RESOLVING THE CITY

by

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B.A. (Honours), Oxford University, 1997

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Geography)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
AUGUST, 1999
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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
VANCOUVER, CANADA

Date August 16th, 1999
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the deeply layered genre of crime and detective fiction together with academic texts dealing, broadly, with urban geography. These apparently separated writings are read together and against one another in order to reveal answers to important questions of how the city is organized and arranged in its texts. In particular, this thesis analyzes certain structures in place in forms of textual representation, structures which have deep implications for the writing of the city. Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin stories appear alongside Michael Dibdin’s Aurelio Zen novels, and Christopher Prendergast’s study of Paris in the nineteenth century. Walter Mosley’s series of Los Angeles mysteries are discussed in the context of particularly prominent academic representations of L.A.

Reading such a diverse collection of texts together and against one another is a deliberate tactic, intended to draw out the similar structures in place in very different forms of writing. Those structures are the critical issue here, specifically with regard to the need for examinations of the city that consider not merely which components of the city appear in texts about the city, but also how the city appears in text. How the city appears in text has a good deal to do with the demands exercised by the medium of representation, and a key concern here is to draw out the need for doing away with an often unquestioned separation between places—cities—and their texts. Instead what is studied and ultimately proposed here is a focus on the intersection between subject and textual structure, and how that intersection actively produces the city.
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PREFACE

Part 1 is scheduled to appear in slightly amended form as an article in the journal *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, under the title "Finding Solutions to the City: The trouble with Los Angeles." At the time of writing, the paper has been accepted and submitted in revised form, but a final publication date has yet to be determined.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The list of individuals and organizations whose resources I have drawn from in writing this thesis is too lengthy to be given full consideration here, but particular thanks are due to my supervisor, Derek Gregory, for his support and encouragement; without his insight and vision, this thesis would likely have taken shape far less successfully. Richard Cavell was supremely generous with his time and wisdom, both in reading and commenting on earlier drafts and ideas, and through his inspiring graduate seminars. The University of British Columbia provided vital assistance in the form of a University Graduate Fellowship. I offer my final and most extensive thanks to my wife Wendy for her love and tireless care and patience.
INTRODUCTION: Writing the City

For even at its least realistic crime fiction reminds us of real things.
Ross Macdonald, *Self-Portrait: Ceaselessly Into the Past*

Walter Mosley, Edgar Allan Poe and Michael Dibdin might be thought of as sharing little in common, save their overlapping participation in genres typically grouped together—mystery, crime and detective fiction. And as it turns out, there really is significance to be found in such broad and general formal categories. The connection between crime fiction and urban geography, by contrast, is typically considered with respect to the ‘content’ of their respective texts. The correspondence, for example, between real and imagined urban grit. But as it turns out, the overlap between these separate forms of writing is more to do with questions of structure, the structures installed in texts dealing with, respectively, the real and imagined city.

What follows is a close reading of such broad categories as ‘genre,’ discussing how it is that the genre of crime fiction in general has a lot to reveal with regard to how cities and ‘The City’\(^1\) are written and arranged in text. In urban geography, for example. There are close readings of specific fictional texts: Mosley’s *Black Betty;*\(^2\) Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”\(^3\) and “The

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\(^1\) This distinction—which recurs many times below—can be understood thus: cities are, simply, particular cities; ‘The City’ is a less specific category, referring to any attempt to define the general workings of cities or urban geography.


Purloined Letter";⁴ Dibdin’s Dead Lagoon⁵ and Così Fan Tutti.⁶ And of specific academic texts: Michael Dear and Steven Flusty’s “Postmodern Urbanism”⁷ Edward Soja’s Postmodern Geographies⁸ and Thirdspace;⁹ Norman Klein’s The History of Forgetting;¹⁰ and Christopher Prendergast’s Paris and the nineteenth century.¹¹ The readings of Mosley, Klein, Dear and Flusty, and Soja, might be thought of as an analysis of a particular city, Los Angeles. But my intention here is not to attempt ‘a reading of a city,’ or of ‘The City’; I want to do more than merely present and support an interpretation of particular urban space. Instead what follows is a drawing of links between certain structures in place in text—structures exemplified in crime fiction—and the arrangement and articulation of the content of text(s).

The involvement of the city in such textual analyses relates to a peculiar susceptibility it seems to express towards certain textual structures. There is an uneasy synchronicity, for example, between all-encompassing treatments of the city and the power of text to contain, manage and arrange its subjects. The city can be carefully positioned by its representation in text, and text in turn can be

⁵ Michael Dibdin, Dead Lagoon: An Aurelio Zen mystery (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).
remarkably successful in allowing this positioning to disappear, concealed by its very effectiveness.

There are close connections here to a relatively new field of study broadly defined as 'writing the city.' This field, emerging mostly from nominally literary disciplines, considers texts and the cities they represent. Nothing new there, or at least not if 'writing the city' referred purely to explanations of how cities generate and influence textual representations. More central to 'writing the city,' though, is a rather less crude understanding of relationships between cities and 'their texts,' in which texts are acknowledged to reveal and comprise geographies of the city, and cities in turn are made up of overlapping, contradictory representations. Prendergast’s interpretation of Paris, for instance, demonstrates the inseparable connections between changes registered in French poetry and prose in the nineteenth century and how Paris was changing: one didn’t produce the other, but rather both were and are simultaneously producing Paris, which in turn can hardly be fixed as one definable arrangement. More recently, similar concerns have been presented in Julian Wolfreys’s Writing London, in which his explorations of Blake and Dickens seek to illustrate the textual production of particular imaginaries of London, so that Blake’s London, for example, is intimately bound up with London’s Blake.

However, many of the texts I discuss here can be read as insisting upon an essential separation between texts and the city, ironically related to implicit claims

that cities are not in any sense created by textual structures, but merely, conveniently, correspond to those structures. Impossible when such implicit claims are made is any acknowledgement of the ongoing and shifting involvement of all forms of representation in comprising the city. The arguments presented by Wolfreys and Prendergast, for example, recognize the coexistence of multiple accounts of the city, and seek to understand how those accounts are produced, rather than determine which is most true to the city 'in itself.'

Embedded in these discussions is a desire to find ways of expressing the multiplicity of urban space, the extent to which urban space consists of multiple, infinite tensions between indistinct representations and realities. My approach to this desire comes in two parts. The first—mostly contained in Part 1—examines how the convenience of the compatibility between certain textual structures and pre-existing theoretical articulations of the city demonstrates how easy it is to write the city if that writing takes place in advance of 'the real city.' The second—mostly in Part 2—looks more closely at the origins and qualities of the kinds of textual structures that very often precede the city, explaining how it is that writing in advance of the city is made to seem so seamless only by preventing the expression of other, less static points of view.

Part 1 presents a reading of the work of certain members of the 'L.A. School' of urban geographers alongside a reading of the detective fiction of Walter Mosley, his novel *Black Betty* and the character of Easy Rawlins in particular. What emerges most strongly from this reading is the rather unusual setting for Mosley's writing. The setting is Los Angeles, which, given the critical
role it has played in the history of the hard-boiled sub-genre, might seem to be exactly the reverse of an unusual setting for a detective or mystery story. But the appearance of L.A. is somewhat more complex in Mosley’s work, largely because his primary objective is less to do with making the streets of L.A. viscerally exciting than using those streets to facilitate the telling of a story more general than one specifically concerned with a crime, and separated in part from the hard-boiled surface of his plots.

I am, however, sympathetic to Mosley’s project—no matter how much it might precede and arrange L.A.—since I feel its end very much justifies the means. My reading of Mosley identifies complex strategy both in his use of the detective genre and L.A.; the visceral excitement which is certainly present has some rather more serious concerns lying beneath the surface. Systemic racism and intimately linked issues of crime and poverty are perhaps Mosley’s chief concerns, and his method of relaying them to a large audience has been to produce a detective, Easy Rawlins. Of course, as a detective, Easy does solve crimes, almost always finding out the identity of the killer, the thief, the blackmailer; but his movement toward these solutions is always a process of deeper exploration, in which the issues of crime, poverty and racism are intelligently played out. Almost always, too, the solving of the crime or crimes is not matched by resolution of the social problems revealed, and Easy’s work as a detective is exactly that: a means of subsistence and survival and not some sweeping moral quest for truth.
In the context of the ambiguity of Easy's detective role, the appearance of L.A. is interesting. It is at once merely the place where Easy lives and carries out his exciting-yet-mundane work, and it is a critical element in the crimes Easy solves in each of the series of six novels. And if, as I illustrate in Part 1, Mosley's work is less about the intricacies of L.A. poverty and racism than it is about American poverty and racism, it is possible to read L.A. not as the setting in which Mosley's underlying stories take place, but rather as the setting through which they take place. A problematical treatment if the integrity of L.A. is sought to be conserved, but one which is balanced somewhat by the intentions lying behind it.

My readings of more conventional urban geographies of L.A. tackle very different writings, all of which I understand to be linked by a search for solutions both to L.A. and to 'The City' more generally. Those solutions—in the work of Soja and Davis, for example—are very much a process of 'discovering' narratives or installing pre-existing theoretical architectures in the city, in this case L.A. Of course, Mosley's use of L.A. as a place through which to explore issues of racist oppression and poverty is a process of artificial discovery and installation, and my reasons for using his work are largely to do with the power it has to work through issues surrounding how territory is used in text. But there is something quite expected in a novelist's use of territory as subordinate to meaningful statements about the human condition; less so of the use some urban geographers and theorists make of the city.

It is entirely reasonable for the city to be used in academic texts as a place in which to make meaningful and transferable statements about the workings of
cities; description, after all, is unfortunately no longer considered to be the point of urban geography. But my readings of key texts about L.A. identify a use of the city that goes beyond making points in the city. For example, L.A. is represented by Soja as a series of points of touchdown, all linked by their ability to reveal the weight and worth of his understanding of spatiality. Soja’s most comprehensive explanation of the operations of urban space, *Thirdspace*, is a bringing together of modernism and postmodernism facilitated by a carefully managed selection of parts of L.A. Not only is L.A. compromised by Soja’s attempts at drawing its components together, its nature is discovered after the production of general urban relationships and in order to satisfy the demands of those relationships.

My concern here is more one of textual structures than politics or ideology. It is not the case that I necessarily disagree with the post-Fordist economic analysis that drives much of Soja’s work, but rather I think it vital that urban geography be concerned with how cities appear in text as least as much as with why they appear. Indeed, I study representations of L.A. to which I am deeply sympathetic. Davis’s *City of Quartz*, for instance, revolutionized my understanding of L.A. through its sustained challenge to a prevalent figuring of the city as, alternately, a vapidly empty space, a model for economic progress and an indicator of a soon-to-be-everywhere *Blade Runner*-style urbanism. But I discuss *City of Quartz* here mostly with regard to how its narrative drive is achieved by opposing—among others—right-wing narratives of L.A. with nothing more radical than a singular alternative narrative, in which L.A. is permitted little mobility outside of Davis’s articulation of those parts of the city he chooses to represent.
What seems most often to partner immobilizing treatments of the city is a sense that cities consist of that which can be represented in text—a logical accompaniment to texts that attempt all-encompassing articulations of the city. In turn, making the presence of the city in text fundamentally unquestioned is a direct function of assuming an essential separation between representations and the subject represented—in this case texts and their cities. Doubly ironic when the texts implying such a separation very often introduce theories and corresponding textual structures that actively produce and arrange the city. At the very least, contradictions such as these mean that the relationships between textual structures and cities merit thorough consideration.

I don’t mean to suggest that text is in itself a flawed medium for representing the city, but rather that the medium has a good deal more influence than its appearance often suggests in the context of writing the city. And similarly, through Klein’s The History of Forgetting I do offer an alternative method of reading L.A. to those offered by Davis and Soja. My analysis of Klein is that his book is a remarkably open text that nevertheless manages to say very significant things about L.A. Those very significant things including the multiplicity of L.A.’s existence, the extent to which its treatment as a place in which to locate dramatic and sweeping narratives erases other less visible stories, and most importantly of all, the city’s resolute refusal to correspond to or remain within the bounds of a containing textual structure.

Part 2 focuses on the Poe tales and Dibdin’s novels, as well as Prendergast’s Paris, and the central issue is the formal nature of textual structures.
As with Part 1, allegorical use of texts is a critical component, and the artificial, enclosing, constraining nature of Poe’s Dupin stories is deliberately set against the ambiguities of the investigations of Dibdin’s Italian detective, Aurelio Zen. The crimes Dupin brilliantly solves begin as incomprehensible, impossible, unspeakably brutal acts—in the case of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”—and as acts of extreme lateral cunning and concealment—in “The Purloined Letter.” But Dupin’s solutions are very much to do with his ‘ownership’ of the territories of his investigations, from Poe’s detached rendering of nineteenth-century Paris to the nature and identity of the criminals. Indeed, the solutions to the crimes are first and foremost to do with revealing the intellectual prowess of their detective, to the extent that it is possible to read the crimes and their setting as being arranged or even caused by Dupin. In a sense, the solutions come before the crime, and the point of reading Dupin here is to explain the structures in place in text that perform precisely that operation: strategically arranging the content of the text, the story, and making that arrangement smooth and discreet so that the movement from beginning to end appears as an entirely natural process of discovery.

