



# Introduction

When readers encounter iconic private detective Philip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler's late novel *The Long Goodbye* (1953), he appears more dislocated and out of step with the rhythms and pace of his time than ever before. He now incongruously owns a television set and reads newspaper society columns when, he says, "I run out of things to dislike." In general, the new decade, with the premium it places on celebrity, high-tech appliances, machinery, and consumerism, is not a good fit for the author's tainted urban knight. An early scene includes a passing observation that will today sound prophetic, a divining of portents and signs. One night Marlowe finds his friend Terry Lennox drunk and almost passed out on Hollywood Boulevard, in front of shops already "fill[ing] up with overpriced Christmas junk." To avoid an arrest by hovering police officers, he helps his friend into the nearest parked taxi, all the while negotiating with the driver. The driver, with the aid of an advance tip, agrees to take Terry home, and to start the car he puts down his reading material, sticking "a magazine with a Martian on the cover behind his mirror."<sup>1</sup>

Insofar as it anticipates the perceived eclipse of the noir phenomenon in the late 1950s and early 1960s, does this fictional anecdote point to a death foretold? Or a greatly exaggerated report of a death? With that sardonic aside, Chandler—through the mediating and transmuting consciousness of Marlowe—remarks on changing tastes of the era. He discerns an altered sensibility, signaled by the incidental image of the

Martian, while recognizing that this may spell doom for his preferred genre of hard-boiled crime fiction. It would soon be supplanted on the wider landscape, according to Woody Haut, “by more immediate forms of popular literature [and film],” such as “spy fiction, science fiction, soft-core pornography.”<sup>2</sup> There is insight and likely also a degree of uncertainty in the detective’s apprehension of unfolding trends. Yet the response to the shifts from noir to “pulp” and from “pulp” to “pop,” as it has accumulated within criticism over recent decades, has not been so ambivalent, suggesting instead that no exaggeration—no paradoxically overstated death—is applicable to the case. Regardless of the axiomatic construction employed, the consensus has long held that when it comes to crime fiction or (to my purposes) the more specialized domain of American film noir of the late 1950s and the whole of the 1960s, some sort of postmortem is in order, some reflection on a state of decline. In the pages that follow, however, I reject calls for autopsy and challenge what has become the standard view of the matter by arguing that even if the cultural impact of noir diminished during these years, as it certainly did, dark crime cinema claims an identifiable continuation exceeding the usual chronologies. Except—such is the proverbial “catch” or “rub” but also the very subject of *Edges of Noir*—our understanding of what constitutes “film noir” demands a corresponding adjustment.

Opinion tends to solidify over time. It is nevertheless worth acknowledging that the decline-and-fall perspective was not always the dominant one. Indeed, in Raymond Durnat’s early historical overview of film noir, the 1970 essay “Paint It Black,” he went beyond a consideration of the classical period of film noir (typically dated 1940–58). In retrospect, Durnat seems to offer for twenty-first-century readers an alternative framework to that of another—more influential—account of sources that succeeded it, Paul Schrader’s “Notes on Film Noir” (1972). By contrast, Schrader’s last main “phase” of the first cycle, labeled “the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse,” ends in 1953.<sup>3</sup> According to Durnat’s contribution to what might be understood as rival genealogies among “archaeologists of the genre,”<sup>4</sup> film noir extends well into the 1960s, Hollywood’s “Jacobean period,” and those films of the later phase comprise a distinct category of crime cinema in which an emphasis on spectacle displaces more conventional modes of storytelling.<sup>5</sup> The intriguing if all-too-brief remark concludes the essay, establishing a horizon of expectation for future criticism by insisting on the worthiness of 1960s noir for further examination. However, regardless of the passing of more than fifty years and the otherwise abundant attention directed at film noir, this particular outlying development—periodization, sub-genre, or movement—remains largely unexplored.<sup>6</sup>

For a long time, the prevailing notion was that American film noir nearly vanished after 1958 until a subsequent “neo-noir” revival, said to materialize around 1973 or 1981 (depending on which chronology one consults). Alternatively, the more recent inclination has been to see intrigues surrounding urban corruption and detection as pervasive conceits with a “global currency,” in the words of Jennifer Fay and Justus Nieland, an unbroken cultural presence since the onset of World War II.<sup>7</sup> Still, the fatalistic world of film noir and the tumultuous though aspirant years of the 1960s are not often associated in people’s minds. Given that, from its beginning, the genre (or movement, or cycle) occupied a peripheral position within the Hollywood studio system, what I call the transitional “late noir” outgrowth of the 1960s is even more likely to be found on the conceptual edge of things—on the margins of the margin.

