



Modern Noir

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MODERN NOIR

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A LEVEL MEDIA STUDIES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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2. MUCH OF THE INFORMATION LISTED WILL BE AVAILABLE BY OTHER MEANS:

- Your local library which has access to the inter-library loan system.

Your local library may have copies of MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN and SIGHT AND SOUND. Some of the recent newspaper items may be held in your local reference library.

- Your nearest college/university

Universities may allow access to outside students, though it is unlikely that you will be able to borrow books or journals. Ask your reference librarian, who should be able to assist by locating the nearest college library holding suitable material.

- Your school library

- Local bookshops

Some of the books mentioned in the bibliography are still in print and your bookshop should be able to order items for you.

- British Library
Newspaper Library
Colindale Avenue
London NW9 5HE
Tel. 0207 412 7353

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PHOTOCOPYING

If you find it very difficult to locate any of the journals mentioned, we can undertake to photocopy a *small number* of articles and send them to you. This is costed on a fixed time basis, and you must establish what the charge will be before you request copies. At the time of writing this the minimum charge is £10 per half hour (excluding VAT).

All cheques to be made out to **BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE**.

British Film Institute
21 Stephen Street
London W1P 2LN
Tel. 0207 255 1444

Nearest underground stations: Tottenham Court Road, Godege Street.

Why do research?

You cannot simply rely on your existing knowledge when approaching essays in Media Studies. Although you will have some understanding of the area being explored, it is not enough to enable you to examine the area in depth. If you were asked to write about the people in your street in detail, you might have some existing information about names, faces, relationships, issues and activities but this knowledge would not offer you details such as every single one of their names, who knows who, who gets on with whom, how people earn a living, what has happened to them in the past and so on. This extra information could change your opinions quite dramatically. Without it, therefore, your written profile would end up being quite shallow and possibly incorrect. The same is true of your understanding of media texts, issues and institutions.

Before researching any area, it is useful to be clear about what outcomes you are hoping to achieve. Research is never a waste of time, even when it doesn't directly relate to the essay you are preparing. The information may be relevant to another area of the syllabus, be it practical work or simply a different essay. Also, the picture you are building up of how an area works will strengthen your understanding of the subject as a whole. So what outcomes are you hoping to achieve with your research?

- **A broad overview of the area you are researching:** This includes its history, institutions, conventions and relationship to the audience. Research into these aspects offers you an understanding of how your area has developed and the influences which have shaped it.
- **An awareness of different debates which may exist around the area of study:** There are a range of debates in many subject areas. For example, when researching audiences you will discover that there is some debate over how audiences watch television or film, ranging from the passive consumption of values and ideas to the use of media texts in a critical and independent way. Any discussion about censorship, for example, and an analysis of the debates which emerged over the release of the film "Crash", will be extremely shallow if you have no knowledge of these different perspectives.
- **Some knowledge of the work of theorists in that particular area:** You need to demonstrate that you have read different theorists, exploring the relevant issues and investigating the area thoroughly in order to develop your own opinion based on acquired knowledge and understanding.
- **Information relevant to all key concept areas.** You should, after research, be able to discuss all key concept areas as they relate to that specific subject area. These are the codes and conventions, representation, institutions and audience.

Types of research

- **Primary:** This is first-hand research. In other words, it relies on you constructing and conducting surveys, setting up interviews with key people in the media industry or keeping a diary or log of data (known as quantitative information) on such things as what activities women are shown doing in advertisements over one week of television viewing, for example. Unless you are equipped to conduct extensive research, have access to relevant people in the media industry or are thorough in the up-keep of your diary or log, this type of research can be demanding, complex and sometimes difficult to use. Having said that, if you are preparing for an extended essay, then it is exactly this type of research which, if well used, will make your work distinctive and impressive.

- **Secondary:** This is where you will be investigating information gathered by other people in books, pamphlets, on radio, television, in the newspaper and in magazines. All of these sources are excellent for finding background information, statistics, interviews, collected research details and so on. This will form the majority of your research. Some of these will be generally available (in public libraries for example); others such as press releases and trade press may only be available through specialist libraries.
- **Other Media:** When considering one area of the media or one particular product or type of product, it is very important that you compare it with others which are similar. You will need to be able to refer to these comparisons in some detail so it is not enough to simply watch a film. You will need to read a little about that film, make notes, concentrate on one or two scenes which seem particularly relevant and write all of this information up so that you can refer to it when you need to.
- **History and development:** Having an understanding of the history and development of the media text which you are researching will provide a firm foundation and context for contemporary analysis. There is a difference between generally accepted facts and how theorists use these facts.
- **Theory:** This is the body of work of other critics of the media. Most of the books and periodical articles which you will read for research will be written by theorists who are arguing a particular viewpoint or position with regard to an issue within the media. It is this which forms the debates surrounding the study of the media, in which you, as a media student, are now becoming involved.

Using research

- **Organising your research:** Before rushing headlong into the local library, the first stage of research is to plan two things. When are you able to do your research and how are you going to organise the information gathered? You may, for example, wish to make notes under the headings listed above.
- **Applying your research:** Always return to the specific questions being asked of the text. The most obvious pitfall is to gather up all of the collected information and throw it at the page, hoping to score points for quantity. The art of good research is how you use it as part of or evidence for an analysis of the text which you are exploring. The knowledge you have acquired should give you the confidence to explore the text, offer your own arguments and, where appropriate, to quote references to support this.