The implications of Dupin’s pre-existing solutions are largely that the specific detail of the stories is determined by design and aesthetic. That is, the specific nature of the events and scenes represented has no intrinsic role in the outcome; rather those events and scenes are manipulated, shaped and ordered according to the demands of the solution, so that the solution can be convincing and exciting. The detail thus represents a series of necessary delays, quite literally a process of filling time, which means careful attention must be paid to making
the detail fulfil that role convincingly, even though it is fundamentally not convincing. That is to say, the function the detail appears to perform—allowing the solution to the crime to be discovered—cannot be the function it does perform if the solution has already been determined. Which in turn explains why the design of the detail is enormously important, and also rather compromised.

The allegory here lies in the extent to which Poe’s texts present a quite conventional treatment of ‘story’ in text, in the sense that the structures Poe imposes on Dupin’s stories speak more generally to the production of other kinds of solutions in text. Conclusions about the city, for example, that design ‘how it works’ along the lines of the closure required by a particular, pre-existing narrative. What is required in order to maintain such closure is a rather oppressive control of the text, inhibiting or removing the ability of other narratives to have any degree of impact—denying the reality of plural representations. Other interpretations of the content of the text are hardly very powerful if all that is made available is an aesthetic treatment of that content, and if the real direction of the text has been established even before its beginning.

The investigations of Dibdin’s policeman, Aurelio Zen, by contrast, present a character at the ‘other end’ of the kinds of oppressive control enacted by Dupin. The setting for Zen, the ‘New Italy’ of the late 1980s and the 1990s, is a good deal more complex than Poe’s vague Paris, consisting of overlapping networks of crime and institutionalized corruption. Zen’s battles are in turn quite different from Dupin’s intellectual struggles, primarily because correct and singular solutions are quite alien to the workings of Dibdin’s New Italy. The New Italy for Dibdin is a
bizarre hybrid of ancient networks of crime and corruption and a more recent, still evolving rhetoric of change and progress, in which those networks have allegedly become a thing of the past. What makes things difficult for those tasked with solving crimes—and particularly for Zen since he’s paradoxically carved an outsider’s role for himself within the establishment—is that solutions must satisfy both the corruption and the rhetoric. The Zen mysteries are correspondingly a sometimes disturbing mix of darkness and light: on the one hand there are moments of near farce, as Zen subverts and takes advantage of the gaps and loopholes created by the New Italy’s ill-fitting structures; and on the other there is a perpetual undercurrent of uncertainty deriving from those same gaps and loopholes, which together make truth and justice things to be arranged and deployed after the fact. The New Italy is difficult to manage precisely because, given sufficient access to power and authority, solutions are relatively easy to come by.

Dibdin’s novels are given most significance here by his writing of Zen as a rather ambiguous hero. Zen is cynical and jaded enough to recognize the often futile nature of his work, and the occasions on which he is rewarded with promotions, money or public acclaim are more often than not the accidental products of quite different intentions. Nevertheless, Zen is possessed of just enough integrity to attempt to achieve things in spite of the limitations identified by his cynicism—at the very least he cares to understand how things work and why they should be different. So Zen is by no means entirely resigned to a passive role in the New Italy, and his actions to shape some direction are fascinating in this
context because of the intimate relationship they have with the city. Venice and Naples are, respectively, the settings for *Dead Lagoon* and *Così Fan Tutti*, and Zen's attempts to shape events and solve mysteries are linked to his struggles to interpret these perplexing cities.

And unlike Poe's Paris, which reveals its secrets according to Dupin's intellectual machinations, Venice and Naples remain for Zen perpetually on the verge of interpretation and explanation. Just as Zen thinks he knows how these cities work, they've moved on to the next thing, rendering his intellectual versions of urban space always slightly out of date. Of course, Paris remains for Dupin entirely within the bounds of his intellect precisely because of its writing 'after the fact,' and much of the significance of Dibdin's novels relates to their skilful illustration of exactly how such static cities are always rather artificial products. Indeed, Aurelio Zen's investigations speak most forcefully to the issue of 'other points of view'—the subtitle of Part 2—in the sense that Zen is at once expressing the difficulties of interpreting spaces defined in good part by a centralized control of rhetoric and expression, using the gaps and inconsistencies of such centralized control to his own advantage, and attempting to fix and hold in place a space of his own making. Zen's Italian cities might very well be an urban mosaic of inconsistencies and incomplete solutions, but it is perhaps most useful to understand their difficulties in terms of the incompatibility between cities and solutions.

The incompatibility between cities and solutions is, finally, the primary issue dealt with in Part 2, and it is the theme that unites all of my arguments and
material here. To this end, my opening claim to a focus on genre is intentionally a little misleading; crime, detective and mystery fiction, or any of their sub-genres are really not the point so much as the conventions of a genre. That is to say, the conventions of crime, detective and mystery fiction have a lot to do with producing complete textual structures centred on the telling of a particular kind of story—a story of a crime or mystery. My concern, though, is with the relationship between the telling of the story of a particular crime or mystery and the conventions of genre, and the inevitable tensions that arise. It is not my intention to propose urban geography as a genre—I hope my analysis is more sophisticated than that—but instead to use the fictions discussed here and the formal characteristics of their genre as a means of commenting on the general complexities of what is represented in text, and more specifically the need to consider writing the city as an act fraught with necessary contradictions.
PART 1: The Trouble With Los Angeles

Introduction

This section was provoked in part by Michael Dear and Steven Flusty’s proposal for a model to map the postmodern city, although it is less a response to Dear and Flusty than an intervention in geographies of Los Angeles, in which I call for a more inclusive form of urban geography, one in which individual imaginaries of urban space are at least as important as grand theoretical architectures. Various geographies of L.A. represent the primary vehicle for both Dear and Flusty’s and my own arguments, but my intention is not to propose an alternative version of ‘The City,’ or even that city. Instead my concern is with the importance of understanding the textual strategies that are deployed in very different representations of L.A., transforming it into a place in which to locate and articulate pre-existing stories.

Though I consider some of the most well-known academic representations of L.A. (texts from Edward Soja and Mike Davis, as well as Dear and Flusty’s), at least as much of my analysis is devoted to the writings of Walter Mosley, and his novel Black Betty in particular. Much of what follows discusses, simply, the appearance of L.A. in Mosley’s novels. I read this author’s use of the city as a carefully managed and arranged space that facilitates the telling of a story of racist oppression from the 1940s to the 1960s that is more one of America than any particular city. In Mosley’s fictions L.A. is intimately bound up with the genre
of detective fiction, in the sense that his detective, Easy Rawlins, moves through the city to solve various crimes, all the while exploring and revealing resolutely historical and serious issues. It is highly significant, for reasons I outline and develop below, that many elements of the Rawlins novels that are typical of 'hard-boiled' crime fiction—the setting, the corruption, the crime that leaves no character untainted—are rendered as little more than a part of the protagonist's daily tactics for survival, a means to a somewhat less exciting end.

My reasons for reading detective fiction alongside academic writing are mostly to do with demonstrating similarities in the treatment of L.A. in these ostensibly very different forms, both of which render L.A. uniquely available as a setting for exciting stories. A good deal of the 'factual' writing of L.A., within and outside of the L.A. School, seems to produce its conclusions about L.A. via a highly orchestrated series of points of touchdown in the city, all of which can be seen to be fundamentally about finding a way to tell a pre-existing story. What gets lost in such projects is any sense that cities are made up of coexistent, ever-changing, always escaping geographies, none of which can be entirely captured by cleverness in narrative design or textual strategy. So while Dear and Flusty’s paper argues for a new spatial vocabulary to map out and contain the escaping city, I think it rather more productive to focus on ways of writing the city that don’t require it to be immobilized in text.

By way of an alternative to those readings of L.A. and of 'The City' that arrange their subject in advance, I offer a reading of the geographies of L.A.

1 Dear and Flusty, “Postmodern Urbanism.”
found in Norman Klein's *The History of Forgetting*, which proposes a speculative, semi-fictional version of the city made up precisely of individual imaginaries of space. For Klein, sweeping treatments of the city, treatments which simply install theoretical structures in the city, enact a process of erasure in their failure to consider those parts of the city not available for such forms of expression, a process that rubs out the lives of inhabitants and obscures their spaces. I don't mean to propose Klein's book as the solution to the difficulties I have with many other readings of L.A.; rather, the subtle irony of his text, the playfulness of its speculations, seems to me to be a singularly useful means of countering those difficulties. Nor do I mean to suggest fiction to be, somehow, more real than fact when it comes to L.A.; rather, looking at how certain fictional versions of L.A. are produced aids in developing an understanding of the origins and methodology behind its more formal existence.

L.A., clearly, is an object of fascination in geography and many other places, but rarely in and of itself. That is to say, L.A. has become in some quarters a suitably exciting, dramatic, richly diversified place for the playing out of narratives. A great place for a detective story—as its long history in that genre demonstrates—but also a great place in which to bring more serious issues into view. Of course, it is hardly surprising that serious academic texts have an agenda when it comes to writing the city. There are, clearly, points to be made and explored by studying the city, and one must inevitably be selective in choosing which parts to include. However, Part 1 is very much about identifying things as having gone a little too far when it comes to L.A., in the sense that perceptions of
its 'unique' incomprehensibility appear to have encouraged its use as a place in which anything is possible. Including, perhaps, any solution to the difficulties of 'The City.'

What is at issue here has little to do with the specific merits of the politics motivating various representations of L.A. Quite the opposite, in fact, since my arguments seek to demonstrate some of the problematical aspects of treating the analysis of 'L.A.' in particular as a political project with the power to reveal the worth of a specific understanding of the city in general. Consequently, my discussions should not be seen as a comparative reading of the ideological merits of the academic writers I cite. Rather, my focus is a selection of particularly prominent—and politically very different—examples of writing which use L.A. to slide back and forth between its particular characteristics and 'The City' more generally. Arguably, all urban writing necessarily enacts such movements, but nevertheless I hope it is not naïve to seek versions of L.A. in which the city is more than an elucidating instrument of text.

In presenting what follows, I doubtless open myself to criticism for my own strategic use of selections from, for example, the work of the diverse L.A. school. But my agenda has little to do with critiquing this work in and of itself. Indeed, I have an underlying and more general story to tell, the central theme of which is that cities really don't require solutions so much as they simply contain interesting and deeply important stories. Following Klein, too, many such stories are quite simply incompatible with 'solutions' to the city, being more to do with the
necessary inconsistencies of cities made up of ongoing, infinite and individual realities.

I begin with a brief discussion of Dear and Flusty’s argument, setting out their call for the need for a radically new means of modeling the city’s ever more complex relationships. I develop my disagreements with their reasoning via the discussion of Mosley, his novel *Black Betty* in particular, examining his fiction as an intriguing allegory for the ‘solving’ of L.A. elsewhere. Analysis of Soja’s *Thirdspace* features prominently, too, and I position this work as representative of a pervasive treatment of L.A. as a place in which to articulate sweeping spatial theories. I also discuss Davis’s *City of Quartz*, which seems to me to render L.A., coincidentally, as an empirically validated hard-boiled narrative, connected very closely to the streets of the city but in part because of the demands of Davis’s politics reluctant to allow L.A. to escape its pages. I employ these three texts as significant contributions to urban geographies of L.A., different from each other and from Dear and Flusty, yet in several respects similar in the mode of their search for answers to the confusions L.A. seems to present. Finally, I read *The History of Forgetting* as a possible solution to the search for solutions, since Klein seems to me to succeed in suggesting how it is possible to convey an intricate sense of L.A. without fixing the city in place. Or leaving it behind.

Solving the Place

“Postmodern Urbanism,” Michael Dear and Steven Flusty’s recent textual excursion to Los Angeles, discovers the city (and ‘The City’) of the late twentieth-
century to be so impossible to write that a radical change is called for. L.A. it seems is the new model of urban form, produced by ‘keno capitalism,’ a system inherently connected to the vagaries of flexible accumulation. Keno capitalism is responsible for the visually disparate nature of ‘the’ postmodern city, in which development proceeds on the basis of no easily detectable logic. Under this new hegemony, the city assumes a fluid morphology, which is largely articulated in favor of a new class of postmodern citizen, the ‘cybergeoisie,’ who provide “presently unautomatable command-and-control functions.”

Essentially, everybody else (the ‘protosurps’) can rot in the ‘carceral city’ of the underclass, except when they are required to provide just-in-time services for their more fortunate neighbors in “the ‘big house’ of the global latifundia,” a space that simultaneously transcends physical place, and yet leaves complex, traceable webs in the intertwining of ‘megapoles’ in the ‘Citistät’:

Citistät, the collective world city, has emerged from competing urban webs of colonial and postcolonial eras to become a geographically diffuse hub of an omnipresent periphery, drawing labor and materials from readily substitutable locations throughout that periphery. Citistät is both geographically corporeal, in the sense that urban places exist, and yet ageographically ethereal in the sense that communication systems create a virtual space, permitting coordination across physical space. Both realms reinforce each another while (re)producing the new world bipolar disorder.

Citistät synthesizes for Dear and Flusty the postmodern city, its characteristics including, superficially at least, an absolute dissimilarity to the Chicago School’s models of concentric urban zones. Order in the urban form is located in ‘virtual

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2 Ibid., p. 62.
3 Ibid., p. 62.
4 Ibid., p. 63.
space,' and this virtual space allows for visual disorder in the physical space of the city. Los Angeles is figured as the perfect place in which to begin this new theory of a form, and Dear and Flusty collect their understanding of the thoughts of many recent writers on L.A. as representative of the distinct school of thought they call 'postmodern urbanism.'

