

DePaul University
School for New Learning
Spring 2018

AI 215: Film Noir

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Day/Time: Wednesdays, 5:45 – 9 PM
Note: This is a 5-week course which begins on 5/2 and meets 5/2-5/30
Location: DePaul Loop campus, room TBA
Credit hours: 2

Course description:

The term “*film noir*” refers to a group of Hollywood movies, most of them made in the 1940s and early 50s, which share some or all of the following features: a distinctive visual style emphasizing darkness, shadows, high contrast images, and off-kilter camera angles; a labyrinthine plot revolving around crime, usually murder; a set of character types (which have become cinema archetypes) including the hard-boiled male detective, the dazzling, predatory *femme fatale*, the remorseless criminal, the struggling victim, and the ordinary person who has - through bad choices, a momentary slip or a simple twist of fate – “gotten in way over” his/her “head”; relationships, often erotic, which are obsessive and beyond the bounds of propriety; a vision of the modern metropolis as a maze of “mean streets,” dark alleys and glaring neon signs; and an attitude of resigned cynicism about a world of corruption where every move seems to spell doom. Despite this, noir films are also full of repartee that sparkles with wit, innuendo and hip-sounding slang. And of course, everybody smokes – all the time.

In this course we will screen and discuss select noir films and develop skills of viewing and analyzing them closely. Highlighted topics will include the concept of genre in film; the relationship of genre codes to creativity; the dynamics of form and content; the tension between commerce and art; the *auteur* theory; psychologies of the divided self; representations of masculinity and femininity; and the question of what these films say about American society, post-World War II.

Faculty:

John Kimsey received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago and serves as a member of the SNL resident faculty at the rank of Associate Professor. He has also worked as a professional musician and has a strong background in the study of popular culture, popular music in particular. His publications include essays in journals such as *the Space Between: Literature & Culture 19-14-1945*, *Popular Music & Society*, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, *The Journal of Popular Music Studies* and *The Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*, as well as edited volumes such as *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism and the Fab Four* (SUNY Press, 2006), *It Was Forty Years Ago Today: Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles* (Ashgate, 2008), and the *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). In 2014, he received DePaul's Excellence in Teaching Award.

Dedication: This course is humbly dedicated to the memory of Dr. Warren Scheideman, who hatched its plot, investigated its subject, and taught its lessons to many students across many years.

SNL Competences Offered:

A1-D Can analyze writers' or artists' representations of human experience.

A1-X Can analyze a film noir text in terms of form, content, and/or sociohistorical context.

A5 Can define and analyze a creative process.

The A1-D competence is addressed by the course focus on how film noir portrays human experience -- particularly in relation to social boundaries and their transgression, psychologies of the divided self, male chauvinist conceptions of gender, and the existential sense of a world where corruption is rampant and everyone is out for themselves.

The A1-X competence is addressed by the course focus on film noir creations as works that are bound up with phenomena such as genre conventions, the relation of form to content in cinema, Hollywood commercialism, censorship codes, the dynamics of "high" and "low" culture, shifting conceptions of authorship, and the socio-historical milieu of the US during World War II and the Cold War which followed.

The A5 competence is addressed by the course focus on debates about authorship in the movies, differing conceptions of creativity, the relation of form to content in cinema, the dynamics of "high" and "low" culture, and the process by which select film noir works were brought to the screen.

Learning Experience:

A variety of learning strategies will be employed, including screenings; classroom lectures and discussions; print readings; journals entries; and a short paper.

Expected Outcomes:

At the end of this course, it is expected that students will be able to:

Describe the concept of film noir and its key features

Discuss, in both verbal and written discourse, select works of film noir

Analyze such works closely in both verbal and written discourse

In addition:

Students fulfilling A1-D will be able to think and write critically about the representation of phenomena such as subjectivity, gender, violence, desire and social status in such works.

Students fulfilling A1-X will be able to think and write critically about concepts such as form & content, film grammar, genre code, and the *auteur* theory.

Students fulfilling A5 will be able to think and write critically about ways in which theories of and debates about creativity tie in with the above.

Course Materials -- Required Text:

There is one required textbook for the course. It is available at the Barnes & Noble/DePaul bookstore at 1 E. Jackson, as well as from various internet vendors:

Hirsch, Foster. *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*. Da Capo Press. 2008.
ISBN 978 0 30681772 4.

In addition, select readings will be posted on the Ares electronic reserve system at

the DePaul Libraries website. To access these online reserve readings, just go to library.depaul.edu and click on the Services tab in the banner across the top. The second item in the dropdown menu is Course Reserves Services. Click on that it will take you to the Course Reserves Services page. On the right you'll see a heading that says Access Our Reserves and below that, a blue box saying "Log in to Ares Course Reserves." That will take you to the login page for the Ares system. Log in using your Campus Connect User ID and password. You will then get a page listing the courses in which you're enrolled that have readings posted in Ares. Click on the title of this course and the list of our electronic reserve readings will be displayed.