Critical neglect aside, late noir includes some of the most evocative films of the postwar decades. They are often formally disruptive and experimental. Films located under the heading of late noir draw their dynamic energies from a number of influences, among them exploitation cinema, international New Wave movements, and sensational Cold War B movies—with the latter category, the American B production, in particular constituting, for critic Andrew Sarris, a “haunting subject” on which “one can never say the last word.”<sup>8</sup> (Although not all—or most—examples of late noir are B or low-budget films.) This variety of precedents to late noir results in works of marked textual amalgamation and narrative complexity, which project fictional scenarios that draw on multiple plot threads, genre traditions, and aesthetics. Some of the most notable of these films—such as *The 3rd Voice* (1960), *Shock Corridor* (1963), *The Naked Kiss* (1964), *Brainstorm* (1965), *Mirage* (1965), and *Point Blank* (1967)—enact a double gesture, at once seeming to encourage and deflect analysis. It lends them close points of affinity with the strain of postwar fiction writing labeled “postmodernist metafiction,” which also involves a contested chronology when literary and cinematic histories are compared.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the individual chapters of the present study, in which selected films from the decade are given extended attention, acquire the contours of an interpretive exploration—a scrutiny of texts that are frequently enticing yet obscure, overloaded with and deprived of meaning. Late noir films exhibit, in short, an internal dynamic of engagement and resistance that runs parallel to what Linda Hutcheon perceives as distinctive of literary metafiction: “the metalinguistic contradiction [of] being inside and outside, complicitous and distanced, inscribing and contesting its own provisional formulations.”<sup>10</sup> Intersecting with the winding path of the journey pursued here, one of vexed exegesis, will be a number of the most prominent fixations and

dilemmas of the Cold War years, including those of psychopathology, confinement and surveillance, obscenity and transgression, nuclear annihilation, the destabilization of gender identities, and the rise of the bureaucratic corporate organization. Those contextual frames, forming the backdrop to the “body” of *Edges of Noir* and providing symptomatic manifestations of a range of collective anxieties, are in turn themselves bounded by an opening to the book devoted to significant precursors and by a conclusion devoted to an aptly culminating fragmentation.

With its psychedelics, vibrant fashions, and styles, the 1960s seems an unlikely decade, an *improbable scene*, in which to expand the dour sensibilities and chiaroscuro iconography of American film noir. According to film historians, the late 1950s marks the end of the first cycle of noir due to the popularization of television, the predominance of color cinematography (Technicolor and other chromatic technologies), and the ascendancy on the page as well as the screen of fictional genres replacing those of crime and detection: espionage, science fiction, road narratives, and tales of the counterculture. The late 1950s was a time, Paul Kerr argues, “when television and colour had established themselves, both economically and ideologically, as powerful lobbies within the [film] industry, and the double bill [the showcase for many B films] had virtually disappeared.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the undeniable convergence of these trend lines and despite assertions to the contrary, film noir persists beyond an announced terminal point, beyond a Gothic-sounding premature burial and conclusive exposition. Once late noir is recognized, permitted to surface fully, it may seem quite far-reaching. Besides the films reflected on at length in this study, there are many others deserving of contemplation, such as *Portrait in Black* (1960), *Blast of Silence* (1961), *Experiment in Terror* (1962), *Cape Fear* (1962), *Pressure Point* (1962), *Panic in the Year Zero!* (1962), *Johnny Cool* (1963), the Don Siegel–directed remake of *The Killers* (1964), *The Money Trap* (1965), *Mickey One* (1965), *Harper* (1966), *Warning Shot* (1966), *Pretty Poison* (1968), *Madigan* (1968), and *The Honeymoon Killers* (1970). Of course, as would be typical of the neo-noir cycle to follow, several late noir films will leave an impression on viewers resembling that of hybrid-genre offerings: the Ross Hunter–produced *Portrait in Black* is in the end closer to melodrama, *Experiment in Terror* and *Cape Fear* modernize horror conventions alongside the more familiar investigatory elements depicted. Even with those films that look to repeat established narrative patterns, the discernible differences within the repetition turn out to be most resonant. For example, *Harper*, adapted from a tough-minded crime novel by Ross Macdonald (*Moving Target* [1949], part of the author’s Lew Archer series of books),