At the heart of Dear and Flusty's paper is a desire to explain the city, to make the connections clear. Hardly a new direction for urban geography, except that it is apparently the case that, almost without anybody noticing, 'The City' has made the transition from modernism to postmodernism, and consequently it is in need of a model for its newly incoherent connections. Something equivalent in meaning, influence and stature to, say, the concentric rings of the Chicago School. "General theories of urban structure are a scarce commodity," Dear and Flusty claim, and they continue, providing answers in the form of diagrammatical representations of the endless relationships between globalization of economy and culture and articulations of urban space. Los Angeles, quite neatly, is seen to fit with these relationships. What is tentatively sought by Dear and Flusty in their conclusion is a global push for understanding the phenomenon of postmodern urbanism, so that all cities might eventually be understood along the lines of the structures of keno capitalism they propose in L.A. My intervention, however, is a brief explanation as to exactly why I find it entirely reassuring that general theories of urban structure—at least of the sort proposed by Dear and Flusty—are in short supply.
Dear and Flusty are present here not because I read their essay as a representative model for recent writing on L.A. or even of the increasingly disparate L.A. School. Instead their model for the postmodern city serves as an introduction to a discussion of the importance of considering what happens to any city when it is used not simply to produce more widely applicable conclusions, but solutions. A solution to the city is much more than an attempt to account for the urban geography of a particular place. Instead I understand a solution to the city as working, somehow, in reverse, so that urban geography is used to account for an already existing Geography, and so that the city subject becomes, if not beside, then at the very least before the point.

Black Betty and the Place of Fiction

Walter Mosley might convincingly be advanced as an author arguing for general theories of urban structure, in the sense that his novels are woven together by narratives persistently wide in their scope. For his best-known character, the African-American detective Easy Rawlins, Los Angeles consists primarily of racism and poverty, and of communities in uneasy alliance, standing up to resist such forms of oppression. There have, correspondingly, been a number of readings of Mosley's work which focus on his novels as primarily to do with themes of resistance. Such readings are supported somewhat by Easy's continually

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5 Ibid., p. 51.
expressed anger at his situation—he is often poor, never financially secure, always suspected of something, frequently subjected to physical and verbal assault from whites on both sides of the law. These readings are also supported by Mosley’s own position: an African-American writer in a genre that has—with a few notable exceptions—remained largely white.

However, my understanding of the Rawlins novels is that their critical underlying theme is rather more sophisticated than the appropriation of an historically white genre by an African-American character. It is more subtle, too, than simply Mosley’s setting of much of the novels’ content in African-American neighborhoods and communities in Los Angeles. L.A. as a setting for the stories is not so much subverted by means of Mosley’s use of the city as a place in which they take place as it is by his use of L.A. as the place through which they take place. What I mean by this distinction is that L.A. is employed in part by Mosley as a means of marking out and advancing quite general stories of racism and oppression, as well as providing suitable context for the hard-boiled components of his plots. But there is a separation between the narrative of Easy’s function as the hard-boiled detective, given context by the L.A. setting, and the narrative of Easy’s coexistent living and working through of less necessarily placed issues of social injustice. Black Betty, the fourth novel in what is now a series of six Easy Rawlins mysteries, presents one of the series’s more layered and complex treatments of the relationships between detective fiction, L.A., history and social injustice, as well as a fascinating example of Mosley’s strategic take on the city.
Toward the end of Black Betty, detective Ezekiel ‘Easy’ Rawlins buries the corpse of Marlon Eady, the brother of Elizabeth Eady (the eponymous ‘Black Betty’ whom Easy is hired to find). The burial does not take place in the cemetery or even in some forgotten field; instead Marlon is interred in the basement of the home of Easy’s old friend Odell. Marlon’s death is not from natural causes but from a vicious beating at the hands of the police, and there is a very strong sense that this event, though it is by no means commonplace in Easy’s life, comes to him as no surprise. In fact, one of the clearest sentiments found in all of the Rawlins mysteries is that the life Easy leads is one in which official history plays no part at all, and in which the particularities of every poor African-American have, so to speak, been buried in the basement. Of course, erasing history is hardly an easy process:

I went downstairs and sledgehammered out a piece of the concrete floor in the basement. That took the better part of three hours; the whole time Marlon winked at me from his icy bed.

The work took longer than it should have because I couldn’t use my left arm at all. It took almost an hour to develop my one-handed sledgehammer swing, cracking again and again against the hard floor. It felt right. Ten blows and then a sliver of rock breaks out. Then a long crack to work at.

After three hours I had cleared away a piece of ground that was four feet by three. The clay soil was almost as hard as the concrete. The spade nor Odell’s broad-tined pitchfork could dig into it.7

It is not incidental that a member of L.A.’s African-American underclass is buried in the basement of a nondescript, run-down house, a dark secret hidden away by the mundane anonymity of its location. This act represents merely an extreme manifestation of Easy’s movement through a city of his own making, a Los
Angeles consisting of secret transgressions of official narratives of the city. It is interesting, too, that locations in Black Betty are often vaguely defined or deliberately obscured: "‘Take Etta’s car and come over to...’ I gave him Mofass’s address."\(^8\)

The cases Easy is tasked with solving always have an outcome, a denouement in the most traditional sense of the detective fiction genre. But there is also an absence of resolution in the many other narratives that inevitably accompany Easy’s investigations. And it is this coexistence of resolution and lack of resolution on which I wish to focus my reading of Black Betty, particularly with regard to the extent to which Mosley’s hard-boiled narratives can be interpreted very much as a superficial and highly visible element located in the mean streets of Los Angeles. Black Betty represents here an allegory for how it is that solving the city is often very much to do with sustaining and facilitating the momentum of a narrative whose vision of urban space is fundamentally rather narrow. Particularly since what is left unsolved in Black Betty and the other novels in the series is perhaps a much larger part of Easy’s life.

Easy is hired in Black Betty via a sleazy intermediary named Saul Lynx to track down Elizabeth Eady (Betty) who has disappeared from the Beverly Hills mansion of her recently deceased employer, Albert Cain. Various cruel twists trap Easy in an ever more complex web of conspiracy and corruption, which is mostly to do with an attempt on the part of Cain’s adopted son, Arthur Hawkes, and

\(^7\) Mosley, Black Betty, p. 269.  
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 145.
various other plotters, to prevent Betty from inheriting her dead employer's fortune. Easy has few of these details when he begins his investigations, but he eventually discovers that Lynx is merely a go-between acting on behalf of the Cain family lawyer, Calvin Hodge, whom Easy suspects—but never proves—is the driving force behind the plan to redirect Cain's fortune by murdering Betty. As with the other Rawlins mysteries, Black Betty is very much about people in positions of power and authority and their involvement in the most sordid and brutal of crimes.

Commander Styles, a corrupt and sadistic police officer, is responsible for carrying out most of the violence which facilitates Hawkes and Hodge's plot, and he goes to jail for his part in aiding the conspiracy to cover up the murder of Cain, and for murdering one of the (African-American) participants, Terry Tyler. But for Easy this location of blame is hardly sufficient. It is instead merely surface detail to a more persistent and long-term narrative. Styles is the "workingman,"

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the blind tool of Hodge and Hawkes, and as such he is entirely disposable. Arthur Hawkes (the adopted son of Cain) has his part in the murder of Cain attributed to manipulation by (black) Marlon Eady and (poor) Ronald Hawkes (Arthur's real father, a known criminal eager to get his hands on some of his son's money). Arthur has the wealth of the Cain family behind him, not to mention the lawyers this wealth can buy, and consequently his guilt is less important than the compelling need for him to be innocent: "The prosecution didn't fuss much."10

9 Ibid., p. 342.
10 Ibid., p. 343.
Hodge emerges entirely unscathed. Finally, Betty, raped many times by Albert Cain (producing two children and enough guilt in Cain to induce him to make her family his beneficiaries), is constructed as “a whore who had beguiled Albert Cain,” and the will is broken. Easy has all of the real facts of the case but these facts are crushed by the more persuasive opposition of black and white, rich and poor—a common pattern in the Rawlins mysteries.

For the official record of L.A.—the record controlled by the power brokers of the white establishment—Black Betty represents merely a temporary delay in the natural order of things. Easy’s investigation begins along the lines set out by the real criminals, and he himself is constructed as a mere disposable tool, required by Hodge et al to locate Betty in what are understood to be impenetrable African-American communities. But it doesn’t take Easy long to work out exactly how disposable he is, particularly as he moves closer to discovering the full extent of the corruption surrounding Albert Cain’s death and Betty’s disappearance. Soon Easy knows too much and becomes himself a target of Styles, who it seems is well aware of just how simple it can be for a black man to die in police custody, no questions asked. Easy’s search for Betty becomes a desperate scramble for evidence against the plotters, his only chance to save his own life. And his quest is not so much for pure truth as it is a strategy to deal with the facts of his everyday life, facts which include deaths in police custody, wrongful imprisonment, murders of black citizens that barely seem to merit the slightest pretense of official investigation. It is hardly incidental, too, that the upsetting of Hodge and Cain’s

11 Ibid., p. 343.
plan makes little difference to the eventual outcome (Cain inherits the money; Hodge, presumably, gets his cut). Easy’s daily struggles are thus very much to do with fighting against such deeply embedded racism, as well as the associated power of its narrative; and his successes are defined more by his survival than the moral victories typically associated with crime and detective fiction.

It is significant, I think, that the uncovering of the real facts of the case in *Black Betty* barely impacts on a larger narrative on the basis of which much of Easy’s version of L.A. is constructed. But parallel to Easy’s search for Betty runs another, less “official” side of his city, the side that consists of Easy’s attempts to make a life which is about more than mere survival. These attempts are predicated on an understanding of L.A. not simply as a place of racism and poverty, but also one driven by money. Easy’s ongoing attempt to empower himself through financial success is a persistent theme in each of the novels, beginning with *Devil in a Blue Dress* in which losing his relatively respectable job at an aircraft factory—because of his refusal to accept the insults of his racist boss—means Easy must look for other employment or risk the repossession of his newly acquired home. His career as a private detective emerges as a direct result of this financial need, and Easy only ever takes such work as a short-term solution to similarly dire constraints. In the context of his struggle to establish himself, Easy’s search for Betty—as well as the investigations in at least four of the other five novels in the series—is simply one strategy among many directed toward financial gain. Significantly, it is one of the few strategies which bring Easy into
direct contact with L.A.'s official spaces of power: police, city bureaucracy, wealthy neighborhoods, lawyers, and so on—although it is worth noting that the cases Easy is hired to solve inevitably involve his looking for answers within the largely unacknowledged spaces of L.A.'s African-American communities. The other strategies, represented in Black Betty by one sub-plot in particular—concerning an attempt at real estate speculation thwarted by white developers—are at least if not more important to Easy's survival.

Clearly Mosley's story of racist oppression is hardly new or surprising, but I think what he does so effectively is to illustrate the processes by which Easy's obsession for specific detail in uncovering the truth behind the various crimes he investigates is rendered not irrelevant but incidental in the face of its context as part of his ongoing struggles. And what seems so poignant in the Rawlins novels is the extent to which the hard-boiled plots that ostensibly progress their narratives are allowed only a very superficial kind of meaning by virtue of their status as a mere means to a relatively mundane end. The following lines from Black Betty are typical of Easy's ongoing commentaries on the context of his detective work:

John's bar didn't open until noon, but I would have found him there even if we hadn't had that appointment. Men like John and me didn't have lives like the white men on TV had. We didn't roll out of bed for an eight-hour day job and then come home in the evening for The Honeymooners and a beer. We didn't do one thing at a time.

We were men who came from poor stock. We had to be cooks and tailors and plumbers and electricians. We had to be our own counsel because there wasn't anything for us down at City Hall.

We worked until the job was done or until we couldn't work anymore. And even when

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we'd done everything we could, that didn't mean we'd get a paycheck or a vacation. It didn't mean a damn thing.\textsuperscript{13}

It is not insignificant, however, that the setting for Easy's investigations is L.A. The choice of L.A., rather, appears to be significant precisely because it is understood to be a very complex and layered place containing mysteries such as those surrounding Betty's disappearance, yet its complexities, its vastness, its seeming infinity of contrasts, merely mark out the territory for Easy's numbing, grinding struggles. L.A. as narrated by Easy is, despite its diversity, the same all over:

L.A. has always been flat and featureless. Anybody could be anywhere out there. The police arrested you for jaywalking or because you didn't have the brains not to brag after you hit a liquor store for the day's receipts. But if you wanted to hide from the law, L.A. was the place to do it. There was no logic to the layout of the city. And there were more people every day. Sharecroppers and starlets, migrant Mexicans and insurance salesmen, came to pick over the money tree for a few years before they went back home. But they never went home. The money slipped through their fingers and the easy life weighed them down.\textsuperscript{14}

Similarly important to understanding Easy's ambivalence to L.A. are the facts behind Mosley's creation of his character. Mosley has provided an explanation of how he came to the detective genre in which he explains that the original setting for Ezekiel Rawlins and his psychotic sometime partner Raymond "Mouse" Alexander was "a mythical bayou town in Texas, called Pariah."\textsuperscript{15} The story was to be more overtly 'literary' than those of the detective series that ultimately developed, with the original plot telling of a road trip on which Easy and Mouse explore their respective relationships with Easy's father and Mouse's

\textsuperscript{13} Mosley, \textit{Black Betty}, p. 252.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 73.
stepfather. The fifteen literary agents to whom Mosley sent the manuscript each gave it high praise, but were adamant that it was not commercial enough. Not enough people want to read about poor, rural blacks, they said. So Mosley transplanted Easy and Mouse (and their paternal memories) into 1940s L.A. and the plot of Devil in a Blue Dress, but he tried to retain his original story in this new location: “The characters and their language are the same in this book as in the earlier novel. They are poor and black and hungry to get those things racism denies them.”

