”*
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*: Chap. 5.

**FEATURE AND SHORT SCREENINGS:**
*Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk, 1947, 86’)
*Dear Arabella* (Soundies Dist. Corp, 1942, 3’)

**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*The Blue Dahlia* (George Marshall, 1946)
*Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976, 113min)

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**#5 WED FEB 21 EXISTENTIALISM AND LOW BUDGET NOIR**

#1 Paper Due in Recitations this week

**READINGS:**
*Telotte, J.P. “Noir Narration”*
*Kerr, Paul. “Out of What Past?: Notes on the B Film Noir.”*
*Sanders, Steven M. “Film Noir and the Meaning of Life.”*
*Kalat, David. “Detour’s Detour.”*

**FEATURE AND SHORT SCREENINGS:**
Detour (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945, 68')
*She Had Her Gun Already* (Vivienne Dick, 1978, 28')
**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*Act of Violence* (Fred Zinnemann, 1949)

#6 WED FEB 28  
**DANCING FOR WHOM?**

**READINGS:**
Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*: Place, Janey. "Women in Film Noir."
*McLean, Adrienne L. "'It's Only That I Do What I Love and Love What I Do': Film Noir and the Musical Woman."
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*: Chap. 6.

**FEATURE SCREENING:**
*Gilda* *(Charles Vidor, 1946, 109')*

**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*Phantom Lady* (Robert Siodmak, 1944).
*Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston, 1950)
Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994)

#7 WED MAR 7  
**NOIRING THE FAMILY**

**#2 Paper Due in Recitations this week**

**READINGS:**
Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*: Harvey, Sylvia. "Woman's Place: the Absent Family of Film Noir."
*Williams, Linda. "Feminist Film Theory: Mildred Pierce and the Second World War."
*Bie sen, Sheri Chinen. "Rosie the Riveter Goes to Hollywood."
*Haralovich, Mary Beth. "Selling Mildred Pierce: A Case Study in Movie Promotion."
Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*: Chap. 9.

**FEATURE SCREENING:**
*Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945, 111min)

**FILM EXTRACTS:**
*Grifters* (Stephen Frears, 1990)

MAR 14  SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

#8 WED MAR 21  
**IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

Feature Screening:
*Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (Connie Field, 1980, 65min)

#9 WED MAR 28  
**THE POLICE PROCEDURAL AND DOCUMENTARY REALISM**
READINGS:
*Richardson, Carl. “Film Noir on Location: The Naked City.”
*Prime, Rebecca. “Cloaked in Compromise: Jules Dassin’s ‘Naked’ City.”
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art: Chap. 10: Sections on Documentary and Rhetorical Form.

FEATURE SCREENING:
The Naked City [Jules Dassin, 1948, 96”]

FILM EXTRACTS:
T-Men (Anthony Mann, 1947-8)
He Walked by Night (Alfred L Werker, 1948)

PHOTOGRAPHS by Weegee

#10 WED APR 4 RETURN OF THE REPRESSED
#3 Paper Due in Recitations this week

READINGS:
Luhr, Film Noir. Chap 5.
Narrowmore, More Than Night. Chap. 5: Sections: Styles of Noir and Black and White and Red and
Chap. 6: Section: Latin America.
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art: Chap. 7.

FEATURE SCREENING:
Out of the Past (Jacques Tourneur, 1947, 97’)

EXTRACTS:
The Killers (Robert Siodmak, 1946)
History of Violence (David Cronenberg, 2005)

#11 WED APR 11 COLD WAR NOIR

FEATURE SCREENING:
Kiss Me Deadly (Robert Aldrich, 1955, 105’)

FILM EXTRACTS:
The Big Heat (Fritz Lang, 1953.)
The Big Combo (Joseph H. Lewis, 1955.)
The Manchurian Candidate (John Frankenheimer, 1962)

READINGS:
Luhr, Film Noir. Chap. 6.
*Telotte, J. P. “The Fantastic Realism of Film Noir: Kiss Me Deadly.”
*Flinn, Carol. “Sound, Woman and the Bomb: Dismembering the ‘Great Whatsit’ in Kiss Me Deadly.”
Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art: Chap. 8.

#12 WED APR 18 NEO-GREED

READINGS:
Luhr, Film Noir. Chap. 8.

*Cawelti, John. “Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films.”* Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: Appendix: Writing a Critical Analysis of Film.*

**FEATURE SCREENING:**

*Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974, 131’)

**FILM EXTRACTS:**

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**#13 WED APR 25  RE-RACING NOIR**

**READINGS:**


*Flory, Dan. “Race and Tragedy in *One False Move.*”*

*Barrentini, Mark L. “BAD BLOOD: Epistemological Conflict, the Color Line, and *One False Move.*”*

*Scruggs, Charles. “The Pastoral and the City in Carl Franklin’s "One False Move."”*

*Murphet, Julian. “Film Noir and the Racial Unconscious.”*

**FEATURE SCREENING:**

*One False Move* (Carl Franklin, 1992, 105”)

**FILM EXTRACT:**

*Odds Against Tomorrow* (Robert Wise, 1959)

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**#14 WED MAY 2  PSYCHO GOTHIC NOIR**

**#4 Paper Due at Beginning of Lecture Class**

**READING:**

Luhr, *Film Noir*. Chap 9.

**FEATURE SCREENING:**

*Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995, 127min

**FILM EXTRACTS:**

*In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1947)

*Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955)

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_____________ FINAL EXAM