

# 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

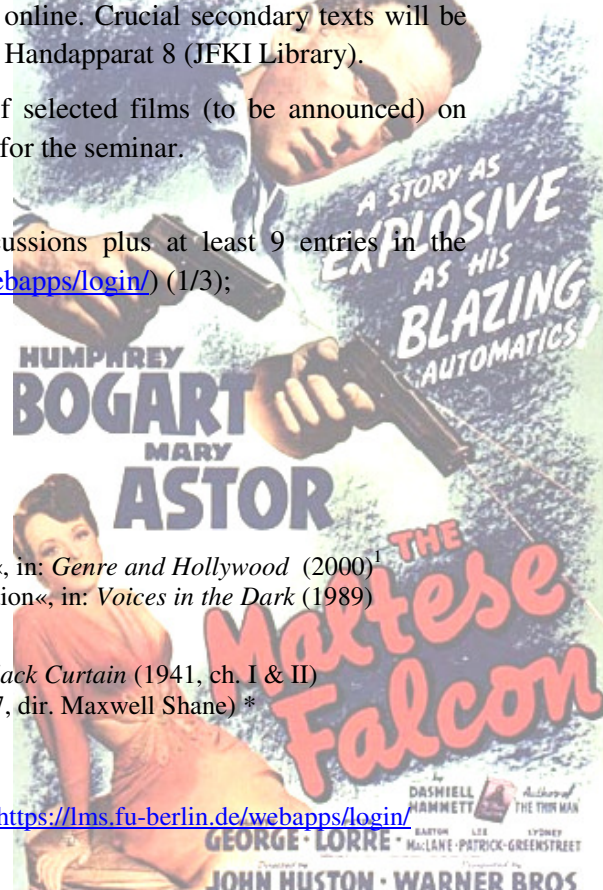
### Oct. 14 Introduction: What is Film Noir?

*Main text:* Steve Neale, »Film Noir«, in: *Genre and Hollywood* (2000)<sup>1</sup>  
*Additional text:* J.P. Telotte, »Noir Narration«, in: *Voices in the Dark* (1989)

### Oct. 21 Noir Aesthetics – The Essentials

*Main text:* Cornell Woolrich, *The Black Curtain* (1941, ch. I & II)  
*Additional film:* FEAR IN THE NIGHT (1947, dir. Maxwell Shane) \*

<sup>1</sup> 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:*  
*Additional film:*

THE MALTESE FALCON (1941, dir. John Huston)  
MURDER, MY SWEET (1944, dir. Edward Dmytryk)

Nov. 4

**The femme fatale**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1944, dir. Billy Wilder)  
GILDA (1946, dir. Charles Vidor)  
THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (1948, dir. Orson Welles)

Nov. 11

**The >B< Noir – Paranoid Visions**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

DETOUR (1945, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer) \*  
OUT OF THE PAST (1947, dir. Jacques Tourneur)  
SUDDENLY (1954, dir. Spencer Selby) \*

Nov. 18

**Postwar Neurosis – Memory and Trauma**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

THE BLUE DAHLIA (1946, dir. George Marshall)  
THE GLASS KEY (1942, dir. Stuart Heisler)  
SHOCK (1946, dir. Alfred L. Werker) \*

Nov. 25

**Guilty 'Til Proven Innocent**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

BLACK ANGEL (1946, dir. Roy William Neill)  
IMPACT (1949, dir. Arthur Lubin) \*  
THE BIG CLOCK (1948, dir. John Farrow)

Dec. 2

**Hardboiled Couples**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

THE BIG SLEEP (1946, dir. Howard Hawks)  
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:*  
*Additional film:*

THE LADY IN THE LAKE (1947, dir. Robert Montgomery)  
DARK PASSAGE (1947, dir. Delmer Daves)

Dec. 16

**Fatal Dénouements – All plots move deathwards**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

DEATH ON ARRIVAL (D.O.A.) (1948, dir. Rudolph Maté) \*  
THE KILLERS (1946, dir. Robert Siodmak)

Jan. 6

**The Psychology of Noir**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER (1948, dir. Anatole Litvak)  
DARK MIRROR (1946, dir. Robert Siodmak)  
THE RED HOUSE (1946, dir. Delmer Daves) \*

Jan. 13

**The City Noir II – The Underworld**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

ASPHALT JUNGLE (1950, dir. John Huston)  
SCARLET STREET (1945, dir. Fritz Lang) \*

Jan. 20

**Noir Suspense – Strong Women**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

SUDDEN FEAR (1952, dir. David Miller)  
LAURA (1944, dir. Otto Preminger)