Roger Berger (1997) notes in his discussions of Mosley’s work that the mass migration of African-Americans to California after World War II makes L.A. a believable setting for this pre-existing story, and it is here that Mosley’s project is supremely ironic. Mosley can publish Devil in a Blue Dress, and continue the series, because detective fiction and its well established history in L.A. render exotic a narrative that in the less familiar and exciting spaces of a literary figuring of the bayou of Texas is understood to appear merely as worthy social history.

Easy’s traversal of L.A.’s mean streets is, then, powerful irony on the part of Mosley in the sense that L.A. appears in his novels not as an exploration of the stories concealed by its particular locations, but as a deliberately non-specific treatment.

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16 Ibid., p. 133.
18 It is interesting to note that now that the Rawlins series is firmly established as extremely commercially viable, Mosley’s hand is somewhat less constrained. For the clearest example of this freedom, see Walter Mosley, Gone Fishin’: An Easy Rawlins mystery (New York: Pocket Books, 1998). Gone Fishin’, the most recent Rawlins novel is set in the late 1930s (before the previously published stories) and the plot is strikingly similar to Mosley’s original writing of Easy and Mouse.
Black Betty is thus not primarily intended to be about L.A. along the lines of any sort of urban geography. And unsurprisingly the location of Mosley’s fictions is subordinate to the human stories that unfold within their pages: it is less important to Mosley to tell us about where Easy lives than it is for him to help us learn who Easy is. And it is also, clearly, Mosley’s intention to make some very general—albeit with a specific historical context—statements about the human condition. As a novelist, Mosley would surely not succeed if he were to replace his stories of Easy’s struggles with accounts of the places in which they take place, so it is not a fair or necessary criticism to accuse Mosley of compromising himself via his intelligent usage of urban space. Nevertheless, despite the literary value of its strategies for telling Easy’s story, Black Betty does provide a narrative of L.A. that is structurally very similar to that presented in some key non-fictional accounts. Which returns to my use of Mosley’s fiction as an allegory for the position L.A. assumes in its more serious textual forms, in which discovering pre-existing narratives in the streets has rather more disturbing implications than those developed by Easy Rawlins.

Making L.A. Visible

Soja’s Thirdspace offer quite different arguments about the city and about L.A. than those provided by Dear and Flusty. Nor is Soja attempting to write about the ‘African-American experience’ during particular times in American history. Thirdspace does, however, sustain at least some of its momentum by treating L.A. as the place through which a story can be told. Developing themes and
arguments introduced in his earlier *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja's intention is to provide an explicitly spatial understanding of the transformations of (Western) cities in the late twentieth-century—the same transformations, I think, that have encouraged Dear and Flusty to look for new urban models. But Soja's search is less for a model of the city than for one of *spatiality* that can be applied to the city. L.A., quite understandably, comprises the majority of his examples in the text, and it is present essentially to illustrate the extent to which his understanding of space and spatiality—in large part an amalgam of Lefebvre and Foucault—has the power to reveal what is present behind the representational confusions of late capitalism. Understandably, too, L.A. appears in Soja's text in a form articulated by the demands of his arguments.

To provide some background to *Thirdspace*, it is perhaps useful to describe briefly what I understand to be its origins in *Postmodern Geographies*. That earlier text introduced L.A. as a series of citadels, seemingly independent but all articulated by a centralized process of panoptic surveillance (surveillance by whom, I'm not exactly sure). Essentially the product of post-Fordist flexible accumulation, the seeming disorder of L.A.'s geographies is none the less contained within an economic rationality. The demarcation of this rationality is identified by Soja by means of a careful fixing of L.A.'s dispersion. His amalgam of modernism and postmodernism allows him to hold on to a modernist fixing by asserting the need to get past the multiplicity of (postmodern) representations that
L.A. seems to generate. L.A. is "tough-to-track" in the sense that Soja's victory over and incorporation of its duplicity into a Lefebvrian understanding of spatiality—a trialectic—is hard-fought, but the price of this victory comes via the implication that L.A. consists of its mobilization by Soja's narrative of spatiality. Not that it is by any means a contradiction that Soja wants to be both modern and postmodern, or at least to explain the relationship of one to the other. After all, explaining the infrastructures of capital present behind a particular representational order requires part of postmodernism's blurring of the distinction between reality and representation, and part of modernism's claim to separate one from the other.

But whilst an adoption of some of modernism and some of postmodernism might be necessary for Soja's interpretations of late capitalism, when it comes to choosing which parts of Los Angeles with which to illustrate his arguments there is something fundamentally problematical in their selection. In Thirdspace, particularly, Soja's attempts to be in-between the material and the representational require him really to say something about what is going on in particular places. This requirement is perhaps a refreshing change from some interpretations of postmodernism, except that saying something translates in Thirdspace to deciding upon the most powerfully visible of L.A.'s spaces, and moving on from the stringing together of these spaces to an understanding of the

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19 Soja, Postmodern Geographies, p. 222.
20 For a development of this reading of Postmodern Geographies, see Derek Gregory's Geographical Imaginations (Oxford: Blackwell: 1994). Chapter 4, "Chinatown, Part Three? Uncovering Postmodern Geographies" (pp. 257-313), is an extended commentary on the rigidity and inconsistency of Soja's deployment of postmodernism.
city as a whole. Postmodernism, presumably, gets left behind here, along with the more reticent parts of L.A.

*Thirdspace* thus focuses on those parts of L.A. that most lend themselves to postmodern representational confusion, but goes on to fix these dramatic points in place to allow for a very material demarcation of the workings of urban structure. L.A. is only permitted flexibility in its meanings before its parts are incorporated into Soja’s spatial reasoning.

As I understand it, Soja’s version of *Thirdspace* is an expression of the fragile and unstable nature of place. Place is unstable for Soja because of its significance within what Andrew Merrifield (1993) has called Lefebvre’s “spatial triad”\(^{21}\) of lived-perceived-conceived;\(^{22}\) it is the site of multiple contested imaginaries. This apparently fluid composition of place, Soja claims, requires some kind of infinitely subjective frame of reference, so much so that existing conventions of narrative must be replaced with an entirely new spatial vocabulary:

This all-inclusive simultaneity opens up endless worlds to explore and, at the same time, presents daunting challenges. Any attempt to capture this all-encompassing space in words and texts, for example, invokes an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that the sequentiality of language and writing, of the narrative form and history-telling, can never do much more than scratch the surface of Thirdspace’s extraordinary simultanities.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{22}\) A preoccupation with the work of Henri Lefebvre has been a common theme in Soja’s work to date. In both *Postmodern Geographies* and *Thirdspace*, Soja develops a reading of Lefebvre focused on his *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) in which he understands Lefebvre’s determination of the indefinable intersections of Representations of Space, Representational Space and Spatial Practices to be demarcatable in Los Angeles.

\(^{23}\) Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 57.
The strong implication in Thirdspace is that the blurry disorder presented by L.A. only comes into sharp focus via its mobilization within Soja’s textualization of space. That is, Soja must prepare the theoretical ground before the city is made (textually) visible.

Citadel-LA, which forms the center to Soja’s discussion of an exhibition held at U.C.L.A. in Spring of 1989 as part of an ongoing commemoration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, invokes the strangely duplicitous nature of L.A.’s downtown spaces in order to concretize the importance of Soja’s new vocabulary. Citadel-LA is “the ‘little city’ that defines the power-filled ‘civic center’ of the polynucleated Los Angeles region.” It contains everything that has been celebrated on the way to the production of Los Angeles as the academic cliché par excellence, including the Walt Disney Concert Hall, designed by Frank Gehry (the man who helped put the fortress in Mike Davis’s “Fortress L.A.”); the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA); the Central District Headquarters, ostensibly for the Department of Water and Power, but also acting as signifier-in-chief for a deluge of Chinatown analogies; and of course, Fredric Jameson’s monument to a sense of postmodern direction, the Westin-Bonaventure Hotel and Gallery. The L.A. of Soja’s Thirdspace is by necessity an unapologetic process of selection.

25 Soja, Thirdspace, p. 204.
26 See Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in New Left Review 146 (1984) pp. 53-92; and Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). The Bonaventure Hotel is perhaps most well known in academia for Jameson’s discussion of his utter disorientation in its lobby and the near
Citadel-LA, the center to the city without a center, seems particularly representative of the kinds of contradictions Soja sees everywhere in L.A. It is a center for L.A., but not one around which there is some logical articulation of the rest of the city; instead it appears to be a microcosm of the remainder of L.A.'s confusion. Soja narrates the confusion by means of a micro-history of the citadel of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles, which began as an agricultural settlement and trading post, and which marks part of the site of present-day Citadel-LA. El Pueblo is represented by Soja as an exemplar of L.A.'s multiple rescriptings, continually "written upon and erased over and over again in the evolution of urban consciousness and civic imagination,"\(^{27}\) rescriptings that demand a theoretical infrastructure to render the confusion coherent.

Relating the particularities of L.A. to more general 'urban questions' requires the making obvious of the particularly 'postmodern' nature of Soja's Thirdspace, and in turn this process of making obvious requires that the links be drawn between the components of L.A.—and elsewhere—he chooses to represent. El Pueblo is joined to the Bastille, for instance, by means of an alleged disruption of historical narrative in the sense that both are for Soja sites of contested meaning in which nothing is ever exactly as it seems to be. The location of El Pueblo as one site among many in Citadel-LA is the most explicit manifestation of the ability of L.A.'s spaces to mask origins and direct attention, invisibility of its entrances and exits. As it turns out, Jameson was (at least) half joking, but perhaps the 'point' of postmodernism is that such playful ironies can have quite unexpected influence. \(^{27}\) Soja, Thirdspace, p. 228.
and it is at this level of ‘postmodern’ surfaces that erasure of urban history operates in Thirdspace.

For Soja, much of what is going on in L.A. is represented by what he refers to as the ‘carceral city,’ the underside to the shiny surfaces of postmodern L.A. Soja’s Thirdspace perspective, his unique presentation of the relationship between postmodern confusion and modern systems of ultimately coherent relationships, positions him as singularly equipped to explain the city. Of course, it is entirely valid for Soja to want to illustrate the processes of almost geometric concealment at work in the spaces of L.A., but it requires that he manipulate a relationship between modernism and postmodernism so that he is quite literally able to see the operation of the mysterious urban processes of Thirdspace, as well as Lefebvre’s trialectic. In particular, Soja’s discussion of Borges’s short story, “The Aleph” (the place from which all other places can be seen), highlights his foregrounding of abstraction and confusion, all of which is eventually made clear in L.A.; it is “a ‘first approximation’ from which to reinterpret The Production of Space and recompose its imbricated conceptualizations of Thirdspace.” But as a ‘first approximation,’ the function of “The Aleph” appears to be deliberate confusion, in which urban space is initially conceived of as an incomprehensibly complex and non textual set of relationships, which can never be seen, except of course when Soja gets to L.A. in later chapters and articulates these relationships in text. It is perhaps helpful to think of this contradiction in Thirdspace as being equivalent to a scenario in the Rawlins mysteries in which Easy’s solving of the case at hand
translates to similar closure in the more substantive issues that dog his life. But of course, that doesn’t happen in the Rawlins mysteries, and Easy is quick to recognize that solving cases in and of themselves can be a frustratingly futile exercise.

Soja’s understanding of the duplicity of the various ‘façades’ of L.A. leads him to conclude that, for example, the confusing content of Citadel-LA is a visual distraction to the necessary order lying underneath, and he discovers it to be a synthesis and a microcosm of L.A.’s postmodernism. Consequently Soja’s vision of L.A. as real-and-imagined place (part of Thirdspace’s subtitle) comes from his own building of the city from a series of ‘unmasked surfaces,’ his arguments preserving an artificial sense of openness via the appearance of what might be thought of as a postmodern representational consciousness in their ‘first half.’ To this end, L.A. is understood by Soja to be a place in which it is possible to have it both ways, not in the sense of a necessary mixing of modernism and postmodernism, the imaginary and the material, but quite simply by his implicit claim to be uniquely able to discover the strength of his creation, Thirdspace, in the streets of L.A.

Forgotten Histories: Invisible L.A.

As much as I love noir, and find it exotically compelling, it is nevertheless often utterly false in its visions of the poor, of the non-white in particular. It is essentially a mythos about white male panic—the white knight in a cesspool of urban decay; about desire turned into a slot machine.

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26 Ibid., p. 54.
Despite its origins as social realism in Hammett, the hard-boiled story cannot help but operate, very fundamentally, as white males building a social imaginary.\textsuperscript{29}

In one form or another, \textit{The History of Forgetting} is entirely about Los Angeles, and of course it is hardly unusual or unexpected to find a treatment of this city covering a mass of subject matter. Nevertheless, I believe there is something unique in Klein’s blending of documented historical events, informed speculations and outright fictions. In the context of discussions of how L.A. is represented, too, Klein’s book can be read very much as an argument against singular narratives of the city. Or narratives of the city that seek to solve its coexistent versions by means of the ‘discovery’ of their linkages in a singular system of relationships. Perhaps more importantly, Klein offers insights as to what is left out by sweeping treatments of the city.