will at the outset recall Howard Hawks's 1946 version of *The Big Sleep*, famously starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, to the extent of including an overt restaging of the older film's opening sequence (Marlowe's meeting with General Sternwood). However, what remains salient is how the plot of the color-saturated *Harper*, which follows the travails of the titular detective (played by Paul Newman), unfolds within a decidedly post-Chandleresque Los Angeles, one featuring a modish underworld populated not by shadowy femmes fatales, blackmailers, and small-time racketeers, but rather by "swingers," drug addicts, "hipsters," aging gigolos, frug dancers, religious cultists, new age gurus, sun worshippers, and assorted astrology enthusiasts. Moreover, the quest of the detective amounts, in a manner that will become increasingly familiar in subsequent sleuthing-centered dramas, to a futile exercise, with the fate of the missing person in question sealed from the start. Still other films that belong to a separate category, those that would likely not initially be classified as examples of film noir, exhibit unmistakable noir visuals and/or emotional registers—such as *The Hustler* (1961), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the early Francis Ford Coppola entry *Dementia 13* (1963), *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965), *Seconds* (1966), *Targets* (1968), and *Medium Cool* (1969).

More particularly, *Cape Fear* comes across as notable for following, in its engagement with what might have been deemed transgressive and lurid contents, directly from the previous transgression of *Psycho* (1960), which serves to provide a framing lexicon and visual rhetoric from which the later film draws so that its own segments and sequences acquire sufficient cultural legibility. In other words, although many aspects of *Cape Fear* will recall *Psycho*, down to the Bernard Herrmann musical score, deviations from the established pattern of action form something on the order of individual speech acts (against the backdrop of an encompassing "language"). Like Hitchcock's breakthrough film, *Cape Fear* combines a film-noir-style hermeneutic with a pulp-heavy Gothic-noir representation of homicidal psychopathy, while the violent ex-con Max Cady (Robert Mitchum) reveals, in unvarnished terms, his particular sexual fixation on the underage daughter of Sam Bowden (Gregory Peck), whose family he targets for harassment. Even if the ensuing (psychological and physical) struggle among principal characters displaces, to an extent, the initial pathological investment of violent energies, attempts at narrative resolution cannot efface the prior suggestion that the daughter is the true object of the scheme of terror to which Cady subjects the Bowden family.

Detective Harper's investigation in *Harper* forces him to adapt to distinct worlds that coexist in 1960s California: from the palatial estates

of the wealthy, to the underworld, to an industrial wasteland of derelict shipyards and abandoned oil tankers—the latter comprising signs of an industrial economic base fading into the past. The film repeatedly plays on the significant juxtaposition of façade and underlying reality, matters brought to the detective’s attention due to the contradictory legacy—a mix of capital acquisition and philanthropy—of Sampson, the kidnapped, then murdered mogul in question (he is said to have once donated nothing less than a mountain). A gathering for religious cultists, “the Temple of the Clouds” devoted to the worship of “the sun god,” acts as a cover for a cadre of criminals smuggling migrant labor into the country. A reputed “swingers’ bar,” the Piano, is likewise not exactly what it appears to be: once a sultry jazz number is performed and the polite applause dies down, the youthful patrons promptly return to twist and frug dancing. Moreover, the locale is later shown to be a front for a heroin ring. If the cultural currents on display are new to film noir, the practice of decoding outward appearances of establishments and institutions will feel familiar. What is distinctive, and foremost among what James Naremore designates the film’s “incidental virtues,” is the implicit critique contained in the depiction of Harper’s ineffectuality.<sup>12</sup> Despite uncovering connections within a wider conspiracy, he usually arrives too late to the scene either to rectify the situation or to avoid disaster. Sampson is killed regardless of his best efforts, and the family members he presumes to protect from harm, malevolent Mrs. Elaine Sampson (Lauren Bacall) and thrill-seeking daughter Miranda (Pamela Tiffin), greet the news of the deceased patriarch with a combination of indifference and glee. Other suspects with whom Harper hoped to negotiate, and for whom he retained an equivocal affection, only end up adding to the collection of corpses. The narrative concludes, as Grant Tracey rightly notes, on an image of “stasis,” a freeze-frame of exceptional irresolution.<sup>13</sup> During a long drive back from the oil tanker, the scene of the culminating crime, Harper’s close friend, the movie-referencing lawyer Albert Graves (Arthur Hill), admits that his searches for a “third man” and a “fourth man” were mere delaying tactics. He killed Sampson, and his reasons for doing so are not particularly compelling. But Albert saved Harper’s life on the previous day, and the detective finds himself unable to retaliate or punish his friend. He is stuck in a posture of inaction. “Oh hell!” are his dispirited final words.