Listing your research

It is good practice, and excellent evidence of your wider reading, to list all references to secondary research, whether mentioned within the essay or not, at the end of your work. This is usually written in this way:

Notes

1. Len Masterman, *Teaching About Television*, London, Macmillan, 1980.

2. Manuel Alvarado and Bob Ferguson, "The Curriculum, Media Studies and Discursivity", *Screen*, vol.24, no.3, May-June 1983.

Other media texts referred to in detail should be listed, with relevant information such as the director, date of release or transmission, production company and, where possible, scene or episode number. Where you have compiled primary research, it is useful to offer a brief summary of this also at the end of your work.

MODERN FILM NOIR

INTRODUCTION

As compilers we have chosen films partly in terms of what is available on video (see separate listing at the end of this guide), partly in deference to Laurent Vachaud's article, cited below, and partly because some titles we felt just had to be included, but there will be plenty of other just as valid that have been omitted.

We have also included a very brief general selection to help researchers familiarise themselves with the genre(s) covered.

WARNING

The classification of the films means that a number of them have been rated as only being suitable for 18 year olds and above.

SOME GENERAL READING

Two key points to note: firstly students might find it helpful to consider one or two "standard" definitions of *film noir* in order to inform any debate about *modern noir* (and to take account that some writers will simply extend their definition to include more recent films in their discourse); secondly the term *modern noir* may not always be recognised in catalogues and databases, so it is advisable to see whether newer writings about noir have been treated as "classic" *film noir*, but do in fact discuss more recent manifestations of the genre.

Books

CAMERON, Ian, editor.

The Movie book of film noir.

Studio Vista, 1992.

Includes the chapter "Moving Targets and Black Widows. Film Noir in Modern Hollywood", by Leighton Grist.

COPJEC, Joan, editor.

Shades of Noir.

Verso, 1993.

CROWTHER, Bruce

Film Noir. Reflections in a dark mirror.

Columbus Books, 1998.

JACKSON, Kevin

The Language of Cinema.

Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1998.

A dictionary that includes film noir, and extends the definition to take in modern noir.

RUBIN, Rubin
Thrillers.

Cambridge University Press, 1999. (Genres in American Cinema series).

In **Chapter 5, Modern Period (pp.119-180)**, a section starting on p. 170 looks at “*Neo-Noir*”, giving an interesting overview, citing many different titles, but including reference to BLOOD SIMPLE, SE7EN, LOST HIGHWAY and THE LAST SEDUCTION. The whole chapter is in itself interesting as an attempt to separate out various genres (or sub-genres).

YAQUINTO, Marilyn
Pump ‘Em Full of Lead. A Look at Gangsters on Film
New York: Twayne, 1998.

In **chapter 12, “Neo-noir and New Waves” (pp.202 - 216)**, there is a general overview of those films which are specific to the gangster genre, but which have something new added to them. MILLER’S CROSSING is amongst those discussed.

Journal articles

POSITIF

No 420, February 1996, p.78-79

Le rouge et le noir, by Laurent Vachaud

In this key article (in French), Vachaud tries to define the characteristics of what he calls “neo-noir”. He argues that this is a new genre, with specific characteristics: low/medium budget, usually independent, productions; mixture of gore and black humour; narrative twist; betrayal within a group (rather than the classic noir theme of a hero against society) and emphasis on dialogue.

He quotes from, and suggests the following as being included: all COEN films except Hudsucker Proxy; RESERVOIR DOGS; PULP FICTION; USUAL SUSPECTS; SEVEN; LAWS OF GRAVITY; KILLING ZOE; and (in part), LITTLE ODESSA. [Thanks to our colleague Christophe Dupin for his help with this article].

We have arranged the film titles in chronological order.

NB: For newspaper and press articles, different choices may be identified using the indexes available at many libraries; the BFI National Library holds more than just those items that have been selected in this listing. There have been articles published, even if we have not listed any.

BLOOD SIMPLE (1983)

Books

COEN, Joel and Ethan
Blood Simple and Raising Arizona.
Faber, 1996

The script, with a few stills, plus a brief prologue (in each case). That for BLOOD SIMPLE gives examples of the way the final script developed from previous drafts in an analogy about “shooting ratios”.

[The same version, but of BLOOD SIMPLE only was published in 1988, by St. Martin’s Press, New York].

FERNCASE, Richard K

Outsider Features: American Independent films of the 1980s.

Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Chapter 6, entitled “**Neon Noir: Blood Simple**” is in part career resumé but also gives insight into the source of **BLOOD SIMPLE** and the way it looks. What the chapter title hints at is that this is a style different from the classic use of black and white bas-relief of shadow and light. The chemistry of the relationships and the acting styles may be among other points to consider. (The Coen’s other key films prior to **Fargo** are also touched upon. A useful overview).

MARTIN, Joel W. and **OSTWALT**, Conrad E, jr, editors.

Screening the sacred. Religion, myth, and ideology in popular American film.

Boulder, CT: Westview Press, 1995.

Chapter 2, “**Shall these Bones Live? The problems of bodies in Alfred Hitchcock’s PSYCHO and Joel Coen’s BLOOD SIMPLE**”, by Larry E. Grimes, tries to demonstrate how Hitchcock imbues his film with a traditional Christian vision, a discourse of hope that sets it apart from **BLOOD SIMPLE**. Grimes argues that concepts such as resurrection make much more sense if interpreted through traditional Christian theology and gives a (partial) interpretation, with barely a nod towards noir, modern or otherwise.

Journal articles

AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

Vol. 66. No.7 July 1985, pp. 70-72, 74

Shadows and shivers for Blood Simple, by Barry Sonnenfeld

Useful testimony about the lighting (and about the film production in general) and the way the camera was used.