Klein’s reading of L.A., like Dear and Flusty’s, is in large part a reading of readings of the city, but his objective is quite the opposite of theirs. Indeed, their use of L.A. as starting point for a general theory of urban structure probably comes quite close to building the kind of noir social imaginary Klein opposes outside of as well as within hard-boiled crime fiction. But his book isn’t really concerned with opposing particular interpretations of L.A.; rather Klein simply seems to want to comment on the marginalizing effects of L.A.’s treatment in a diverse spread of discourse. This discourse is found in popular print and television media, in crime fiction, at architectural conferences and seminars, in academic texts. To the extent that Klein identifies almost a franchising of L.A. neatly

\textsuperscript{29} Klein, \textit{The History of Forgetting}, p. 79.
synthesized by his experience at a 1990 public lecture series on art in L.A., in which “three out of five leading urban planners agreed that they hoped L.A. would someday look like the film Blade Runner.” It is at least marginally reassuring that Klein goes on to comment on the audience’s unease at the possibility of realizing an L.A. of sci-fi noir in the not-too-distant future. What is less reassuring, however, is Klein’s identification of an L.A. that has already come to be understood in some circles as a place in which, to paraphrase one of his chapter headings, to build Blade Runner.

At first glance, Klein’s book looks as if it is offering something very similar to Davis’s City of Quartz, which can usefully be read, I think, as a challenge to understandings of L.A. that define the city as the simplistic product of ‘white panic’ and the rampant onslaughts of financial capital. Consequently it is revealing to read Davis against Klein here, primarily to reinforce the importance of their different modes of expression, their different understanding of what is meant by urban geography. At one level, it is the case that I prefer Klein’s book to Davis’s, but that preference derives more from a consideration of methodology than content. Indeed, I think it important to read Davis here precisely because I support the ideological drive of City of Quartz much more than Soja’s advancement of the need for a Thirdspace perspective on L.A., and because I want to emphatically state my claim that the production of representations of the city is as least as important as what those representations say.

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30 Ibid., p. 94.
To some, Davis might appear as the street-level savior of L.A., beginning City of Quartz in the ruins of the long-departed socialist community of Lano del Rio in Antelope Valley as an intentional disruption of earlier urban histories. Once the location of a socialist utopia, Antelope Valley is now ripe for development and fast becoming the outer edge of L.A.'s consumption of the Mojave desert. For Davis, the prospect of a "brave red kibbutz" in the desert has been replaced by a largely unquestioned, apparently unstoppable alternative triumph of the ideology of financial capital. One of Davis's key concerns is thus to articulate the possibility of resistance to L.A.'s twin tropes of capitalist boosterism and white panic, which seem to make the militarization of the city and the oppression of the poor inevitable. The L.A. School, represented in City of Quartz by Soja and Allen Scott, is identified as inhibiting resistance by means of a nihilistic application of inevitability to capital's progression:

By exposing the darkest facets of the 'world city' (Los Angeles's 'new Dickensian hell' of underclass poverty in the words of UCLA geographer Alan [sic] Scott) the 'L.A. School' ridicules the utopias of L.A. 2000 [Mayor Bradley's strategic plan of 1988 for a new regionalism in L.A.]. Yet, by hyping Los Angeles as the paradigm of the future (even in a dystopian vein), they tend to collapse history into teleology and glamorize the very reality they would deconstruct.32

The nihilism of the L.A. School, Davis claims, participates in the very structure it aspires to deconstruct, and I think this connects to Derek Gregory's analysis of Postmodern Geographies as providing a surprisingly rigid treatment of the streets

31 Davis, City of Quartz, p. 11.
32 Ibid., p. 86.
in which Soja wants to place so much agency. Also, Dear and Flusty’s treatment could certainly be accused of a collapsing of history, and a voyeuristic glamorization of the most enticing of Southern California’s spaces since L.A.’s past is read entirely through their present model.

But Davis, too, hardly pays attention to the inherent structural process of a textual reduction of L.A. As Rosalyn Deutsche has observed, City of Quartz reads much like a hard-boiled detective novel of the kind Klein and Davis both consider, and Davis contributes explicitly to this simile even at the level of the language he employs. The following, for example, is part of Davis’s introduction to the largely untold story of the city of Fontana, devastated by the closure of its steel plant in 1983:

Rising from the geological and social detritus that has accumulated at the foot of the Cajon Pass sixty miles east of Los Angeles, the city of Fontana is the principal byproduct of this ‘unmentioned catastrophe’. A gritty blue-collar town, well-known to line-haul truckers everywhere, with rusting blast furnaces and outlaw motorcycle gangs (the birthplace of the Hell’s Angels in 1946), it is the regional antipode to the sumptuary belts of West L.A. or Orange County. ‘Designer living’ here means a Peterbilt with a custom sleeper or a full-chrome Harley hog.35

Davis and his photographer Robert Morrow, we are told, “cruised the mean streets,” snapping “Los Angeles’s suburban badlands,” (see “Acknowledgements” and biographical profiles), and ultimately set the city’s record straight. Indeed, the style of Davis’s writing of L.A. is such that it appears to have generated an image of its author as a character in other gritty dramas. John

33 Gregory, Geographical Imaginations.
35 Davis, City of Quartz, p. 375.
Shannon, for example, in his L.A.-set mystery thriller, The Concrete River, includes a thinly disguised version of Davis, Mike Lewis: “Only Mike Lewis would go scuba diving in the lull of a rainstorm [Jack] thought. He’d probably wedged it in between his classes in urban theory, whatever that was, and a hell-bent dash in his old Toyota to some TV interview. Somewhere in there he wrote books on L.A. social history.” Davis’s fast-paced process of setting the record straight attempts to dispel myths of boosterism and white panic that, respectively, present L.A. as the Mecca of development and as generating an inherent and ubiquitous criminality from within its more infamous suburbs. Crack cocaine in Compton and a rampant, seemingly independent form of finance capital and creative destruction are, in these myths, intrinsic components of L.A., and Davis is extremely persuasive in illustrating exactly how partial and misleading they are.

Much of City of Quartz tells the story of the production of desperate poverty in L.A., and of the refusal of the city authorities to make any substantive attempt to challenge the origins of this poverty. Chapters 4 and 5, “Fortress L.A.” and “The Hammer and the Rock,” center on this theme: here the narrative is one of the securing and privatization of what public space remains in L.A., and of the increasingly paranoid protection of wealthy suburbs from invasions of poverty, ethnicity and crime (all of which are implicitly linked in those discourses of boosterism and panic). The narrative is also one of the manipulative deployal of discourse by Chief Daryl Gates’s L.A.P.D. in order to legitimize a virtual war on

36 Ibid., in “Acknowledgements” and biographical profiles.
poor (and racially defined) neighborhoods. Deeply serious issues worthy of exposure and debate, but I find Davis’s argument to be undermined somewhat by its structuring with a binary of representation and reality similar to that which is present in Soja’s work. Despite the radical political project it is used to support, L.A. remains in *City of Quartz* quite conservatively composed of its available textual archive (as well as a few ‘real,’ voyeuristic journeys into the streets). All of the many imaginaries of L.A. (except, Davis’s of course) are left behind by his interpretations, in the sense that his story requires that they be distilled into his hard-boiled city. Again, Deutsche identifies similar limitations, and I find her reflections on Davis’s preoccupation with Jake Gittes to be particularly poignant. In *Chinatown*, Jake and Davis both forget the protagonist’s involvement in the production of L.A., each believing themselves to be standing clear from their well-lit subject, but “the qualities that make the city ‘realistic’...do not just mirror sociological conditions or, what amounts to the same thing, express psychological experiences engendered in sociologically constituted city dwellers by the real urban environment. These qualities also entangle the city with the protagonist’s psychic geography, with the spatial processes that form his identity.”

Not that detachment of narratives from the cities they help to construct is a problem unique to Davis, it’s just that *City of Quartz* is so implicitly concerned with the material implications of L.A.‘s imaginaries—boosterism and white panic in particular—that the production of a singular alternative seems more jarring here

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than it does elsewhere. Davis is certainly interested in the untold stories of L.A., but his version of L.A. is remarkably reluctant to engage with its own involvement. That is to say, Davis's sojourns into the importance of post-war noir fiction, real political corruption and scandal, Scientology, police raids staged by Daryl Gates for a maliciously drooling Nancy Reagan, all reveal a city made up of elisions between fact and fiction, Pynchon-like slippages and reversals of cause and effect, event and report. But at the same time, these elisions are understood by Davis to be deceptions in need of someone equivalent to the figure of the lone detective, rather than symptoms of a culture in which the maintenance of rigid distinctions between reality and representation makes things artificially simple.

By contrast, I support Norman Klein's vision of the city because it is firm in its insistence that much of the textual production of L.A. is characterized by a dismissal of the extremely real and multiple imaginaries of the city, although The History of Forgetting is by no means a vague text. That is to say, Klein has a very clear understanding of a 'real' L.A. as well as what he understands to be an L.A. of shallow artifice. But for Klein, the reality of L.A. is not confined to its available surfaces, and in fact these available surfaces are understood, in isolation, to generate an almost epidemic misinformation. The combination of a desire to say something substantive and a recognition of the dangers of making things too clear cut leads Klein to write a version of L.A. that is both an analysis of how the

38 Ibid., p. 31.
39 Deutsche, Evictions, p. 251.
city is represented and a series of speculative, semi-fictional accounts of what might be left out or obscured by those representations.

A recurring theme in Klein's examination of representations of L.A. is a self-conscious deployment of the city as highly believable allegory. This theme begins with his observations on noir film and literature, and the particular methodology of its production of L.A. Raymond Chandler is invoked as only the most obvious of names involved in this production process, particularly when it comes to Bunker Hill:

Chandler's version of Bunker Hill is peopled with the hopeless and the criminal: "Landladies bicker with shifty tenants." Old men wearing cracked shoes have "faces like lost battles." It is an old neighborhood, with evil lurking beneath the quaintness, "little candy stores where you can buy even nastier things than their candy." At "ratty hotels ... nobody signs the register except people named Smith and Jones ... The night clerk is half watchdog and half pander ..." "Out of the apartment houses come women who should be young but have faces like stale beer".

For Klein, though, Chandler's Bunker Hill turns out to be a fiction of an altogether different sort than might be expected. He notes that the structure of the noir imaginary of Chandler (and many others) requires a treatment of the city as an entity formulating and formulated by its characters; it produces a complex series of binaries in which L.A. must always remain distinct from its population and their everyday activities—the distinction in Chandler, for example, is maintained by Marlowe's moral superiority. The problem here is not that Chandler 'gets it wrong' when it comes to his descriptions of Bunker Hill; it is instead that the L.A.

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40 See in particular Part 2 of The History of Forgetting, "L.A. Noir and Forgetting" (pp. 73-93), in which Klein provides an extensive discussion of the various ways in which film and literature set in L.A. have come to assume a very particular decentered and soulless form in their setting.
of his descriptions is formulated after the fact. That Chandler writes about crime and its detection turns out to be a convenient metaphor for his understanding of L.A. as a composite of remembered and recorded events, all of which move toward the tying up of loose ends. The visible evidence of Bunker Hill originating from individual observers, if it is not entirely fictional, turns out to be at best partial and determined by perspective, and Klein’s understanding of the limitations of the noir persona further emphasizes the validity of Mosley’s use of some of its conventions: it is essentially the shaping of a place by a pre-existing story.

One of the clearest themes in Klein’s exploration is not, as it is in Soja in particular, the difficulty of getting to the essence of L.A.’s socio-economic relationships; nor is it, as it is in Dear and Flusty, the provision of a structure on which to hang L.A. It is rather the very absence in his writings of a single solution to L.A.—or for that matter the city in general. This absence can, I think, be located via Klein’s discussion of the ‘B-Roll’ as a metaphor for urban history. The B-Roll refers to the existing footage required by most producers before they will allow a documentary to begin filming. The B-Roll is run over the voice-over, and Klein’s own involvement in such productions leads him to the conclusion that very often the B-Roll becomes proof of an event’s existence, and the more footage there is, the more real the event: “If you cannot fill the screen with photos or a clip, then any event, no matter how important to the world, is not ‘a story’.”42 Unfortunately, there is no B-Roll for most of the geographies of L.A. Klein wishes to explore. Most

41 Klein, The History of Forgetting, p. 51.
42 Ibid., p. 256.
of these geographies are, in fact, fictional.

Klein does not understand fiction to be an inherently honest medium, and as I hope my reading of Mosley illustrates, one has to be careful when choosing fictional representations of 'real' places. Nevertheless, Klein's particular story of L.A. centers on several fictions—'docufables' as he calls them—the most extensive of which comprises chapter 7 of his text. Chapter 7 contains the story of Dai, a Chinese-Vietnamese immigrant to the U.S. who leaves bourgeois comfort and semi-security in his home in Kien-Giang, (former) South Vietnam, arriving with his family in Los Angeles in 1977. Los Angeles for Dai includes, for example, his troubled relationship with his son Binh, whose emotional disturbance connects to memories of refugee holding camps and the family's traumatic boat journey to Bangkok; it includes in short a great deal that is unavailable to anyone else. When, towards the end of the novella, Dai is stabbed by Binh in their seedy apartment home in Angelino Heights, the B-Roll for this particular event consists of the police report, and maybe the stories of inquisitive neighbors told to the local press. It even, perhaps, although one can't quite be sure if Klein is poking fun, becomes a made-for-TV movie. The deeper origins of the event, however, remain buried in invisible memories.