Histories of American cinema had long maintained that film noir disappeared over the intervening decade until, in a revisionist turn, some scholars began to weigh the likelihood of the crime genre going “underground” or “lingering on the margins.”<sup>14</sup> Upon being extracted or exhumed and made visible, 1960s noir emerges as the crucial *transi-*

*tional phase* in the development of film noir between the classical and neo-noir cycles. The transition, as I will show, proves inseparable from a defining intermediacy. Film noir could be said to experience an ironic and paradoxical post-*Psycho* afterlife in the years of space-age gadgetry, happenings, and psychedelia; one that carries the form until the end of the decade. (Although some of the later color pictures, like *Point Blank* and *Targets*, might be more post-*Blow-Up* [1966] than post-*Psycho* in their overall conception.) The intermediate quality of late noir requires specification to indicate, for instance, how the impact—at least in the “pulp” variant (a fusion of noir and sensation) of exploitation cinema—is, on the one hand, more substantive than the “classical” hyperbolic treatments of supposed lurid topics like venereal disease and marijuana usage would portend. Yet, on the other hand, late noir appears more restrained and thus less explicitly transgressive than genres and sub-genres that fully materialize in the 1970s after the dismantling of the Production Code Administration—whether cinema verité-style noir, blaxploitation, slasher-horror, or hardcore pornography. There are certainly vivid instances of transgression and extremity, as I discuss at length with reference to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and to Samuel Fuller’s paired provocations *Shock Corridor* and *The Naked Kiss*. But due, more often than not, to censor-imposed restrictions and cultural taboos, storylines are generated that, while open to a confrontation with controversy, are mainly distinguished by their elusiveness. This amounts to some combination, depending on the particular film, of ambiguity, elliptical construction, meta-cinematic devices, and/or reliance on off-screen space and intertextual allusion.

A pervasive mood apparent in late noir tends to be much more ominous than what is usually ascertained in the films of the 1940s, and to derive from a depiction of unsavory aspects of crime scenarios. The corresponding films dramatize issues that remained largely outside the representational scope of classic noir: physical torture, fetishism, incest, racism, “brainwashing,” drug addiction, electroshock treatment, juvenile delinquency, (soft-core) pornography, “nymphomania,” pedophilia. In this sense the altered focus in the 1964 version of *The Killers* away from the murder victim and insurance investigator of director Robert Siodmak’s 1946 original and toward the violent exploits of the hit men characters strikes me as paradigmatic. Again, however, a comparison with neo-noir films of the 1970s, and with the cinema of “New Hollywood” generally, would likely lead to a different conclusion. Similarly indicative of “the transitional nature of the times,” for two historically oriented studies of exploitation cinema, Eric Schaefer’s *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* (1999) and Calum Waddell’s *The Style of Sleaze* (2018),

the 1960s assumes an in-between status as periodization.<sup>15</sup> The decade's temporal frame comes after the classical precedents (Schaefer's book covers the years 1919 to 1959) and before exemplary instantiations of cult cinema (Waddell's book covers the years 1959 to 1977, though most of the pivotal examples are from the 1970s). A symptomatic generic marker would be the sexploitation subgenre of the 1960s, which now looks like a compromise formation attaining a recognizable shape only prior to its far more explicit successors of the next decade. Waddell, in particular, insists on dividing exploitation films from B films as a general taxonomy, seeing the former as part of a distinct "stylistic movement in film history," one based on the promise of representing "something that is aesthetically or thematically unique from Hollywood."<sup>16</sup> Regardless, when casting a backward glance from the years in which late noir films were produced, it becomes clear in some cases, especially in the work of writer-director-producer Fuller, that the products of major as well as independent studios could at times absorb sensational contents of films from previous years.

Most of the films considered at length in *Edges of Noir* consciously or unconsciously diverge from the primary form of the 1940s–1950s cycle of film noir, the detective story. The other main generic basis for noir, the gangster film, largely vanishes in the years preceding the subsequent revival occasioned by the critical and commercial success of *The Godfather* (1972). Although crime narratives of the late noir period often involve some kind of investigation, the format or structure of linked episodes of interrogation tends to be absent, and the detective figure undergoes a marked decentering during this time. Despite those indicators, the detective genre does survive through the decade in a residual form, typically either as pop (e.g., *Tony Rome* [1967]) or as parody (e.g., *Marlowe* [1969]), or as some combination of the two (here, too, *Harper* seems the most relevant example).