EMPIRE

August, 1996, p. 34

Review, by Ian Nathan

The general focus of this review is on the Coen Brothers’ reinterpretation of film noir and some of the specific films influencing their production are named, as are (some) characteristics of the style.

FILM & HISTORY

Vol. 26 No 1-4 1996, pp. 20-29

Too long in the wasteland: visions of the American West in film, 1980-1990, by Douglas W. Reiting

In considering **BLOOD SIMPLE**, the author comments upon the apparent incongruity of setting a film noir in the American West.

FILM COMMENT

Vol. 21. No 2. March/April 1985, pp. 14-19

Bloodlines, by Hal Hinson

Relevant interviews that include questions on colour versus black and white, and which talk about noir influences. (Joel Coen: "We didn't want to make a venetian blind movie").

LISTENER

Vol. 120. No.3090 24 November 1988, p.34

TV preview by Richard Combs, in which he suggests the style is part of a counter-trend.

MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN

Vol. 52. No 612, January 1985, p.17

Review, by Steve Jenkins

Standard MFB-type review, but the influences of James M Cain are referred to, and the plot development is praised.

TIME OUT

No. 735 Jan 31 - 6 February, 1985

Simply Bloody, by Anne Billson

The brothers talk a little about the influences on the film, the writer explains the origin of the title, and Sam Raimi's rules are invoked.

STORMY MONDAY (1988)

Book

CHIBNALL, Steve and **MURPHY**, Robert, editors.

British Crime Cinema.

Routledge, 1999.

In **chapter 13**, "**Space in the British crime film**", by Charlotte Brunsdon, there is a section (pp155-160) which devotes part of its analysis to the look of the film in relation to noir. There are further references in the index.

Journal articles

FILMS AND FILMING

No. 411, January 1989, p.34

Review, by Martin Sutton

A positive slant, though much of the focus is on Sting as the most charismatic of the stars in this "overdressed crime thriller, 40's style".

LISTENER

Vol. 21 No 3097 19 January 1989, p.56

Review, by Margaret Walters

Described as an “elegant, ironically self-conscious trifle”, *STORMY MONDAY* is compared with some earlier films which suggest noir-isms, but maybe they aren’t foregrounded enough.

MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN

Vol. 56. No. 661 February 1989, p.58

Review, by Kim Newman

Critical review, assessing the picture as a sub-genre of the gangster movie.

VARIETY

20 April 1988

Review, author unknown.

Critical of the film, but the (American) reviewer does suggest that it has tried to emulate *MONA LISA* as a British film noir.

Newspaper/Press Articles

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

21 January 1989, p.20

An American without tears, by Nigel Floyd

Looks at how a Tyneside location and a “local” star blend with Hollywood style, but with some emphasis on the music background.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

22 January 1989, p.17

Chicago-on-Tyne, by Richard Mayne

Brief and critical review but one that suggests that Newcastle “has never looked so noir”.

SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE

22 January 1989, p.3

Taking the Tyne by storm, by George Perry.

Background to the film, clearly linking it stylistically to film noir.

WHAT'S ON

18 January 1989, p. 66

Newcastle blues, by Phillip Bergson

Interview with director Mike Figgis, who talks about what he set out to achieve, both in terms of location and the "look" of the film.

There are other reviews etc. on the microfiche.

MILLER'S CROSSING (1990)

Books

COEN, Ethan and **COEN**, Joel
Barton Fink, Miller's Crossing
Boston, MA; London: Faber & Faber, 1991

Impress your fellow "grifters", and startle some "sick twists" by investigating and using that inventive, snappy dialogue...

NOLAN, William F.
Dashiell Hammett: A casebook
Santa Barbara, CA: McNally & Loftin, 1969

Critical biography of the crime-writer who inspired the Coens. Chapter 5 concentrates on the novel "Red Harvest", which bears striking similarities to this film. This book provides plenty of material for correlation between pulp noir fiction and the Coens' work.

HAMMETT, Dashiell
Red Harvest
USA: Vintage Books, 1989

Gain your own inspiration from a master of pulp fiction; labyrinthine plots and shady characters dreamed up by the creator of such classic novels as "The Maltese Falcon".

COEN, Ethan
Gates of Eden
London: Doubleday, 1998

Entertaining and intriguing stories from Coen, which make excellent companion-pieces to the films. A mixture of dialogue and prose, they offer a further insight into the themes of the brothers' work.

FILM COMMENT

Vol.26. No.5. September/October 1990, pp.32-3

Chasing the hat, by Richard T. Jameson

An atmospheric and eloquent review, concentrating on cinematography and elements of noir. Stylish background reading which evokes the mood of this genre. It is followed by an interview with John Turturro.

MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN

Vol.58. No.685. February 1991, pp.49-51

Miller's Crossing, by Steve Jenkins

Cast, credits and detailed synopsis are followed by a favourable review. Jenkins examines how the brothers base "their own highly expressive visual and rhythmic style on solid generic foundations".

PREMIERE (US)

Vol.4. No.2. October 1990, pp.94-101

The Joel & Ethan Story, by John H. Richardson

Richardson tries to get beyond "the sound of cheap detectives making wisecracks into the void", and gain some insight into the minds and methods of the Coen brothers. Fascinating quotes from the brothers and their associates, and an in-depth account of their career progress.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol.6. No.1. Winter 1990/91

Neo-classic Hammett: Miller's Crossing, by Tom Pulleine

According to Pulleine, this is the neo-classical, humorous product of "a (double-headed) auteur". A very positive review.

GUARDIAN

18th October 1990, p.24

Cinema's Blood Brothers, by Juan Goodman

The focus is mainly on the Coens themselves, the cast, and some of the genesis of their work. A well-rounded, informative piece.

