Crime Films

Popularity of Crime Films

- consistent popularity: "the only kind of film that has never once been out of fashion since the dawn of the sound era" (T. Leitch)

Sources of Popularity of Crime Films

- fascination with crime

- question of violence

- strategies of character attachment

- experiential shifts in personal morality

- subgenres (cops, PIs, amateurs, gangsters, comic caper films, etc.)

Definitional Issues

- Are all movies that include crimes crime films?

- What features should be considered essential to labeling a film as a crime film?

- What paradoxes are activated by the crime film?

- How much can we allegorize a crime film into a social commentary?

Points of Analysis in Crime Films

- stance toward law enforcement

- explanations for the criminal's behavior

- typical settings, especially those marked as dangerous

- relation of crime to normal life

- types of criminals

- types of victims

- presence of "civilians"

Points of Analysis in Crime Films

- character of the "avenger"

- the avenger's relationship to society (liminality)

- motives of the criminal

- motives of the avenger

- fate of the criminal

Points of Analysis
in Crime Films

- genre / audience expectation

- violence /entertainment

- casting / **persona**

- vicarious experience (social contradictions; moral ambiguity)

- ideology (gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, class)

Historical Overview

- 1903: *The Great Train Robbery*

- 1906: *The History of the Kelly Gang*

- 1912: *Musketeers of Pig Alley*

- 1913: *Fantômas*

- 1930s: focus on the criminal; gangster films and prison films

- 1935 on: focus on teams of government agents

Historical Overview

- 1930s: Whodunnits and Great Detective series

- 1941: *The Maltese Falcon* and the hard-boiled detective series

- 1941: Hitchcock brings moral ambiguity to US

- 1944: Start of film noir in the US

- 1948: the police procedural and the cop hero

- 1950s: Freudian psychology applied to criminals

- 1967: generic revisions: CARA ratings

- 1972: *The Godfather*. Crime can pay.

- 1990s: the Coen brothers, Quentin Tarantino, and David Lynch redo the crime genre