It is worth adding, at the same time, that these aspects might strike twenty-first-century viewers as somewhat muted. The pop element of *Tony Rome*, a film featuring Frank Sinatra as the titular Miami-based private investigator, consists to a considerable extent in the leading figure's preference for snappy one-liners and double entendres, which place the fictive persona at some distance from the hard-boiled prototype. Of course the film could be read, more interestingly, against the grain as a chronicle of the detective's strained efforts to keep up with the younger generation's swinging lifestyles—a topical matter that would render the crimes in question secondary concerns. Even when the story turns rather violent in its second half, the emphasis remains on comical contrivances, invariably of a sexual nature, and the surrounding atmosphere around



Rome—against occasional southern-Gothic overtones—has more in common with that of the early James Bond films starring Sean Connery than the fictional universes conjured by Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Cornell Woolrich. A recurring setting besides Tony's docked boat, where he happens to reside, is the luxurious Fontainebleau Hotel on Miami Beach, which was incidentally also the site of the post-opening title sequence from the early Bond entry *Goldfinger* (1964). In any event, the combination of light mystery and bedroom farce proved marketable enough to generate a sequel the following year, *Lady in Cement* (1968), which further foregrounded similar un-noirish impulses. On the surface *Tony Rome* would appear to closely resemble *Harper* in involving a case that is focused on family dysfunction and that drags the detective into a modish demi-monde (specifically, for Tony, to strip joints, go-go clubs, and "junkie hangouts"). But the theme of social dislocation, essential to the overall impact of *Harper*, mainly fails to resonate with or attach to the scenes of subcultures and alternative lifestyles beyond the material they are deployed to provide for humorous juxtapositions.

The parodic aspects of *Marlowe*, a loose adaptation of Chandler's 1949 Hollywood-set novel *The Little Sister* updated to the late 1960s, are mainly reserved for the eccentric clients who pop in and out of the detective's shabby office. Elsewhere in the film, one discovers satirical jabs at the chasm separating an overtly anachronistic Philip Marlowe (James Garner) from representatives of the counterculture—a dimension made evident in an early scene when he visits a "hippie" hotel and tries, unsuccessfully, to communicate with the stoned proprietor. From an historically removed vantage point, though, the efforts at satire will come across as blunted. This will seem, as I see it, especially true when *Marlowe* is compared to the sharpened self-reflexive critique of conventions of genre filmmaking with which some of the early neo-noir films of the following decade are laced. These later pictures like *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Night Moves* (1975), which additionally had the paradoxical effect of reviving the detective genre by deconstructing it, break decisively from the pop-cultural mode by investing recurring themes with a pervasive sense of alienation and penetrating social commentary. *Marlowe* does not aspire, in developing its satirical strain, to a sufficient height to be measured by those attainments. And the denouement of the film reinforces the overriding frivolity by occurring during a striptease number at a burlesque club on Hollywood Boulevard, with Marlowe, in a most implausible byplay, interrogating the performer (Rita Moreno) from offstage while also inadvertently setting her up for murder. Yet despite such incongruities toward the beginning and end of the film and a general lackadaisical pacing, the film captures something vital from the

original novel in the portrayal of two rival sisters from Kansas (played by Sharon Farrell and Gayle Hunnicutt) finding themselves at odds with the Babylon of the film industry, and its various media-savvy appurtenances (agents, publicity experts, blackmailers). Woven, in other words, into this strange and erratic mélange is a significant thread concerning an embittered reflection on the “dream factories.” Not having mastered the art of intertextual subversion, *Marlowe* appears most effective when least committed to the aims of a comical send-up of the genre.

Darker clouds hang over another Sinatra vehicle of these years, *The Detective* (1968). Billed as “an adult look at a police detective,” the somber setups on which the story depends would have still seemed familiar to viewers from their prior appearance in television police dramas. And contrary to the likely intentions behind the use of more sexually explicit language pertaining to the details of crime scenes and the foregrounding of the theme of the abuse of police power, the *mise-en-scène*, points of dramatic conflict, and the wide spectrum of incompatible performance styles (from the naturalistic to the histrionic) give the film a distinctly outmoded look and feel for a product of 1968. The claim is driven home when it is recognized that powerful crime films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) were produced, respectively, very shortly before and shortly thereafter. In particular, throughout awkward insertions of vignettes in *The Detective* from a troubled marital situation, evidently meant to appear unflinchingly honest, it is difficult not to see the melodramatic inclinations and artifice that dwell just beneath the surface.