SCOTSMAN WEEKEND

23rd February 1991, p.vii

Style calls the shots, by William Parente

Parente scrutinises the aesthetics, “wilfully unrealistic” style, and the “thrill of the idea of violence”, whilst also offering an unusual view of the Coens as “the visual equivalent of Orwell’s ‘versificator’”... an arresting review.

OBSERVER

17th February 1991, p.56

Mayhem for full orchestra to settle a score, by Philip French

A classical slant on Tom and his fellow characters, within their detached world of gangster ethics. Aspects of noir and neo-noir themes are intimated, as French explores the small town mythos.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

14th February 1991, p.19

Deep into the heart of gangster territory, by Hugo Davenport

Davenport identifies the paradox at the heart of the film; that of an unreal world made believable. A solid over-all review, with particular references to the phraseology and humour of the Coens’ writing.

THE LAST SEDUCTION (1993)

Books

BRUZZI, Stella

Undressing Cinema: clothing and identity in the movies.

London: Routledge, 1997. xi-xiii, 214p. illus. appendices.

Chapter 5. “Clothes, Power and the Modern Femme Fatale. THE LAST SEDUCTION. DISCLOSURE. SINGLE WHITE FEMALE”. (pp.120-144).

Bruzzi criticises the feminist position adopted by Simone de Beauvoir and Susan Brownmiller which sees ‘feminine’ dress as symbolic of the dominant male agenda and male gaze. Similarly she rejects the feminist view that women in film noir are constructions of male fantasy and essentially unknowable. From the author’s own feminist perspective, THE LAST SEDUCTION places subjectivity upon the woman not the men, and also does not contain the threat of the female through appearance. Bridget’s entry in the workplace shows she is not defined by appearance alone and also is in control of the ‘feminine’ image she projects. The film thus confronts the erotic situation of the female but within a narrative based upon a dynamic female subject which challenges male supremacy.

NATOLI, Joseph

Speeding to the Millennium. Film and Culture 1993-1995.

New York: State University of New York Press, Albany. 1998. 407p.

THE LAST SEDUCTION: Commitment is Murder? (pp.231-240).

The author aligns the film THE LAST SEDUCTION with the O.J. Simpson trial through contrasting Linda Fiorentino's character with Nicole Brown Simpson. Outlining classic film noir and its shaping by formerly constructed patterns of power, THE LAST SEDUCTION is perceived differently in that Fiorentino 'has crossed over to the postmodern side'. Representing a 'sort of Nietzschean superwoman', she transcends both the stories and morality of our time, including those attributed to Nicole Brown Simpson. Described as 'postmodernly noir', Fiorentino exposes the seductive nature of traditional commitments and stereotypes, while Mike and the viewpoint of the audience, attempt to counteract this perception.

Journal articles

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol.4. No.6. August 1994, p.44

THE LAST SEDUCTION. Credits, synopsis and review, by Kim Newman.

Describing THE LAST SEDUCTION as a perfect example of 'grunge noir', and a revamping of 'classic noir', Newman admires both the plot (compared to the intricacies of BLOOD SIMPLE), and the acting of the three main protagonists. Fiorentino is seen as more of a modern female monster, than a pastiche of the 40's femme fatale, while eclipsing Sharon Stone's character in BASIC INSTINCT. Although she is in complete and devastating control throughout the film, Fiorentino manages to be both 'fascinating' and 'rotten' and grudgingly gains the audience's sympathy when she succeeds in her avaricious aims though contemptuously exploiting all those around her.

Newspaper/Press articles

FINANCIAL TIMES

4 August 1994, p.13

THE LAST SEDUCTION. In praise of femmes fatales, by Nigel Andrews

Focusing on various femmes fatales from the cinema, Andrews notes that such characters emerge in noir films when there is a change in the power balance between the sexes. THE LAST SEDUCTION reflects anxieties about current feminist advances within a noir context, yet appeals to both men and women. Updating the 40's style of noir, the film creates its own style but utilizes the historical context where women were portrayed as gentle and innocent.

NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY

5 August 1994, p.33

Basest Instincts. Jonathan Romney on the fascination of the unrelenting amoralist.

The article concentrates on the character of Bridget Gregory as a modern femme fatale, equally believable and unbelievable and compares her with more 'amateur' noir femme fatales such as Hayworth and Stanwyck. Seen as Thatcher-era woman in New York, her fatale template contrasts with small town American culture. Though the connection with the noir classic DOUBLE INDEMNITY highlights the film's differences and mechanical quality, Romney notes that the pleasure in the film is obtained through watching Bridget's victory over her 'appalling' prey.

TIME OUT

4-11 June 1997, p.7

Fatale attraction. Geoffrey Macnab finds that a woman's place is in control in THE LAST SEDUCTION.

Seeing the film as a paen to 1940's noir archetype - the femme fatale, Macnab notes that THE LAST SEDUCTION is not a pastiche unlike other modern noir films. Reflecting more 90's values, Fiorentino is a Thatcher-type character inspiring masochism in her male admirers through her dominant work persona and insurance scams. Though the lack of a moral framework is a drawback, separating the film from DOUBLE INDEMNITY, to which it refers, the pleasure derives from watching a 'virtuoso at work'.

KILLING ZOE(1994)

Journal articles

AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

Vol. 76. No. 4 April 1995, pp.72-74,76-77

Personality prevails in Killing Zoe, by Al Harrell

Though quite technical in places, Richmond discusses the way he shot the picture in order to recreate Paris, and the various elements and influences that are distilled into the final "look" of the film.