Also, you're required to screen our Week 3 film *Laura* outside of class, so you'll need to do that. *Laura* is widely available from streaming services for \$2.99 or so or may be found at your local library.

Attendance Requirements:

This is a 5-week course which meets for three and 1/4 hours a week, during which time we screen a full-length film and discuss it. **Given this, it is crucial that students attend all class sessions and do so promptly so that we may get underway with the evening's (very intriguing) business.** In the event of an absence, it is imperative that you a) let me know ahead of time; and b) contact a classmate ahead of time to be your 'tutor' for the missed session. Again, students must strive to attend all five class sessions and points are given for attendance (see below). **A student who misses more than one class session will not have met the requirements for a passing grade.**

Evidence students will submit:

Class participation. Students are expected to do the appropriate reading for each class session in a timely fashion. They are also expected to demonstrate that they have done

so by participating in class discussion. In addition, students will submit the following pieces of written work:

Journal entries. Each week (excepting week 1 and including week 6, when we do not meet), students will submit a journal entry (around 4-500 words, typed, double-spaced) on the previous week's film. A format for journal entries appears on p. 8 of this syllabus, after the Schedule of Screening, Readings and Topics.

Final Paper. By Week 6 (that is, by March 18th, when we do not meet), each student will submit a short paper (about 5-6 pages – i.e., 1200-1500 words long) on one of the films which the course has highlighted, approached through the lens of the competence she/he is fulfilling in the course. Details on the Final Paper assignment will be discussed and distributed in handout form in class.

In sum, the evidence requirements for the course are: class participation; five journal entries; and one short paper. Point-wise, the breakdown is as follows:

Attendance	5 pts
Class participation	10 pts
Journal entries (5)	45 pts
Short paper	40 pts
Total	100 pts

Criteria for Assessment and Policy on Late Submissions:

I expect the written work described above to conform to college-level standards of mechanics and presentation. I am happy to work with students on these points, on a draft-revision basis, if students so desire. In making such assessments, I strive to be clear, flexible, forthright and empathetic. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of the services offered by DePaul's Writing Center. (For more info on the Writing Center, see the heading Writing Help, at the end of this syllabus.)

Throughout the course, assignments that are submitted late will receive reduced points and assignments that are more than two weeks late will receive zero points.

The last date by which any assignments (i.e., assignments that are two weeks late or less) may be turned in is March 12th.

A single journal entry is worth a maximum of 9 points, with 9 points indicating excellent work; 4.5 points indicating average work; and 2 or fewer points indicating work that is somehow lacking. In addition to allotting points, the instructor will provide written feedback on each journal entry. In journal entries, I am mostly looking for you to register a thoughtful response to the viewing experience in light of the 6 questions contained in the journal format.

The Short Paper will be graded as follows:

A designates work of high quality. An A paper (36-40 pts)

develops an argument cogently and creatively across the length of an essay;

reflects thorough understanding of and engagement with pertinent texts (audiovisual and/or print) and the issues at hand;

draws insightful connections and/or generates thoughtful questions concerning the topic and the specified materials;

cites sources consistently in appropriate citation style;

is virtually free of grammar lapses.

B designates work of good quality. A B paper (32-35 pts)

develops an argument effectively across the length of an essay;

reflects adequate understanding of and engagement with pertinent texts (audiovisual and/or print) and the issues at hand;

draws clear connections and/or generates apt questions concerning the topic and the specified materials

cites sources consistently in appropriate citation style;

is mostly free of grammar lapses.

C designates work which minimally meets requirements set forward in assignment. A C paper (28-34 pts)

develops some ideas but does so in a superficial or simplistic manner;

reflects limited understanding of or engagement with pertinent texts audiovisual or print) and the issues at hand;

draws connections, some of which are unclear, and/or raises questions, some which are inapt, concerning the topic and the specified materials;

cites sources inconsistently and/or occasionally uses appropriate citation style;

contains several grammar lapses.

D designates work of poor quality which does not meet minimum requirements set forth in the assignment. A D paper (24-27 pts)

shows little development of ideas;

reflects little or no understanding of pertinent texts (audiovisual and/or print) and the issues at hand;

does not draw clear connections or raise coherent questions concerning the topic and the specified materials;

does not cite sources appropriately;

contains numerous grammar lapses.

Policy on Pass/Fail Grades:

It is assumed you are taking the course for a letter grade (A, B, C, etc.). However, it is possible to take the course on a Pass/Fail basis if you wish to do so. **If you do wish to**

take the course on a Pass/Fail basis, you must inform the instructor of your wish to do so in writing by the end of Week Two.

Policy on Academic Integrity:

This course abides by the university's strictures against plagiarism and its policies on Academic Integrity as described in the DePaul Student handbook. All work done for this course must observe the Guidelines for Academic Integrity as outlined in the *Code of Student Responsibility* (in the *DePaul Student Handbook*). The code's Plagiarism Policy reads as follows:

Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's; copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with proper acknowledgement; submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else; and the paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgment.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If an instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion. Actions taken by the instructor do not preclude the college or the university taking further punitive action including dismissal from the university.