The guiding premise of chapter 1 is that film noir in its late phase emerges from specific transformations within the Hollywood cinema of the preceding decade. Accordingly, my objective is to trace twists and turns within a dynamic of exposure and consequent collective anxiety or panic, which appears subject to continual repetition. I ponder the overriding impulse, evident in selected B pictures from the 1950s and publicized in accompanying marketing campaigns, toward the revelation of secretive or otherwise concealed dimensions of American life. The heightened suspicion of the atomic age and the years of McCarthyism, the zeroing in on “the enemy within” the borders of the United States, prompts the employment of techniques for demystifying surface phenomena, as a number of storylines draw on the conventions of the “exposé” or “city confidential” film noir along with the then-ubiquitous “Red Scare” or “Red Menace” film. However, the attendant politics—to the degree that they may be determined—are frequently at odds with the anticommunist ideological investments of the latter subgenre. At the time the public in the United States was compelled to unscramble

a fundamentally contradictory message being conveyed by mass media and governmental institutions: to be on the lookout for threats that were said to be ubiquitous but, more often than not, also invisible—or at least difficult to detect. Consequently, innovative films such as *D.O.A.* (1950) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) complicate the processes of decoding, rendering them paradoxical, while their besieged protagonists encounter existential threats that only become clear after the world of outward appearances seems to collapse. For *D.O.A.*, allegorization informs its bizarre plot, involving the inexplicable fatal poisoning of the protagonist, by adding the specter of atomic destruction to the chaotic scenario. Whereas *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* resists allegory by dramatizing the irreducible enigmas disclosed through the efforts, on the part of two survivors of an alien takeover of a small town, to demystify outer surface appearances and thereby discover a dark underlying truth concerning the recent transformation of their lives.

Subsequently, the films addressed in chapter 2 that mark the transitional phase for late noir, the turn into the next decade, sketch various dimensions of 1960s cinema that will appear at least intermittently predominant. Against the usual positioning of the film, I read *Psycho* in terms of its citation and reimagining of exploitation and B films as contradictory means of concealing while revealing what would have been regarded as “shocking” and “obscene” contents. *The 3rd Voice* (1960), a distinctive if comparably obscure feature, stands out for the challenge it poses to viewers regarding the meaning of its cryptic and bizarre crime plot, one concentrated on mistaken identity. Whereas *Underworld U.S.A.* (1961) directly engages the city confidential film by subverting its premise of heroic opposition to the criminal syndicate and replacing procedural detail with meta-cinematic spectacle. Finally, the television series *The Twilight Zone* (1959–64) proposes in key episodes to move, at least conceptually, beyond the interpretive impasse of suspicion by—counterintuitively—confirming the paranoid subject’s apprehension of alterity and (often world-annihilating) dread.

At various points during the period, the authoritarian prospect of a surveillance encroaching on private life attains vivid realization in works of the popular imagination. Citing a number of critical and historical studies of Cold War scares and persecution nightmares, in particular those that follow from the experience of captivity during the Korean War to manifest a “brainwashing panic,” chapter 3 reflects on late noir films that represent widespread concerns about bureaucratic organizations bent on effacing dissent. Curiously, three B-noir thrillers that were produced in consecutive years by separate Hollywood studios share an identical plot device centering on an individual’s attempt to gain admit-

tance to a psychiatric hospital under false pretenses. Then, once inside the asylum, the respective protagonists discover that the line between the performance and actuality of madness is blurred. The representation of confinement establishes comparisons to the oppressive conditions to which prisoners of war returning to the United States testified, with electroshock (electroconvulsive) therapy appearing analogous to wartime techniques of mind control. *Shock Treatment* (1964) sets its tale of a stolen fortune against a clinical backdrop in which a sadism endemic to the institution involves employing hypnosis and visits to the dreaded “shock room” to discipline unruly inmates. The little-known *Brainstorm* (1965) pushes further, past the boundaries of convention and coherence, by lending the state apparatus of mental health, and the intrusive surveilling gaze associated with it, a spatial expansion—according to which even sites presumed to be external to the hospital premises turn out to be part of the same encompassing clinic. Fuller’s *Shock Corridor*, the most daring of these “entrapment narratives,” projects a damning portrait of the United States of the 1960s as a vast psych ward, with the subjects on display—potential witnesses to a murder—offering testimonies that attest to symptomatic constructions of past and continuing injustices resulting from war trauma, racism, and fears of nuclear annihilation. As the film rushes toward an implosive cataclysm, the hospital corridor in question becomes the set piece for an apprehension of the nation as a psychological case history.