The point of Klein's novella is not merely to dismiss the history of L.A. as a process of erasing stories 'like' that of Dai and Binh, and it is perhaps an unfortunate distraction that his focus is on an 'immigrant' story. The B-Roll, for
example, also consists of apparently real, first-hand and on-the-spot reporting like media footage of the 1992 uprising that followed the acquittal of the L.A.P.D. officers filmed beating Rodney King:

How often do reporters arrive at the scene of the crime after the evidence has already been altered or driven away? And, even if they arrive on time, not much may be visible. Many reporters were close enough to see a rock crash through their windshield, or to interview looters on the spot. However, in an event as massive as this, to be present at one street corner does not make you a reliable source. Nor does it give you enough background to discuss long-term causes, the subtleties of a particular street, its normalcies, its survival. Panic was the story that made this a ratings bonanza. Only the spark of hysteria was required. However, that spark may be all that is remembered.44

For Klein, first hand witnesses of the sort described above are always witnesses after the fact, and the power of George Holliday’s now infamous camcorder film of the King beating comes from its ungrammatical subversion of convention:

I enjoy watching the B-Roll fall apart. During the collapse of the Soviet Union, I was shown tapes from Lithuanian television, just as the Russians burst into the studio. The coverage was extraordinarily fresh somehow. Then I was told why: we were seeing the backs of people’s heads. The camera was out of position, according to the grammar of on-the-spot reporting. Since then I have always wondered if part of the shock of the Rodney King video was that it showed too many officers from the back, where the camera is not expected to be: it was video verité.45

L.A., Klein suggests, has very much been edited together in order to produce coherent singular narratives, and this would seem to provide a very accurate definition of the methodology behind, say, Soja’s selections. Of course, it is hardly surprising that explorations into urban history have consisted of highly selective

43 See chapter 7 of The History of Forgetting, “Stories in an English I Don’t Speak: A Novel” (pp. 151-215), which contains many subtle references to Klein’s version of ‘factual’ L.A., largely represented by Dai’s brief and partial encounters with the ‘reported’ components of the city.
44 Klein, The History of Forgetting, p. 224.
archival digging, but Klein's central concern is not to present some unresolvable critique of this process of selection in itself. Rather, the various versions of L.A. Klein considers all seem to be characterized by what is very much an archive directed at a single answer.

For Klein, 'L.A.' includes its representations, its existence in noir film and fiction, in science fiction, in academia. L.A., at some level, is even the postmodern urbanism of Dear and Flusty, but Klein's key point is that all of L.A. cannot be filtered through metaphor and subsequently articulated in an 'essential' form. Clearly Dear and Flusty have every right to identify apparently new trends in urbanism, and it is important that such trends are discussed, but to do so it is essential that the implications of their choice of urbanisms are acknowledged, and that the intricate processes of production involved in making available these urbanisms are explored. Otherwise the writing of L.A. is in danger of remaining something akin to the detective career of Easy Rawlins. That is, a perpetually frustrating tactic for survival: cases are solved but there hasn't been much real movement from beginning to end.

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Conclusions: The trouble with Los Angeles

He went out to buy a paper from the machine. The Times' headline yelled at him inscrutably, Ter Braak May Head Opera. What could you do with a newspaper that didn't even know the name of its own city? Nobody but tourists and ex-mayors called L.A. Los Angeles.46

The trouble with cities is that they encourage interpretation. The trouble with Los Angeles, perhaps, is that its size and the extent of its global reach present an impossibly enticing challenge, provoking attempts at mastery. Or rather, L.A.'s size and reach might be thought of as encouraging, by virtue of the impossibility of mastery its figurative and physical size suggest, use of the city for just about any kind of narrative. So Los Angeles becomes a place for the playing out of theories and stories, rather like Paul Skenazy's discussion of early noir fiction,47 in which he identifies a treatment of L.A. as a place to which other times and places are brought. In the case of James M. Cain's 1932 novel, Fast One, Skenazy notes that L.A. is deployed as a "business venture"48 for a generic type of New York or Chicago gangster exported to the emptiness of the west. Of course, that was in the early 1930s when L.A. was a quite different place from now, but it seems that now the very fullness of L.A., its scope and scale, are such that anything is possible, any narrative locatable in its streets. The city is so full, it might as well be empty; a nice fit perhaps with Soja's use of modernism and postmodernism.

Davis, Dear and Flusty, Mosley and Soja, in the examples of their work discussed here, say very different things about L.A. and cities more generally.

Davis challenges the use of L.A. as a place for playing out powerful, oppressive and ‘untrue’ narratives; Dear and Flusty build a model of postmodern urbanism sustained by a rather superficial stringing together of parts of L.A.; Mosley subverts L.A.’s history in the hard-boiled genre by transforming the typically moral quest of the lone detective into a more mundane struggle for survival; Soja seeks evidence in L.A. of the traces of barely visible, newly invented spatial relationships. Perhaps it is unfair to compare these very different writers, but then the real issue here is less to do with attempting to gather various written versions of L.A. into some plenary assembly than it is to raise the importance of considering how L.A. is treated in text. And to move on from the treatment of L.A. as a place in which to locate pre-existing stories to a fuller recognition of the diversity of urban places. Diversity not necessarily in the sense of the inclusion of particular marginalized socio-economic groups but rather of a less obvious hierarchy of visibility in the city.

It is particularly ironic that in all the texts I consider, save Klein’s and Mosley’s, L.A. is one way or another conceived of as requiring answers or solutions. Ironic because Easy Rawlins and the characters of Klein’s docufables are perhaps the figures here most in need of solutions to L.A.; but the problems of L.A. Easy and the others require to be solved are mostly to do with the characters’ perpetual inability to control their own visibility in L.A. or influence the direction of the city’s more powerful narratives. In the more overtly serious writings considered here, the need for a solution to L.A. is often an unquestioned assumption, the

necessary objective of urban geography. That, finally, is what I find most disturbing about Dear and Flusty’s paper: that they don’t appear to have stopped to consider the existence of a need for and the implications of a general theory of urban structure.

But it is perhaps too trite an alternative simply to call for fewer solutions to the city, particularly when the mire of simplistic postmodernism Soja in particular is so keen to avoid appears to be offering exactly that. Instead it is more helpful and productive to follow Klein and begin with the notion that it is not necessary or useful to look for solutions to the city—The History of Forgetting makes no pretence that this in itself is some sort of conclusion. From this beginning, a movement towards fictional treatments of the city is by no means the only proper direction to take. I don’t think Klein means to propose this direction either, since fiction in The History of Forgetting is mostly used to reveal the limitations and partial nature of some other representations of L.A. Indeed it is the question of representation that is critical here, in that access to more complete and meaningful treatments of the city comes via an understanding of how those representations of the city are produced. The title of Klein’s story of Dai and Binh, “Stories in an English I Don’t Speak,” is, I think, Klein’s admission that he is ill-equipped to solve L.A., and it is also his refusal to offer a complete translation of the city. In the end, that translation is always, frustratingly, just out of reach.
PART 2: Crime Fiction, and Other Points of View

Another evening, another restaurant. This one also served Neapolitan specialities, but here no attempt had been made to create a supposedly characteristic décor evoking the city as it appeared through the misty eyes of expatriate nostalgia: colourful, chaotic, cheap and cheerful. For this establishment was in Naples, or more precisely in Posillipo, one of the most beautiful and exclusive neighbourhoods on the bay, situated at the tip of a small headland shaded by palms and lemon trees and overlooking the sea.¹

The city as labyrinth, in which one gropes like a blind person, without the help of an Ariadne's thread, is an image that has traveled well from the nineteenth century to the theoretical and fictional writing of our own time (in post-war fiction it has made regular appearances from the cities of the nouveau roman to the New York of Paul Auster's remarkable novels). Michel de Certeau—in perhaps the most powerful theoretical statement of this point of view—writes of being in the city as akin to moving in 'des labyrinthes mobiles et sans fin' [1980, 172]. Yet de Certeau's use of the image is in no sense a warning or a lament for the loss of a knowledge-based orientation, and indeed his more general argument shows just how difficult and complicated the question of the city as object of knowledge, especially systematic knowledge, has become.²

Introduction

Crime fiction's importance in geography has little or nothing to do with the extent to which it is entirely possible to skim through the gritty realism of the hard-boiled detective story, picking out suitably poignant (urban) descriptions along the way. Such descriptions, after all, can be found in the existing texts of urban geography,³ the most respectable of broadsheet newspapers, or even by one's

¹ Dibdin, Cosi Fan Tutti, p. 66.
³ Ralph Willett's The Naked City (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) is a particularly useful example here: not only does Willett display an intense preoccupation with scenes of urban decay, he writes about urban crime fiction, too. Taking each of the big, bad cities of modern American crime fiction in turn ('New York,' 'Miami,' 'Los Angeles,' and so on, each carefully positioned in its own self-contained chapter), Willett is extremely diligent in his attempts to explain
own wanderings through the decaying areas of the city. Raymond Chandler, merely one manifestation among many of the English Gentleman abroad, mostly made it up when it came to Bunker Hill.

What is a great deal more interesting about crime fiction is its power to reveal rather more intricate and general sites of representation, points in text that mark what might be called locations and rationales of control, as well as problematizing ways of knowing the city. And what follows is less a protracted review of the alleged geographies contained in crime fictions than it is an allegorical reading of certain crime fictions as illustrative of the construction of certain points of view in the textual representation of cities. Critical here are two related assertions. First, an understanding that the nuances of text and the construction of narrative are much more than mere window dressing, barely relevant to the real issue of what is being represented. Those nuances turn out to be, in a sense, what comes first, so that sustaining the text and positioning the relationships between the grimmest urban locations and the fictions they have generated. I'm not entirely sure, however, of the value of such a project apart from the accidental ease with which it demonstrates how it is that crime, poverty and squalor are gleefully—and uncritically—aestheticized. It would, however, be misleading to suggest crime fiction's appearance in geography to be limited to works similar to Willett's. A recent, intelligent, example of the use of crime fiction in urban geography is Philip Howell, "Crime and the City Solution: Crime fiction, urban knowledge, and radical geography," in Antipode 30 (1998) pp. 357-78. Howell reads crime fiction, the work of British author John Harvey in particular, as revealing of the playing out of a radical agenda in the streets of the city, and opposes from the perspective of radical geography what he identifies as a naive critique of crime fiction's often disturbing ideological implications.

4 See, for example, J. K. Van Dover, "Introduction," pp.1-2, in J. K. Van Dover (ed.) The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 1-17: "Although Chandler was a native American, born in Chicago, he came to the American language as half a stranger, educated in an English public school. His use of slang and argot, his notorious addiction to clever similes, his employment of devices such as irony, hyperbole, and understatement all derived from a conscious desire to create an American voice that could communicate what Chandler saw as the American reality. He remained slightly alienated from both—from the tough, smart language and from the mean streets of Los Angeles and 'Bay City.'
view becomes what the text is really about. And, second, that there are not simply multiple narratives and singular places—narratives are not simply about places—but instead a symbiotic relationship between places and their texts, one in which the arrangement of language in and by text is instrumental in the construction of vision. On the one hand, then, text serves its own ends, and on the other its local complexities require the kind of detailed study that has historically been reserved for more literary forms of criticism.

Christopher Prendergast’s *Paris and the nineteenth-century* makes a deeply important distinction in relation to the need for problematizing the syntactic intricacies of texts about the city, specifically French prose and poetry dealing with the writing of Paris. The distinction, initially confusing, is between Paris and ‘Paris.’ Prendergast’s study is focused in the main on the best-known of French nineteenth-century poetry and prose (with a little visual art thrown in, by his own admission somewhat arbitrarily), and his intention is to understand the appearance of Paris in this literature not by means of a crude survey of the correlation between the fictional, the real and the archival city, but as itself a multi-layered version of the city, a version that forms a very material part of that place contained by ‘Paris.’

What is at issue here is not some pedantic attempt to define a binary mode of thinking in which the real defines its representations (in which the ‘real city’ lies in opposition to ‘its’ texts), although for some readers, mired in the worst excesses

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He did not see himself as fully invested in either: his own idiom was not hard-boiled American (nor was he really a detective); he was a gentleman.”
of simplistic postmodernism, that might seem to be the case. Binaristic thinking, I’m afraid, is retained in this section, but in what I hope is a more sophisticated, strategic and ultimately useful sense than might be expected by its diligent critics. And there is, Prendergast insists, a definable relationship between the nineteenth-century literary existence of Paris and the Paris through which its authors moved. However, Prendergast is equally insistent as to the two-way nature of this relationship, through which the literary version of Paris was simultaneously produced by Paris and producing of Paris. Apparently, text need not be entirely immobile:

One way of putting this is to say that the ‘history’ is not ‘behind’ the text, but in the text, in its sinews, textures, syntax, vocabulary, as process of articulation; and if that shift of preposition begs many questions, it at least moves us away from the positivist reduction of literary history to simple ‘source’ material towards a more active engagement with language and literature as themselves ‘active’ forms.⁵

‘The City’ in its written form is a carefully staged rendering of balance between story and plot, one in which the orchestration of the city has already been determined by the demands of the territory in which it is to be displayed. And writing about the city is a lot harder than it looks if one recognizes that the cities are subject to rather different forms of control, power and display before the text than after.

But a contradiction appears if one thinks of the fluid ease with which the city apparently has been written, many times over in almost every place imaginable. The exploration of textual representation that follows, though, is in

⁵ ibid., p. 22.
many respects nothing more than a proposal for taking things in a much ignored direction, which illustrates how representations of space have already taken place, how space has already been arranged. Crime fiction, as it turns out, can say a great deal about the specific textual strategies that bring the city into a very particular kind of view.