Policy on Incompletes:

It is expected that students will complete course assignments by specified due dates within the quarter. In circumstances that the instructor determines to be exceptional, when the student is unable to complete required coursework by the established due dates, the student may request that a grade of Incomplete (IN) be issued. This request must be made formally, in writing, by completion of an IN Request Form that the student signs. The form specifies the final date by which all outstanding coursework must be completed. Failure to submit outstanding work by the specified due date will result in a grade change from IN to W or FX for each enrolled competence, along with serious academic and/or financial consequences. **After the final submission deadline, the student will have no further opportunities to submit work for a passing grade.**

Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability

For information on Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability, see the Appendix at the end of this syllabus.

Writing Help

For information on Writing Help, see the Appendix at the end of this syllabus.

Schedule of Screenings, Readings and Topics

[Note: Readings followed by the designation (E) are posted on the Ares electronic reserve system at the DePaul Libraries website. Go to library.depaul.edu and, in the banner running across the top, find and mouse over Services. In the Services dropdown menu, click on Course Reserve Services. On the Course Reserve Services page, look under the Ares Course Reserves heading

and click on Login to Ares Course Reserves. At the login page, enter your Campus Connect username and password. A list of your courses using Ares materials will come up. Click on AI 215: Film Noir and a list of our Ares readings, alphabetized by author's last name, will come up. Here you can find a given reading and, by clicking on it, get access to it. Most of our Ares readings appear in pdf form.]

Meeting One 5/2

Screening of ***Double Indemnity***; Discussion; The basics of film noir; The literary and cinematic sources of film noir style; Explanation of course structure and requirements

Meeting Two 5/9

Screening of ***Out of the Past***; Discussion; Icons, types and plots in film noir; Conceptions of genre in cinema; Culture, 'high' and 'low'

Readings:

Hirsch, chapter 4, "The Crazy Mirror: Noir Stylistics" **[Do NOT read pp. 73-75]**

Chandler, D., "An Introduction to Genre Theory" (E)

Chandler, R. "The Simple Art of Murder" (E)

Submit: Journal entry on *Double Indemnity*

Meeting Three 5/16

Screen ***Laura*** at home, before class meeting; Discussion; Gender and psychology in film noir

Hirsch, chapter 5, "The Noir Director" **[Do NOT read pp. 120-121; Stop at 139]**

Blaser, "No Place for a Woman: The Family. . ." **[Read sections 1-4 only]** (E)

Boden, "Creativity in a Nutshell," **[Read pp. 1-5 only]** (E)

Submit: Journal entry on *Out of the Past*

Meeting Four 5/23

Screening of ***Shadow of a Doubt***; Discussion; The un-lived life; The anxieties of middle-class life; The country and the city in noir

Readings:

Hirsch, chapter 6, "The Noir Actor"

Sanford, "The Shadow" (E)

Blaser, "No Place for a Woman: The Family. . ." **[Read sections 5-9]** (E)

Submit: Journal entry on *Laura*

Meeting Five 5/30

Screening of ***Kiss Me Deadly***; The PI reconsidered; Noir and the Cold War; The "decadence" of noir; The legacy of noir

Readings:

Hirsch, chapter 7, "Down These Mean Streets: Narrative Patterns"

Anderson, "Cold War America, "1945-1960" (E)

Submit: Journal entry on *Shadow of a Doubt*

Due date for Short paper and last journal entry 6/6

No class meeting on this date.

Submit the following by e-mail to jkimsey@depaul.edu:

Journal entry on *Kiss Me Deadly*

Short Paper

Format for Journal Entries

For a given film, fill up about one-and-a-half to two typed pages responding to the following questions:

1. What is the film about? (Try to be concrete and literal at this point; don't jump to "interpretation".)
2. Describe something from your own experience you are reminded of by the film.
3. What is the most important scene, pattern or image in the film? Briefly explain your choice.
4. Identify one basic feature of noir style that the film possesses. Briefly discuss whether or not the film treats this feature in a striking manner.
5. Draw a connection between the film and one of our course readings. Briefly explain this connection.
6. Pretend the film is *not* about whatever you said it was about in #1. Pretend it's about something else, something hidden or unstated. What is this other thing that the film is "really" about?

Appendix

For Students Who Need Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter, preferably within the first week of class, and make sure you have contacted:

PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-4239 in the Schmidt Academic Center, room 220 or;

The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-7290, DePaul University Student Center, room 307.

Writing Help

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, sample SNL assignments and much more, see the [Writing Guide for SNL Students](http://snl.depaul.edu/writing/index.html) at <http://snl.depaul.edu/writing/index.html>. For on-campus and online tutoring, see the [DePaul University Writing Centers](http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/) at <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>.