INTERVIEW

Vol. 24. No. 9, September 1994, pp.130-135

Hollywood's New Hit Men, by Godfrey Cheshire

Quentin Tarantino (PULP FICTION), Roger Avary (KILLING ZOE), Lawrence Bender (FRESH) and Oliver Stone (NATURAL BORN KILLERS) discuss their (then) recent films. Within this discussion they also touch upon what influenced them, and try (but fail) to avoid talking about violence. Not especially illuminating in terms of noir: KILLING ZOE was apparently location driven!

PREMIERE

Vol. 8 No. 1 September 1994, pp.53-54

French Connection, by J. Hoberman

A discussion on the influence of film noir and other, non-Hollywood, genres on American Independent films, particularly KILLING ZOE.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol. 5. No.1 January 1995, pp.47-8

Review, by Geoffrey MacNab

You decide for yourself where all the borrowing is from: Perhaps this is a conventional B-thriller after all?

TONIGHT

13 January 1995 p.6

Bang, bang, we're ever so cool, by Christopher Bray

The heading says it all really - and the focus of the review (which is hostile) certainly doesn't hover over genre debates.

There are other reviews on the [microfiche](#)

SE7EN (1995)

Book

DYER, Richard

Seven

British Film Institute, 1999. (Modern Classics series)

In seven (of course) key chapters, Dyer seems to be hinting at this being so much more than a crime film. Without question it is a dark film, and this excellent study leaves the reader to decide how dominant the characteristics of modern noir actually are in the context of what else is going on.

Journal articles

AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

Vol. 76, No 10. October 1995, pp.34-40, 42

The sins of a serial killer, by David E. Williams

In which Darius Khondji talks in a fairly technical way about the look of, and the lighting for SE7EN, suggesting that CHINATOWN's John Alonzo may have started the colour-noir approach.

CINEASTE

Vol. 22. No. 3, December 1996, pp.44-46

Review, by Royal S Brown

Important in that it notes the very positive use of a non-token African-American male as the main character, who blends articulacy with well-read literacy, as well as referring to the use of colour in the film itself.

POST SCRIPT

Vol. 16. No. 2 Winter/Spring 1997, pp.35-43

Looking in the Wrong Direction: Displacement and literacy in the Hollywood Serial Killer Drama, by Patrice Fleck

The second half of this piece focuses on the “work” of the serial killer leading to a “text” that the detectives - and to some extent the audience - must read, and posits that SE7EN is much more a radical critique of police work and surveillance in the 90s and as such is in contrast to SILENCE OF THE LAMBS.

PREMIERE

Vol. 3, No. 12, January 1996, pp.10-11

Review, by Ryan Gilbey

Positive review which introduces the term “ultranoir” in talking of the wasteland we (partly) see as a succinct (and literal) way of illustrating moral darkness.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol. 6.No.1, January 1996, pp.22-24

The allure of decay, by Amy Taubin

Mainly discussing the filmic distinctiveness of revulsion against the body, but suggests that this is a police procedural/horror hybrid and gives some clear hints via the references to colour that a noir-ish element is also present. A separate section is based on a talk with the director. An important correction is made via Amy Taubin’s letter on page 64 of the **March** 1996 issue.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol. 6 No. 1, January 1996, pp.49-50

Review by John Wrathall

Puts much emphasis on the darkness of the film, but manages to avoid the “n” word.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol. 6 No. 4 April 1996, pp.18-20

Inside the Light, by Chris Darke

Interview with Darius Khondji, cinematographer, which sheds much light on the influences that inform the look of SE7EN. This is a key article in the context of modern noir (and ‘colour noir’), with helpful illustrations.

NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY

5th January 1996, p.35

Textual tension from the director of Alien3, by Jonathan Romney

Useful and intelligent interpretation, that leads the reader to consider the “visible darkness” of the film and what that might signify...

SUNDAY TIMES

Section 10, 7th January 1996, pp.6-7

Serial Thriller, by Stephen Amidon

Positive review - the film is described as having overwhelming integrity, but Amidon does wonder if it will lead to an inevitable spate of gruesome films with downbeat endings. Did classic noir films end in a downbeat manner?

VILLAGE VOICE

3rd October 1995, p.82

Built for sin, by Amy Taubin

A review that suggests that SE7EN takes place in an unidentified city and could almost be mistaken for a 1940s noir.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS (1995)

LITERATURE/FILM QUARTERLY

Vol. 27. No.1 1999, pp.65-73

Postmodernism, noir and the Usual Suspects, by Stanley Orr.

In a riposte to an article by Tom Whalen - Film Noir: Killer Style (Literature/Film Quarterly Vol 23 No.1 1995, pp2-5), Orr's take is that THE USUAL SUSPECTS is an example of an emergent strain of noir distinct from neo-noir texts, which is subversive of noir modernism. He further suggests that we may be witnessing the exhaustion of noir.

FILM QUARTERLY

Vol.51. N.4. Summer 1998, pp.12-20

Rounding up THE USUAL SUSPECTS. The Comfort of Character and Neo-Noir, by J P Telotte

Analysing THE USUAL SUSPECTS in terms of characterization, the author argues the film revolves around different conceptions of character which unshakes the viewer. Criticising D. Bordwell's premise that film noir characterization ultimately does not challenge current conceptions of reality, Telotte focuses on the discomfort caused by character in recent noir films such as THE LAST SEDUCTION, L.A. CONFIDENTIAL and ROMEO IS BLEEDING. In each of these films, Telotte shows how character becomes the key issue and adds another dimension to the

cultural challenge that resides within film noir. The article continues by analysing character definition and change in *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* and shows how film noir has always tried but failed to reduce character to the understandable and rational.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol.5. N.9. September 1995, p.61

THE USUAL SUSPECTS. Full credits, synopsis and review, by Philip Kemp.