Crime Makes the City Visible

Edgar Allan Poe’s series of three crime fictions featuring the amateur detective and consummate genius, C. Auguste Dupin,\(^6\) is commonly framed by a series of debates between Lacan and Derrida, specifically concerning who it was that got the meaning of the third story, “The Purloined Letter,” exactly right.\(^7\) But more interesting to me—here at least—than the respective merits of psychoanalysis and deconstruction is the question of just how Poe produces the sterile space of Dupin’s solutions, and more importantly, how that production process is concealed. Accessing that process of production via the formal structures of Poe’s texts proves to be extremely revealing of just how the boundaries of text can precede the subject of representation and dictate its qualities. In particular, there

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\(^6\) Only “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter” are discussed here. The second Dupin story is “The Mystery of Marie Roget.”

is much to be gained from observing exactly how Poe and Dupin make it quite impossible for their advantage over the investigation to be undermined.

Poe and Dupin are accompanied here by less academically familiar names: Michael Dibdin and his fictional detective, the deviously suave Italian policeman, Aurelio Zen. As well as negotiating the intricacies of the criminals and crimes he is tasked with solving, Zen must also manage the more difficult terrain of the socio-political landscape of the 'New Italy' of the late 1980s and the 1990s. A recurring theme in the seven Zen novels is the difficulties experienced by Dibdin's almost anti-hero as he copes not only with brutal, savage and even insane criminals, but also the epidemic political corruption that obstructs and directs his inquiries. The 'New Italy,' in Dibdin's creations at least, manages to operate at many co-existent levels, and the various cities to which Zen is posted always have to be decoded at least as much as the crimes they contain. The essential point of studying Dibdin here is to demonstrate exactly how misleading the simplicity of Poe's spaces really is.

The simplicity of Poe's spaces, his use of a Paris that is never once allowed to be anything but the product of single vision, derives from the extent to which his stories seem to be very much about solving the crime. Or rather about how Dupin's successes and genius are articulated by his brilliant solutions. In my reading, the text is everything in Poe's tales, and the crimes represented are everything to do with the text. This fixing of priorities occurs at the expense of the kinds of complexity seen in Dibdin's work, and ultimately means that the spaces
represented by Poe are malleable and subject to interpretation only in his (and Dupin’s) hands.

The underlying theme of Part 2 is the construction of vision in the writing of urban space, and it is singularly appropriate that crime fiction is very often about what and how the detective sees the terrain of the investigation. In many respects, too, all of the texts presented here deal with how things are brought into view, and the differences between the texts oscillate critically around that issue. The main body of the arguments that follow is primarily a review of some important features of crime fiction, together with readings of Dibdin and Poe, and the key point that emerges is a displacement of assumptions that cities can be a benign and innocent presence when involved so critically in the making of narrative. The conclusions return to Prendergast, whose book seems to me to be a deeply important critique of how the city is seen in text. And even though I’m keen to do away with distinctions between the real and the not-real, Prendergast’s Paris is, finally, the closest thing to the real city to be found here.

The structure of crime fiction proves to be extremely useful in producing a kind of exploded form of text, in which the formal relationships within the text are made emphatically clear. In the case of Poe, the Dupin stories verge on becoming exercises in formal perfection in which the skillfully constructed momentum of the narrative—getting from confusion to Dupin’s brilliant solution—seems to dictate what is to be discovered before the detective even begins looking. And significantly, the point of view of the detective is rendered as exactly that: a singular and fixed position, which by implication would like to claim to be no
place at all. In the case of Dibdin and Zen, things are rather different, largely in the sense that questions of vision and point of view are much more consciously acknowledged. Also, Zen is in many respects a subversive element, precisely because of his repeated transgressions of centralized ways of seeing, the limitations and incompleteness of which provide him with new avenues of exploration. In short, Dupin's and Zen's respective successes come from opposite ends of the same mechanisms.

Both of these detectives can speak more generally to the question of how the city is seen in text, or rather—another subtle and confusing distinction—how it is not seen, how it is anything but a simple, static presence. With this complexity in mind this section has two objectives: first, to illustrate some of the ways in which the progression of narrative can be predicated on insidious productions of space that obscure precisely the point of view from which that production originates (productions that conceal the city's strategic mobilization); and second, to demonstrate that the nuances of text carry information concerning how it is that other points of view are expressed in text.

The Structures of Crime Fiction

Fredric Jameson, writing specifically on Raymond Chandler, observes more generally that detective and mystery stories employ something of the picaresque in their narrative structure. The protagonist, professional detective or otherwise, is

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very often responsible for linking picturesque but not intrinsically related scenes to one another, so that the places in question, usually cities in one form or another, are incomprehensible in the sheer anonymity of their inhabitants, each pursuing largely separate lives. But the protagonist succeeds in bringing into alignment each of the characters involved in the surface plot. As an example, for the creator of Philip Marlowe, Jameson observes:

[A] case can be made for Chandler as a painter of American life: not as a builder of those large-scale models of the American experience which great literature offers, but rather in fragmenting pictures of setting and place, fragmentary perceptions somehow inaccessible to serious literature.9

Jameson is a little too much focused on The Great American Novel in his definition of great literature, but he nevertheless makes the important point that order in the fictional text is very often provided by the protagonist’s articulation of otherwise orderless fragments.

But in mysteries a balance must also be achieved in the protagonist’s provision of meaning, one which has interesting implications for the appearance of the city. Consider this example: the premise of a novel is that there is a missing person to be found in the city of 1930s Los Angeles. There is a detective, he’s not quite middle-aged, but he’s suitably jaded and well on his way to a state of savagely terminal bitterness. The mystery begins quite simply with the detective asked by his client, a very rich, very frail, very old man living in the unfaded splendour of a Beverly Hills mansion and sitting on a fortune of four million dollars, to find a young man who had been involved with one of his two
daughters. However, as the detective begins his search, many confusing developments arise that get in the way of and eventually supplant the initial mystery with other far less simple ones, to the extent that the reader—and, as legend has it, even the author—of the novel from which my example derives is sometimes unclear what exactly is going on.

The detective spends a great deal of his time in transit, moving from point to point in LA and encountering many different people, most of whom generate one or more of the less simple mysteries I refer to above, and very little of the novel is really spent dealing with that original mystery of the missing man. However, it should not be seen necessarily as a problem that the mysteries proliferate and become more complex. Instead it is more productive here to return to that issue of balance, particularly with regard to the rather obvious fact that once the mystery is solved, the story is over. If, in the case of my example, LA were to offer up in logical sequence the answers to the whereabouts of the missing person at every point the detective went in search of clues, then the mystery would be solved far too quickly and easily to grab and retain the reader’s attention (for convenience’s sake, let’s say this scenario is unrealistic). The extreme alternative is a state of absolute confusion in which LA remains resolutely fragmented, even to

\[\text{Ibid., p. 67.}\]
\[\text{The mystery here is of course Chandler’s first novel, The Big Sleep (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, in association with H Hamilton, 1948), possessed of a plot so confusing that when making the first and best film version of the story, director Howard Hawks and star Humphrey Bogart couldn’t agree on the identity of the body found in a submerged Buick towards the end of the tale. The alcohol they had consumed during their debate prompted them to ignore the late hour and call Chandler at his home to find out the answer to their puzzle. Fortunately he too was awake, and drunk enough not to mind the disturbance, and remarkably unapologetic when it was revealed that even he had no idea what the answer to their question might be.}\]

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the detective, refusing to divulge clues with any predetermined logic, and
ultimately preventing the mystery from ever being solved (this scenario might be
said to be realistic). Somewhere in between these polar opposites lies a territory in
which clues are divulged and cases solved with just the right balance of confusion
and logic. Or to put it another way, somewhere between reality and unreality the
city is just perplexing enough to be convincing, just logical enough to be
satisfying.

In a purely formal sense, the narrative of a mystery story is all about getting
to the solution. And the formal requirements of the mystery story would be very
easily satisfied were it not necessary to make the story entertaining, intriguing and
stimulating, for it is precisely the entertaining components of mystery stories that
get in the way of their formal structure. Robert Champigny's *What Will Have
Happened* alludes to this near contradiction in its title: his book is concerned
with the extent to which narratives in crime fiction are generally about locating the
explanation for something that happens at the very beginning of the story or even
before the story has begun (the figure discovered stabbed, his blood staining the
rich, deep carpet of the drawing room of an English country house, for instance).
The denouement is always in sight in the sense that the author of crime fiction
usually begins the tale knowing what will happen at the end (which, confusingly, is
also the beginning).

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11 Robert Champigny, *What Will Have Happened: A philosophical and technical essay on mystery
Tzetvan Todorov aids in the explanation of Champigny’s dissection of mysteries. He identifies in detective fiction—or at least in the formal ‘whodunit’—two stories: that of the crime and that of the investigation. The crime is absent from the narrative in the sense that it precedes the ‘what will have happened’ of the main body of the narrative, and the investigation has no intrinsic importance except to mediate between the reader and the story of the crime. Todorov relates the inherent separation within the narrative to Victor Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists’ distinction between ‘story’ and ‘plot,’ and goes on to illustrate the extreme significance of the ‘plot’ or investigation’s self-awareness. Martin Priestman helps in explaining this significance as an aside to his discussion of Oedipus and Aristotle:

Todorov draws attention to the second story’s conscious awareness of itself, through the device of the ‘Watson’ or by other means, as a book: an awareness denied to the first story, which purports to be ‘life.’ It is in the rigour with which it maintains the division that the detective story is defined: existing at the level of the book, which is also that of the reader, the detective is inactive and invulnerable; the criminal is active but vulnerable because of his unconsciousness of the presence of the book.

This self-awareness does not mean that the detective is literally written as if he or she recognizes his or her own fictional identity; instead, even if the story is not being told as if it has already happened, the reader operates at a level which

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13 Martin Priestman, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The figure on the carpet* (London: Macmillan, 1990). Priestman traces the (Western) origins of detective fiction all the way back to the story of Oedipus, who as it happens presents a somewhat twisted introduction to the separation between story and plot in more modern examples of the genre. Part of Oedipus’s problem, Priestman observes, is that he fits into too many of crime fiction’s categories, being simultaneously detective, victim and criminal. In the modern detective story, such overlap—presumably because of its potential to corrupt the fluid movement of the narrative—is never permitted.
assumes a given 'technicality' to the mystery's structure, a technicality within which
the criminal operates. The detective is to a great extent part of the pre-existing
structure, which explains his or her fundamental invulnerability to the 'story.'
Again, Priestman provides useful analysis:

This separation of functions ensures that especially where a series is involved, no emotional
problems attach to the figure of the detective, who is none the less clearly the protagonist. The
two other figures who might concentrate feeling round themselves, the victim and the criminal,
are drained of any such significance because we only become aware of them posthumously:
the victim because he or she has died at the beginning of the book, and the criminal because
his or her true identity is only revealed at the end.¹⁵

Todorov's formal breakdown of the mystery plot is seemingly—and
intentionally—more applicable to the equally formal whodunit than to the
'realism' of mystery fiction in which the narrative suggests the plot to be unfolding
before the detective and synchronous to the reader's consumption of the text. It is
made entirely obvious, for example, that the narrator of Poe's Dupin stories is
recounting events that have happened in the past, just as Dr. Watson records and
textually recounts to his audience the exploits of Sherlock Holmes. But the contrast
between tales hermeneutic and otherwise is far less pronounced than an
apparently fundamental difference in the method of the telling of events might
suggest. Even if Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, or for that matter Aurelio Zen,
operate in some piecemeal version of 'real time,' their targets (the criminal(s) and
the solution) have already established the essential 'story' and performed their
essential function. Even if the targets escape discovery, they will have spent the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 20.
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 18.
duration of the novel waiting for precisely this escape. Just like Jameson said, it turns out not to be real, sequential time at all, but a process of strategic linking.

Dennis Porter’s *The Pursuit of Crime*\(^{16}\) is concerned primarily with detective fiction. However, that primary concern should not be understood entirely to limit the applicable range of his ideas. Part 2, “Background Construction and the Art of Suspense,”\(^{17}\) identifies in the detective novel features that are essentially amplified or extreme versions of more general attributes of conventional prose narrative. Like Champigny, Porter illustrates the seemingly unusual position of the denouement, whereby the end is always in the author’s sight and “determines the order and causality of events narrated from the beginning.”\(^{18}\) However, unlike Champigny—who figures more of an absolute distinction between hermeneutic and mimetic forms of fiction—Porter observes the very same regressive and progressive tensions in operation whether or not there is a crime to be solved. That is, the point of the detective novel is, crudely, to get to the end and find out what will have happened, but its ‘other’ point is also to produce text in between which will stimulate, intrigue and entertain the reader. The distinction, one that only needs making for the sake of convenience here, between detective novels and literature is, following Porter, merely that the delaying strategies of narrative are clearly centred on a tightly packed something in detective novels (the crime or crimes), whereas in literature more widely these strategies are more diversely buried in a wider range of somethings.

