

Agency and Fate in Film Noir

SocTh 30209; Phil 20209/30209; GRM 30209

Autumn Quarter 2009
J. Conant and R. Pippin

Syllabus

I. Important Facts about the Course

Course assistant:

Hannah McKeown; email: hmckeown.uchicago.edu

Seminar meeting times and location:

Tuesdays and Thursdays in CWAC 157; 3:00-4:20pm

Film screenings:

Wednesdays in SS 122; 4:30 (Monday showings as well in Weeks 7 & 8)

Undergraduate discussion section:

with Hannah McKeown; Fridays in HM 145: 10:30-11:20

Course requirements:

Regular attendance of seminar meetings, screenings, and (for undergrads) discussion section, plus one term paper (15-30 pages)

Books ordered for the course:

We have ordered The Film Noir Reader (listed below as FNR 1). It is the first of four volumes of essays (the other three are listed below as FNR 2, etc.). We have not ordered the other three volumes (the assigned essays from them are available on Chalk). In addition, we have ordered the BFI books on Gun Crazy and Detour. The three books that have been ordered for the course can all be purchased at the Seminary Coop Bookstore.

A good collection that is unfortunately out of print, so we could not order it, is the *Movie Book of Film Noir* (listed below as MFBN). You may want to buy a copy, if you can find one! The assigned articles from it will also be posted on Chalk.

Other readings:

All other readings are posted on the Chalk site for this course. You can find them by following the author and title in the links; full bibliographical information is not given. **NOTE the readings are available under “External Links” on the Chalk site, NOT through the library reserve system.** If you are not registered for the course, but have been given permission to audit, then speak with Prof. Pippin about being added to the list of permitted users of the Chalk site.

II. General Background Reading for the Course

Most of the assigned weekly readings will be about the film under discussion during that week of the course. The readings listed immediately below are not about specific films. They are background readings, raising general issues about film and philosophy, the medium of film itself, particular issues in criticism and interpretation unique to film, considerations of genre (an especially contested issue for film noir), or, finally, about some of the larger philosophical issues under examination in the course, especially, about the nature of action and the ascription of moral responsibility.

The following is a list of these general background readings that will be referred to in class and are available on the Chalk site in External Links.

1. André Bazin, “The Western, or the American Film *par excellence*”
2. André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Western”
3. André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”
4. Leo Braudy, “Stage vs Screen”
5. Leo Braudy, “Genre: The Conventions of Connection”
6. Stanley Cavell, “A Matter of Meaning It”
7. Stanley Cavell, on the structure of a genre, Pursuits of Happiness, pp. 27-29
8. Stanley Cavell, The World Viewed, chapters 1-5
9. Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck”
10. Erwin Panovsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures”
11. Victor Perkins, “Where is the World?”
12. Victor Perkins, “The Sins of the Pioneers”, Film as Film, Ch. 1
13. Victor Perkins, “Minority Reports”, Film as Film, Ch. 2
14. Robert Pippin, “Introduction” to Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy
15. Robert Pippin, “What is a Western? Politics and Self-Knowledge in John Ford’s The Searchers.”
16. Robert Pippin, “Trapped by Oneself: Jacques Tourneur’s Out of the Past”
17. Robert Pippin, “Running the Show in The Lady from Shanghai”
18. Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck”
19. Bernard Williams, “The Liberation of Antiquity” from Shame and Necessity

20. George Wilson entry on “Action,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/action/>

III. Schedule of Weekly Screenings and Readings

Week One: 9/29 – 10/1

Screening: *Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles) 1947

Readings: George Wilson, *Narration in Light*, Chapters 1 & 3; & pp 200-7
Andrew Britton, “Betrayed by Rita Hayworth” (MBFN)
J. P. Telotte, “Narration, Desire, and *The Lady from Shanghai*”
Robert Pippin, “Running the Show in *The Lady from Shanghai*”

Week Two: 10/6 – 10/8

Screening: *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur) 1947

Readings: Leighton Grist, “Out of the Past” (MBFN)
R. Barton Palmer, “Lounge Time” (FNR4)
Robert Warshow, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero” (IM)
Robert Warshow, “Movie Chronicle: The Westerner” (IM)
Robert Pippin, “Trapped by Oneself: Jacques Tourneur’s *Out of the Past*”

Week Three: 10/13 – 10/15

Screening: *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang) 1945

Readings: Tom Gunning, “Life is a Nightmare” (*The Films of Fritz Lang*, Ch. 12)
R. Borde and É. Chaumeton, “Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*” (FNR1)
R. Durnat, “Paint in Black: The Family Tree of *Film Noir*” (FNR1)
Paul Schrader, “Notes on *Film Noir*” (FNR1)
J. Place and L. Peterson, “Some Visual Motifs in *Film Noir*” (FNR1)

Week Four: 10/20 – 10/22

Screening: *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak) 1946

Readings: Michael Walker, “Robert Siodmak” (MBFN)
Robert Porfirio, “No Way Out” (FNR1)
Claude Chabrol, “Evolution of the Thriller” (CdC, 1950s)
Robert Porfirio, “Expressiveness of Sound and Image in Noir” (FNR1)

Week Five: 10/27 – 10/29

Screening: *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer) 1945

Readings: Noah Isenberg, *Detour* (BFI book)
Andrew Britton, “Detour” (MBFN)
Andrew Klevan, “Notes on Teaching Film Style” (S&M)

Week Six: 11/3 – 11/5

Screening: *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis) 1950

Readings: Jim Kitses, *Gun Crazy* (BFI book)
Gary Johnson, “Gun Crazy” (FNR4)

Week Seven: 11/10 – 11/12

Screening #1: *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray) 1950 (**Monday showing**)

Readings: Victor Perkins, “In a Lonely Place” MBFN
André Bazin, “The Death of Humphrey Bogart” (CdC, 1950s)
Andrew, Klevan, “Notes on Teaching Film Style” (S&M)

Screening #2: *Shadow of a Doubt* (Alfred Hitchcock) 1943 (Wednesday showing)

Readings: William Rothman, “Shadow of a Doubt”
Robin Wood, “Ideology, Genre, Auteur”
Alfred Hitchcock, “The Enjoyment of Fear”
Francois Truffaut, “Interview with Alfred Hitchcock”

Week Eight: 11/17 – 11/19

Screening #1: *The Man Who Wasn't There* (Joel Coen) 2001 (**Monday showing**)

Reading: George Wilson, “Love and Bullshit in Santa Rosa”

Screening #2: *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang) 1953 (Wednesday showing)

Reading: Tom Gunning, “Circuits of Corruption” (*The Films of Fritz Lang*, Ch. 16)

Week Nine: 11/23 – 11/26

Screening: *Angel Face* (Otto Preminger) 1952

Readings: Richard Lippe, “At the Margins of Film Noir” (FNR1)
Edward Gallafent, “Angel Face” (MBFN)
Robert Porfirio, “Interview with Otto Preminger” (FNR3)
Jacques Rivette, “The Essential” (CdC, 1950s)

Week Ten: 12/1 – 12/3

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder) 1944

Readings: James Paris, “Murder Can Sometimes Smell Like Honeysuckle” (FNR4)
Peter William Evans, “Double Indemnity” (MBFN)