Aligning the film with Hitchcock's *STAGE FRIGHT*, which included a misleading flashback, Kemp asserts that misleading the audience is common in many thrillers and that *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* simply takes this device a step further. Though the narrative is shaped by Kint's monologue, which conceals his own purpose and Soze's true identity, the heart of the film is within the narrative dual between Kujan and Kint. A format which reflects the increasingly common concept of the unreliable narrator.

Newspaper/Press articles

GUARDIAN

24 August 1995, p.10

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Comparing *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* with *RESERVOIR DOGS* and also heist thrillers, the author sees the film as going beyond these formats by entering the realms of the metaphysical. With the plot intentionally complex and needing to be viewed a second time to be fully understood, the film is seen as unfashionably smart. Singer, the director, admits to using a genre for a film and then introducing different elements since he is not primarily interested in the thriller genre alone.

NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY

25 August 1995, p.29

The post Tarantino heist movie. Lizzie Franke on how to talk your way out of suspicion.

Commenting on the thriller aspect at the start of the film, Franke compares *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* to *RESERVOIR DOGS*, but notes the film develops into a two hander between Verbal Kint and David Kujan. The audience is challenged as the conflicting stories of the two characters, struggle for dominance. Franke argues that film noir is full of such 'narrative minefields' told by fallible story tellers with 'tales as twisted as their hearts'.

OBSERVER

The Observer Review. 27 August 1995, p.7

Philip French finds himself arrested by Bryan Singer's clever nocturnal thriller.

Reworking familiar traditions from heist movies and film noirs, the director and scriptwriter of *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* have created a gripping thriller. Relishing language in a similar vein to *RESERVOIR DOGS* and *PULP FICTION*, the film centres on a cat and mouse game between Klint and federal agent Kujan. Sharpwitted, the film shows an interest in storytelling which eventually enters the realms of the mystical.

Journal articles

BLACK FILM BULLETIN

Vol.3. No.4 Winter 1996, pp.4-7

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS. From Book to Screen. The director Carol Franklin is interviewed by June Givanni and Gaylene Gould.

After discussing the differences between novel form and the linear format of film, the interviewers ask what attracts Franklin to the noir genre. Arguing that DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS fuses noir with social realism, Franklin asserts the film transcends the noir genre through the highlighting of Easy's external demons. The lifestyle of L.A. in 1948 rather than the noir genre of 1948, is reflected in the film and also, unlike classic noir, the film contains a degree of optimism. In regard to the issue of race within the film, the director points out that the film opened the same weekend as the verdict of the O.J. Simpson trial. This may have adversely affected the potential white audience and contributed to its box office failure.

CINEASTE

Vol. 22 No. 1 April 1999, pp.38, 40-41

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS, by Ed Guerro

Although set in Chandler territory of L.A. 1948, Guerro sees DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS as a noir journey viewed through 'the prism of the black experience'. Despite encountering typical noir intrigue in Easy's search for Daphne Monet, the film is not a typical Hollywood noir period piece. Full of racial ironies and cultural gestures, the film shows an ordinary, working class man, confront powerful white forces. The film's failure at the box office is seen as related to race on two levels. The first is in terms of narrative and Easy's double consciousness as a black man and a private detective. Secondly, the film was released at the same time as the verdict of the O.J. Simpson trial, when racial tensions were high. Ultimately the film's optimistic resolution and experimentation worked against the noir genre and failed to appeal to young filmgoers.

FILMS IN REVIEW

Vol.47. N.1/2. Jan/Feb 1996, pp.62-63

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS, by Andy Pawelczak

Praising Denzel Washington's performance within a film 'atmospherically rich' but lacking in other areas, Pawelczak sees the film as a 'dream of film noir'. Visually brilliant and incorporating themes of the classic private eye genre, the film includes the 'usual betrayals and reversals'. Though Franklin's first film, ONE FALSE MOVE, is seen as a moving noir film, the author feels Mosley's novel hamper's Franklin's adaptation. Observing that the racial theme is present but not heavy handed, the use of music within the film is particularly admired.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol 6. N.1 January 1996, p.38

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS. Full credits, synopsis and review, by Manohla Dargis

Comparing a scene at the end of the film with classic film noir scenes featuring the hurt hero, the author argues that the difference in DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS originates in the black hero played by Denzel Washington. Though the film begins with the sun shining, as many noir films do, and

concentrates on the themes of love and hate and betrayal by friends, the film follows its own path. Dargis argues that the director utilises noir and detective fiction, rather than replicates these genres.

Newspaper/Press articles

OBSERVER REVIEW

14 Jan 1996, p.13

Easy beats Sleazy, by Philip French

Adapted from Walter Mosley's fine first novel, *DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS* evokes the film noir genre of Chandler's 'Farewell My Lovely'. However, it also projects a black perspective which corrects our view of the classic period thriller and Hollywood film noir. Forced into becoming a private detective, Easy accepts his new role by the end of the film with a degree of satisfaction. This introduces a note of optimism within a genre not usually marked by such positive conclusions.

OBSERVER PREVIEW

7-14 Jan 1996, p.20

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS. Nicholas Joicey talks to director Carl Franklin.

Focusing on the arrival of African-Americans in L.A. in the early forties, *DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS*, shows how Easy is diverted into detective work. The director explains that he found the typical emotional distance of the detective role in classic film noir, unsatisfactory and Easy is a character who is even more of an ordinary guy than the noir detectives Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade. Although aiming to produce a level of social realism in the film, Joicey sees the film as more restrained than either the novel it is adapted from, or Franklin's first film, *ONE FALSE MOVE*

FARGO (1996)

Journal articles

CINEASTE

Vol.22 N.2 1996, pp.47, 55

FARGO, by Thomas Doherty.