Jan. 27

**Noir Gangsters – Justice and Revenge**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

THE BIG HEAT (1953, dir. Fritz Lang)  
KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL (1952, dir. Phil Karlson) \*

Feb. 3

**Pulp Noir**

*Main film:*  
*Additional film:*

KISS ME DEADLY (1955, dir. Robert Aldrich)  
THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (1945, dir. Tay Garnett)

Feb. 10

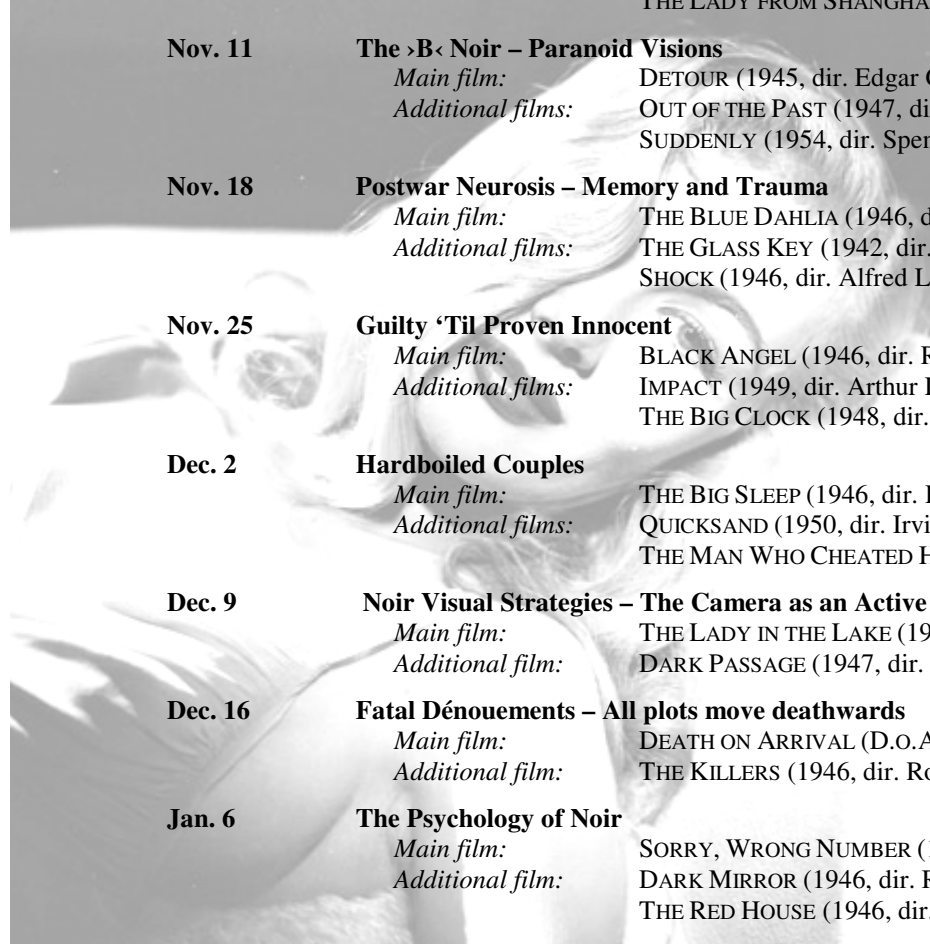
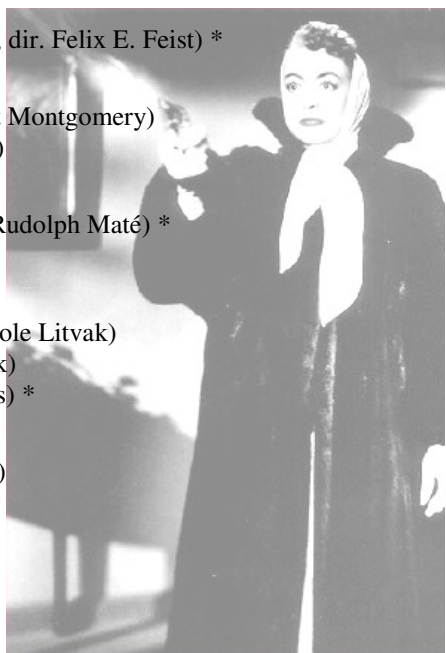
**Neo Noir**

*Main film:*  
*Additional films:*

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL (1997, dir. Curtis Hanson)  
CHINATOWN (1974, dir. Roman Polanski)  
MEMENTO (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan)



**DEADLINE FOR FINAL PAPERS:  
MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2009.  
THERE IS NO (!) EXTENSION  
OF THIS DEADLINE.**



Films marked with an \* are available online at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