The focus of chapter 4 is on *The Naked Kiss* (1964), the film by Samuel Fuller that followed *Shock Corridor*. Advertised as a “shock and shame story of a ‘night girl,’” the film completes through its drastic tonal shifts a kind of passage from a more “hard-boiled” noir sensibility to a more sensationalistic pulp sensibility. In this account of a former prostitute’s attempt to find social acceptance, dialogue and actions veer wildly from the cynical to the sentimental, while expressive modes alternate between minimalism and melodrama. Visually, the film encompasses antithetical propensities as well: a subdued televisual *film gris* (gray film) style is evident in some scenes along with an expressionistic or, at times, surrealist style in other scenes evocative of dreams and fairy tales. Moreover, to an established subgenre of classic film noir, the cautionary chronicle of small-town corruption, Fuller adds a pronounced element of perversion. What is disclosed behind the suburban façade of *The Naked Kiss* is not mere criminality but fundamental moral decay. My analysis of the film, more of an inquiry into how its productive dissonances yield a disruption of film form, then occurs at the dizzying intersection of (seemingly) incompatible determinants: obscenity, domesticity, and exposé-like documentation. Much, it turns out, of the film’s elaborate

narrative conceit revolves around deferring the utterance of the forbidden subject of pedophilia. Confounding as *The Naked Kiss* may appear, the belated recognition of the film offered in this chapter is justified given its bold experiment in overturning generic tropes and audience expectations.

*Mirage* (1965), the film examined in chapter 5, extends the tendency toward simultaneous inscribed citation and critique to the point of eliciting a running commentary on both earlier examples of film noir and a conformist society shaped by mass messaging and consumerism. The film's director, Edward Dmytryk, was previously at the forefront of popularizing the look and structure of 1940s noir, as demonstrated in his highly stylized earlier film *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). *Mirage*, a woefully underappreciated opus, marks the director's emergence from a fraught and contentious personal political history and return to film noir after an absence of more than a decade. However, the perspective he brings to the task of revisiting—and revising—his once preferred domain of crime cinema suggests deep ambivalence about the genre or cycle, especially in view of its relocation to the transformed media landscape of the 1960s. The scenario recounts the struggles of a victim of amnesia to recover memories of past events. Set in the illusory world of the New York advertising industry, *Mirage*, as the title denotes, conjures a dense atmosphere in which nothing is quite what it seems. Part film noir, part Hitchcockian suspense thriller, part Kafkaesque parable, and part espionage conundrum, the film concerns the daunting prospect of nuclear catastrophe and, in particular, the notion of New York City as anticipated site of detonation. Indeed, the crucial intertextual dialogue involves an effort to parallel and yet update (to the conditions of the Cold War) the immediate post–World War II imagination of disaster evident in the film noir *The Third Man* (1949), in which characters reflect on the recent devastation wrought by technologies of war.

A comparative reflection on two films pertaining directly to gender dynamics generates a reevaluation, in chapter 6, of a significant critical model for Cold War studies: “the containment thesis.” As proposed by Elaine Tyler May and Alan Nadel, in the respective studies *Homeward Bound* (1988) and *Containment Culture* (1995), the concept operates in concert with an analogy between the foreign policy of containment (of the rival military superpower) and the institutional mechanisms of social containment; between geopolitics and sexuality; public discourses of war and private discourses of the psyche and the body. Consistent, to a degree, with domestic ideologies of the era, Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) and Walter Grauman's largely forgotten *A Rage to Live* (1965) are premised on means of regulating “the problem,” as it was conceived, of

female sexuality and—what might have been perceived as—transgressive self-expression. Strangely, this social anxiety comes to be concentrated on the behavioral polarities of “frigidity” and “nymphomania.” Of course the relative absence of any mediating classification of action will appear farcical in retrospect. It is nevertheless curious to observe how *Marnie*, a thriller ostensibly devoted to surplus repression (a “sex mystery,” according to the film’s publicity), adopts a spectacular mode of representation, while *A Rage to Live*, a family drama ostensibly devoted to promiscuity, adopts a restrained and decorous mode. Idiosyncratic until the end, *Marnie* sets itself, moreover, the daunting challenge of finding a proper *figuration* for the presumed deviation the title character of Marnie manifests. But as her case history proves more ambiguous and, at the same time, critically irrecoverable, the attendant symbolism becomes more expansive. And, in Mark, an implausible character assuming multiple roles, Marnie encounters an employer, spouse, therapist, art curator, and criminologist.