Using snow as the dominant visual motif, *FARGO* mixes a 'film noir ethos with film blanc visuals'. The article points out the various contrasts in the film between the banal and the brutal and the trivial and the terrifying. Against a winter landscape in which three murders are committed at the beginning of the film, the Minnesotan community is shown as chirpy and solicitous. Yet overall, *FARGO* is a return for the Coens, to the criminal ground of *BLOOD SIMPLE* and demonstrates a doublevision of American folk culture. Interconnecting the mundane with intense action sequences, *FARGO* closes via a moral lesson from Marge, which reveals she is the heart of the film but that she lacks the imagination to understand the evil surrounding her.

FILM QUARTERLY

Vol.50 N.1. Autumn 1996, pp.31-34

FARGO, by Devin McKinney.

McKinney analyses the Coen brothers' artistic approach, considering them 'darker souled' than Tarantino and more involved and committed to their subjects than Jarmusch. Using various genres for their own ends, they dive beneath self imposed surfaces to expose the currents of disorder and chance underneath. To counteract the corruption and murder unleashed by greed is Marge, the pregnant detective. However, McKinney sees Marge as a vapid banal character, whose innocence is unconvincing and shows the Coen's condescension. Observing that, for the Coens, everyone is blood simple under the facade of self control, the author argues that FARGO extends no sympathy to its belittled figures.

NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY

7 June 1996, p.36

'Coen family values.' Jonathan Coe applauds Fargo as the brothers' boldest film yet.

Seeing FARGO as a throw-back to the fundamentals of Blood Simple, the film takes place in the homely desolation of north Minnesota. Confrontation within the narrative takes place between Macy, organising his wife to be kidnapped to claim the ransom, and Marge, the pregnant detective. Other tensions exist between lifestyles and also in terms of cinema, eg, realism versus genre. Though the film contains much violence and murder, the Coens attempt to place these within an explicitly moral context.

PREMIERE (US)

Vol.9 N.7 March 1996, pp.22-24

FARGO, by Todd McCarthy

While a title card at the start of the film announces the following events are based on a true story, the normal disclaimer at the end creates an inherent paradox which is both stylized and super-realistic. Marge, investigating a kidnap plot which goes violently awry, is a character placed between TWIN PEAKS and BLUE VELVET territory. Discovering a 'blindingly white heart of darkness' she provides the film with its redemptive grace. Despite the bitter dark humour of the film, the Coens present a bleak vision of the human condition which is only balanced by the persistent goodness of Marge.

PREMIERE (US)

Vol.9 N.7 March 1996, pp.76-80

Joel and Ethan Cohen. Executive editor Peter Biskind tries to pin down that elusive pair of auteur siblings and discovers that they've always done exactly what they've wanted to do and remain puzzled by the public's reaction to their films.

Describing the Coen brother's debut film BLOOD SIMPLE as a noir film and character actors John Turturro, M. Emmet Walsh and Steven Buscem, as neo-noir totems, Biskind interviews the brothers in the wake of their recently released film FARGO. Responding to the idea that BLOOD SIMPLE influenced the series of films by Tarantino, and the film THE USUAL SUSPECTS, Joel Coen explains he and his brother have been drawn to horror films, film noir and pulp fiction, but have used these genres for their own ends.

THE TIMES

30 May 1996, p.37

FARGO. Brothers Come Close to Great Outdoors, by Geoff Brown.

Showing a 'beauty and urgency' that only comes from operating in the real world, FARGO portrays the characters of Minnesota with an affectionate comedy that is not condescending. Combining a humanity and a moral concern for the violence shown, the themes in the film can be traced back to BLOOD SIMPLE. The heart of the film is Marge, the police chief, who emerges from domesticity to solve the heinous crimes, as the Coens create a world which is simultaneously 'warm, dark, grotesque and beautiful.'

LOST HIGHWAY (1996)

Books

WOODS, Paul A
Weirdsville USA

London: Plexus, 1997

Ideal for cross-reference: comprehensive critique of Lynch's film career, with interesting background information. Lost Highway features in Chapter 10.

CHION, Michael
David Lynch

London: BFI, 1995

Extremely detailed critical theories, concerning Lynch's symbolism and characters. Particularly useful is the section "Lynch-Kit: From Alphabet to Word", which includes examples of his dealings with the themes of Dark, Night and Texture, amongst others.

LYNCH, David and GIFFORD, Barry
Lost Highway

London: Faber & Faber, 1997

Screenplay. Useful for pondering the symbolism in quiet moments...

Journal articles

AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

Vol. 78. No 3 March 1997, pp.34-42

Highway to Hell, by Stephen Pizzello

Cinematographer Peter Deming recalls the ideas and techniques worked out by himself and Lynch (including the innovative "whacking" method) to achieve an unusual, noirish ambience. Essential technical reading.

METRO

No. 118 1999, pp.46-50

Lost in Darkness and Confusion: Lost Highway, Lacan and film noir, by Thomas Caldwell

A detailed personal reading of the film, in the light of the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. With reference to various films of the genre, Caldwell argues that Fred's "paranoic alienation" and fear of responsibility leads him to take on a noir persona, as he falls for the femme fatale...fascinating.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol. 7, No 9 September 1997, pp.48-9

Lost Highway, by Kim Newman

Full cast, credits and clear synopsis, which is particularly useful in the case of this film. Newman's review is open to several interpretations of storyline, and praises Lynch's suggestions of horror.

VARIETY

20th January, 1997, pp.44,48

Lost Highway, by Todd McCarthy

McCarthy sees the film as "a mysterious, ultra-Lynchian exercise in Designer Noir", and tackles the mood more than the narrative. A critical critique, nonetheless.

VIDEO WATCHDOG

No. 43, 1998, pp.26-35

Lost Highway, no author credited

Whilst detailing similarities of Lynch's characters in all his films, this article suggests that he has moved on with this film; a "dawning self-awareness". Also includes a detailed critique of video formats, and their effect on the finished film.

Newspaper/Press articles

SUNDAY TIMES(Section 2)

3rd/4th August 1997, pp.6-7

That Way, by Tom Shone

Shone explains why he feels the film "ends up mapping Lynch's downward career curve almost exactly". Detailing his view of the director's strengths, he also criticises what he sees as self-parody in Lynch's later work.

TIME OUT

13th July 1997, pp.27-8,30

Road to Hell, by Dominic Wells

Interview with a typically reticent David Lynch, which succeeds in prying from him some clues to the symbolism and meaning of the film. Wells also attempts to contextualise Lynch's films in relation to his life, photography and paintings, whilst throwing up some interesting theories on sex and psychopathy.

LA CONFIDENTIAL (1997)

Books

HELGELAND, Brian and **HANSON**, Curtis

L.A. Confidential

USA: Warner Brothers, 1997

The script of the film. Includes an introduction by James Ellroy, who praises the adaptation of his novel: "The film thrills me, and moves me, and troubles me", which, bearing in mind his original formal outline for the novel ran to 250 pages, is no mean task.

ELLROY, James

L.A. Confidential

UK: Arrow, 1997

The film tie-in edition of this novel. Ellroy tells stories which are complex and exciting in a style which pulls no punches. Thoroughly enjoyable reading for fans of this genre, and relevant to studying adaptation.

ELLROY, James

My Dark Places

UK: Arrow, 1997

Ellroy certainly has some... This autobiography of the author makes fascinating background reading, entertaining and informative, as he reveals elements of his life which provided rich material for his work.

Journal articles

AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

Vol.79. No.6. June 1998, p.103

True Luminaries, by Eric Rudolph

Rudolph talks to director of photography, Dante Spinotti, about practical techniques and equipment used. Spinotti explains his respect for stills photographer Robert Frank, and the aesthetic influence which Frank's work had in Spinotti's shooting of the film.

CINEASTE

Vol.23. No.3. April 1998, pp.41-3

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL, by Paul Arthur

An interesting, detailed article which puts the film into context with classic noir films, and also contemporary counterparts. For Arthur, the film revisits "...two intertwined but often overlooked branches of the noir family tree: the rogue cop saga and the exposé of municipal corruption", which he then investigates further.

CREATIVE SCREENWRITING

Vol.4. No.3. Autumn 1997, pp.33-41

An illustrated interview with co-writer Brian Helgeland, discussing the challenge of adapting Ellroy's novel for the screen.

REALTIME

No.23. February/March 1998, p.18

Prostituting Noir, by Patrick Crogan

In a fairly negative review, Crogan criticises what he sees as an attempt to create a virtual-noir film: "[it] prostitutes prostitution, including its own..." An intriguing argument.

SIGHT & SOUND

Vol.7. No.11. November 1997, pp.6-9

L.A.Lurid, by Amy Taubin

The illustrated interview with director Curtis Hanson is essential reading; as he talks openly at length about many aspects of, and inspirations for the piece. Of particular note is his placing of the film, with regard to the noir genre.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol.7.No.11.November 1997, pp.45-46

Review by John Wrathall

Newspaper/Press Articles

GUARDIAN (THE GUIDE)

25-31st October 1997, pp.1,5-8

Tales of the city, by John Patterson

The real-life scandal magazines are explored in this background to the film's "Hush Hush" rag. A completely different perspective on the novel and film, exploring their roots in social reality, whilst relishing in the "cavalcade of civic squalor that makes 'Chinatown' look like 'On the Town'".

OBSERVER

2nd November 1997, p.12

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL, by Philip French

A glowing review, with great attention to historical detail, character depth and interaction, enmeshed within a simple synopsis. Whilst not actively discussing neo-noir, French nonetheless provides some excellent critical material to back up this genre of the film.

SUNDAY TIMES (SECTION 2)

2nd November 1997, pp.4-6

Let's get lost in the dark, by Tom Shone

Shone has hardly a bad word to say about this film, but plenty of good ones, defending his enjoyment in detail. He finishes with the advice: "See it, tell a friend, and then keep quiet".

VILLAGE VOICE

23rd September 1997, p.85

Tales of two cities, by J Hoberman

A mixed review. Whilst admiring some of the casting, Hoberman describes the film as "actively superficial", and he criticises the underdevelopment of the racism angle. Hoberman looks at the film in terms of modern and past political conditions, and asserting, in contrast to Philip French's article, that this is a film "suffused with nostalgia for the pre-multicultural". Differently angled from some of the other reviews, it poses some interesting questions.

VIDEO AVAILABILITY (August 1999)

The titles were in all cases available. The titles, with classification are:

Blood Simple	(18)
Devil in a Blue Dress	(15)
Fargo	(18) <u>DVD only</u>
Killing Zoe	(18)
LA Confidential	(18)
Last Seduction	(18)
Lost Highway	(18)
Miller's Crossing	(18)
Se7en	(18)
Stormy Monday	(15)
Usual Suspects	(18) <u>DVD only</u>