The subsequent chapter is devoted to *Point Blank* (1967), a vibrant color film directed by John Boorman and heavily influenced by New Wave filmmaking techniques, that brings a number of tendencies from late noir to a state of fragmentary culmination. The strange paradox of this accelerated revenge narrative is that while the trajectory of Walker, the protagonist, centers on his battle against a massive corporate entity, “the organization,” comprised of anonymous functionaries, the various points of entry to company offices and hideaways are visually mediated by signs of 1960s psychedelia. *Point Blank* would seem to be situated between traditionalism and radicalism, big business and the counterculture, except that the multinational corporation (the latest manifestation of “the syndicate” of crime cinema), as it historically emerged in the 1960s, likewise played a major role in transforming the domestic—no less than the global—landscape. Walker’s single-minded pursuit of vengeance is extraordinarily effective, as he moves up the corporate ladder by eliminating a number of the organization’s representatives. However, despite his outward success as freelance assassin, Walker’s actions are also marked—and the film is correspondingly haunted—by a sense of ironic defeatism. Something always seems to elude the mercenary’s grasp and his ultimate objective remains unattainable. Stylistically, the sense of late-noir intermediacy assumes the form of an agon between the sharp-edged coldness of the featured urban skyscrapers of glass and steel and phantasmatic, dreamlike compositions and sequences.

The final pages of *Edges of Noir* are devoted to a review of a brief phase of film history. The late 1960s and early 1970s are usually regarded as

the years during which neo-noir emerges. But the corresponding films have not been examined for their specific contribution to the remaking of the genre. To correct the oversight, I indicate how early neo-noir films, in which the adoption of cinema verité filmmaking techniques plays a major role, determine (among several other developments) the reinvention of the detective film, the revival of the gangster film, and the creation of the new subgenre of the “1970s paranoid thriller.”

## Notes

1. Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 17, 9, 10.
2. Haut, *Pulp Culture*, 165.
3. Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” 12.
4. Kerr, “Out of What Past?,” 127.
5. Durgnat, “Paint It Black,” 51.
6. Besides the occasional appearance of an analysis of a particular film from the 1960s that may be classified as late noir, an exception to the rule of critical neglect is Wheeler Winston Dixon’s chapter on “The Flip Side of the 1960s,” though—differently from the present study—the discussion is divided between British and American films. (The thematic concerns follow directly from those of the chapter on the preceding decade, “1950s Death Trip.”) See Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 91–128. Whereas the chapter on “The Gumshoe Vanishes,” from Erik Dusserre’s study *America Is Elsewhere*, pertains not to the 1960s but to the 1970s, in particular to the political conspiracy films of the later decade.
7. Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, 1.
8. Sarris, “Beatitudes of B Pictures,” 51.
9. When one considers the texts cited as representative or seminal works of postmodernist metafiction, there seems to be an inexplicable—or, at the very least, heretofore unjustified—temporal lag between the literary and cinematic examples typically offered. While the literary examples of postmodernist metafiction tend to start from the 1960s, such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962), Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), the cinematic examples tend to be found in the 1980s: *Blade Runner* (1982), *Videodrome* (1982), and *Blue Velvet* (1986). However, I contend that the claims—for intertextuality, intermediality, embedded critique, self-parody, fragmented or elliptical constructions—frequently advanced to establish the metafictional qualities of these later films could easily be applied to selected films from the 1960s, as I discuss in the sections and chapters devoted to (among other films) *Shock Corridor* (1963), *Mirage* (1965), and *Point Blank* (1967).
10. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 21.
11. Kerr, “Out of What Past?,” 125.
12. Naremore, *More Than Night*, 190.

13. Grant Tracey, entry for “Harper,” in *The Film Noir Encyclopedia*, eds. Alain Silver et al., 395.
14. Cochran, *America Noir*, xiii; Hirsch, *Detours and Lost Highways*, 15.
15. Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, 127.
16. Waddell, *The Style of Sleaze*, 3, 16.