Commonly understood to be deduction, the methods of the detective are in truth no such thing when the implications of the backwards movement of narrative are considered. Loisa Nygaard, in her essay on Poe’s 1841 detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,”\textsuperscript{19} observes that the reasoning of the detective, Dupin, is inductive in the sense that “[he] proceeds backwards from the crime itself, from the confused evidence of the witnesses and the mutilated bodies in the Rue Morgue, to try to reconstruct what had occurred.”\textsuperscript{20} The police in Poe’s tale employ a cruder form of induction in which the solution to a crime comes only from an accumulated knowledge of past events, prior instances of similar kinds of happenings. Nygaard refers here to Bertrand Russell’s rather skeptical take on induction, in which Russell noted that the assumption that the sun will rise tomorrow merely because it has always done so is scarcely more sophisticated than the reasonings of the average domestic animal: “The man who has fed the chicken every day throughout its life at last wrings its neck instead, showing that more refined views as to the uniformity of nature would have been useful to the chicken.”\textsuperscript{21}

But Poe’s strategy, according to Nygaard, is to present the brilliant imaginative leaps that characterise Dupin’s detection as merely clothed “in the forms of reasoning accepted in his day, that is, in the conventions of inductive and deductive logic. His use of these modes is not necessarily instrumental in any way

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 24-52.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 24.  
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 231.
to his solution to the crime but rather seems to be part of a performance that, to judge from its subsequent effects on readers, has been stunningly successful.”22 In the case of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ Nygaard provides a detailed breakdown of the extent to which Dupin’s detection does not necessarily lead to the solution eventually presented (discussed in detail in the following section) if the laws of inductive reasoning to which Dupin claims to adhere are followed; the solution is only made to seem to be the only possible truth. The detective, you see, doesn’t have to adhere to quite the same laws of believability as the rest of us, and his or her advantage is precisely derived from the surveying vantage point provided by the boundaries of the text, which position analysis at the opposite end from that suggested by the story.

The structure of mysteries within the crime and detective fiction genre23 is not, then, particularly complex, relying on nothing more than a carefully judged and measured balance between those rigidly defined categories of story and plot—which, by the way, remain rigid only for the strategic purposes of this section. And the success of the balance is directly related to the sophistication of the narrator’s presence in the text, as outlined by Todorov. But it gets more interesting and geographically relevant when it is remembered that both formal

23 A structuralist reading of genres of fiction identifies the very existence of a genre after the classical period as precluding the possibility of a crossover between its works—which became, then, ‘popular literature’ by definition—and ‘real’ literature. “As a rule, the literary masterpiece does not enter any genre save perhaps its own; but the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre” (Todorov, Poetics of Prose, p. 43). And specifically in the case of detective fiction: ‘Detective fiction has its norms; to ‘develop’ them is also to disappoint them: to ‘improve upon’ detective fiction is to write “literature,” not detective fiction’ (Ibid., p. 43).
categories cannot genuinely be distinct if the story is to be one of reality, or even more specifically if it is about ‘the city’ and the city. The difficulty found in the successful writing of places comes, I think, very much from failing to consider the textual intricacies of exactly how it is their stories are and have been told.

Thinking Through the City

The mysteries contained in Poe’s series of three Dupin stories are solved within the confines of their hero’s intellect, itself comfortably ensconced in a small but comprehensive library in a vaguely articulated version of nineteenth-century Paris. And the relationship between intellect and solution here is such that it is possible, indeed logical, to identify crime, indirectly, as the product of the great C. Auguste Dupin’s ratiocinative abilities. Catherine Creswell’s essay on this topic is particularly revealing and pointed in its analysis of the extent to which the claimed dominance of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”’s “philosophical concerns” is confused and overwhelmed by the disturbing function performed in the tale by crime, and more specifically by the brutal murder of women.

The murders themselves, brutally obscene in the manner of their perpetration, are unsettling in more ways than one. They feature virtual decapitation, throttling, mauling, tearing out of hair, inhuman, savage force.

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25 Ibid., p. 39.
Worse than the exacting and gruesome description of the crime, though, its formal origin and function. The crimes are designed, in my reading of Poe, as mere entertaining distraction, like the assistant disguising the mechanics of the magician's illusions: when the gaze returns to the magician, something apparently impossible has happened, but however impossible it has happened. In the case of Poe, the mechanics and the illusion are to do with the workings of his texts, the structures of crime fiction set out in the previous section. The fact of the story coming after the plot, the structures of the text coming before its content, results in Poe in an entirely aesthetic treatment of the events that unfold. The crafting of what is represented in text is expected to be an art form in literature, isn't that its point? But in crime fiction, the concentration of the regressive and progressive dynamic of narrative on the crime and its solution perhaps means more elaborate strategies are required to conceal the already solved solution.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" introduces Poe's character, Dupin, who solves the seemingly impossible and unsolvable crime of the murder of two women whose corpses are found in their modest fourth-floor apartment (locked, from the inside of course, its windows apparently nailed shut). The apartment contains 4,000 Francs in gold, and other things of value, all of which are not hidden but have for some reason escaped the interest of the criminal. In short, there is a lack of reason and logic to the crime, and little evidence to aid its official investigation, conducted in the main by Dupin's intellectual inferiors, the police led by their dull and foolish Prefect, Monsieur G—. Witnesses noticed only aural clues, each testifying that they heard two men, one babbling in a strange,
high-pitched foreign language, one exclaiming simply, “sacre,” “diable,” and “mon Dieu”; none, though, can agree on the mysterious language, identifying the tongue as, among others, Russian, English and German, and the seemingly random, inhuman brutality of the crime is inconsistent with the apparent intelligence with which its tracks have been covered.

It requires Dupin’s particularly lateral brand of reasoning to uncover the real murderer who turns out not to be human at all but instead an orang-utan captured in Borneo by a French sailor. With the intention of selling the creature, the sailor smuggled it back to Paris and locked it in a closet in his apartment, disciplining it when necessary with a whip. Returning home one evening, the sailor finds that the orang-utan has broken open its closet-prison and is brandishing a razor and attempting to shave its face. Alarmed at the image of such a strong and aggressive animal in possession of a sharp blade, the sailor reaches for his whip, startling his captive and causing it to flee from the apartment, through an open window and onto the street. The orang-utan, with the sailor in close pursuit, finally enters the apartment of Madame L’Espanaye in the Rue Morgue, slashing her throat with the razor and mauling and strangling her daughter, Mademoiselle Camille L’Espanaye, before forcing her corpse up the chimney of the apartment’s fireplace. The sailor, having observed this scene as he hangs from the lightning rod on the wall of the apartment building, panics and flees the scene, leaving the orang-utan to escape alone into the streets of Paris. Quite plainly, “The Murders

26 The statements of the witnesses are presented to Dupin in the local paper, the Gazette des Tribunaux. Ten witnesses are named, each of whom makes some reference to the gruff epithets
in the Rue Morgue" is not an entirely realistic or convincing story—how, for instance, does one go about transporting a rather unpredictable orang-utan several thousand miles without detection?—which perhaps makes Dupin's affectation of consummate intellectual superiority in his solving of the crime unfair, to say the very least.

But the question of the believability or realism of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is much more than a redundant argument concerning how effective Poe was at constructing plots. Returning to Creswell, what is most important here is the degree to which the orang-utan's savage behaviour, and its concealment, is nothing more than an excuse for the display of Dupin's intelligence. Hardly surprising in a detective story, one might think, that there is something more than a little strategic in the appearance of crime, because without it the story would not be possible; but the issue is not limited to the obviousness of the reasons for the appearance of crime. It brings us back to the relevance of the mystery's form and structure, and in particular the overwhelming in Poe of the system of logic by the aesthetics of interpretation, by the appearance of crime fiction in general:

As "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" will attest, not in detection nor experimentation but in artifice and gamesmanship will ratiocination find an apt analogy. Just as the analytic, and not the ingenious, is termed the closest to the genius of imagination, the constant variation of draughts, and not the 'elaborate frivolity of chess,' best tests the analyst's acumen.27

Creswell continues her discussion to illustrate the extent to which truth is not uncovered by Dupin's ingenuity so much as it is created "by the higher

uttered by an unseen Frenchman, as well as to the apparently foreign, shrill voice of another.

imaginative powers of analysis,\textsuperscript{28} analytic ability here being akin to high art, and ingenuity merely "crude reproduction."\textsuperscript{29} And if analysis is nothing more than the flip side of imagination, "where to analyze and to read is to create [and] murderers and those who detect them participate in the same game [then] the detection of true causes is impeded by the very efforts to imaginatively project and decipher."\textsuperscript{30}

Dupin's solution to the crime, based in the main on discoveries of clues so impossible to detect, only he could have done so, derives from his noticing that one of the windows of the Rue Morgue apartment is not nailed shut at all, but instead contains only the head of a sheared nail; from a scrap of the orang-utan's hair and a sailor's ribbon, each of which the genius almost immediately associates with its owner (apparently the ribbon is tied in a knot peculiar to sailors on Maltese vessels, and so Dupin is able to narrow down the sailor's identity); and from his setting of a trap for the sailor (enticing him with a newspaper advertisement seeking the owner of a lost orang-utan\textsuperscript{31}), to which his victim duly responds. Creswell suggests that the reason for the excruciating contrivances of these clues is nothing more than the need for display of Dupin's unique ability to discover and interpret them. Even more significantly, the methods by which

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 42, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 48.
\textsuperscript{31} The newspaper advertisement is perhaps the turning point at which the reader really begins to question the believability of Dupin's methods, particularly since the passage in which the narrator describes Dupin's explanation of his logic ends with the guilty sailor quite literally called into print by the detective. When Dupin finishes his account of the trap he has set, the sailor's footsteps are heard approaching Dupin's door, and his capture completes the mystery's solution.
Creswell tracks down the strategies of Poe and Dupin are exactly to do with the importance of looking for the construction of Dupin's position.

Just as Nygaard reads the methods of Dupin as designed only to seem to have been right via the disguising of other possibilities, I think Creswell is observing just how much of the writing of Dupin is to do with making his vision 'innocent' by means of various strategic manipulations of the crimes he detects. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" becomes, then, an aesthetic object, the general appearance of which is vastly more important than the detail of what makes up that appearance. It is of course deeply relevant that analyzing the detail is exactly what reveals the most telling clues as to Dupin's and Poe's textual whereabouts.

Significantly, the most academically infamous of Poe's stories, "The Purloined Letter," takes the trends of the first Dupin story a step further, personifying the ability of the detective to think out the strategies of the criminal to the extent that there develops a striking similarity between criminal and detective, between the partially anonymous Minister D— and Dupin himself. The plot of "The Purloined Letter" is extremely simple. It concerns a letter stolen by the Minister from a person whose importance is so described as to make her identity as the Queen almost certain, and being used by D— as the lever for some particularly insistent blackmail. Monsieur G— (yes, those deliberately incomplete names and partially obscured identities are significant), the hapless Prefect of the Paris police, comes to Dupin in desperation, unable to solve the crime and mindful of Dupin's success in solving the Rue Morgue murders. The Queen has informed him of the identity of the perpetrator of the theft but despite several
increasingly exhaustive searches of the Minister's hôtel and bodily searches of the culprit the letter is nowhere to be found, and by the time he gets to Dupin, G—has resigned himself to the certainty that the letter must be somewhere else entirely.

Dupin's reasoning, though, is that the Minister—far more equal an adversary than the ignorant sailor and his orang-utan—will require the letter to be close by if he is to be able to guarantee its security and access its contents for the purposes of his blackmail, and with this in mind it takes him surprisingly little time to come to an exact conclusion as to where the letter is located. His reasoning is that the Prefect and his officers have little understanding of the importance of their adversary's character and intelligence and thus carry out their many searches with an entirely inappropriate system of logic (i.e. their own). They forget that the Minister is sure to have anticipated their methods and acted outside of them: it would not matter how incredibly elaborate a concealed hiding place D—might dream up, even the police would be sure, eventually, to discover it. So the letter turns out to be in "a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece"\(^{32}\) in D—'s hôtel, invisible and quite literally in plain view of all. The letter has been turned inside out and thinly disguised with the Minister's seal, but that is far less important than the substantial imaginative leap required for a searcher to discover the object of this particular search.

Dupin is almost as impressed by the Minister’s cunning as he is by his own
superiority in solving the puzzle, but on closer inspection Dupin’s solution can be
identified as being rather more connected to the Minister’s appearance as nothing
more than Dupin’s double. Dupin makes no secret of the extent to which he
despises the mediocrity of the Paris police, the Prefect in particular, and both he
and the shadowy Minister are constructed as representative of everything the
police are not. And to a certain extent each requires the other’s existence for his
own personality to be complete, the revelation of the exact structure of the crime
and the parallel structure and scope of Dupin’s intelligence being simultaneous:

I knew [the Minister D—], however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were
adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I
knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intriguant*. Such a man, I considered, could not fail
to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—
and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was
subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises....I felt,
also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now,
concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt
that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister....You
will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first
interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so
very self-evident.33

Moreover, Liahna Babener’s discussion of what she refers to as “The Motive of the
Double”34 observes many clues not only to the similarities between Dupin and D—
but also to their literal performance of two sides of the same identity. Dupin, for

33 Ibid., pp. 218-9, original emphasis.
34 Liahna Babener, “The Shadow’s Shadow: The motif of the double in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The
Purloined Letter,”” in Muller and Richardson, op. cit., pp. 323-34.
instance, is only ever depicted as going out of his apartment at night; the Minister leaves his hôtel only during the day:

It is almost as if the two participate co-operatively in some sort of phased existence and one half of the twosome ceases to exist after nightfall. It is notable that the Minister’s presence in the tale is related only by hearsay....There is some implication that D— may not exist as a separate, independent being at all. D— figures immediately in only one episode of the plot, and that is reported, after the fact, solely by Dupin. Dupin’s account of the meeting is sketchy and suspiciously vague. No dialogue is recorded; for that matter, we are never made to hear any verbatim statement by D—.  

Perhaps Dupin’s cases are a figment of his imagination, except that he is not the narrator; his stories are presented as the recollections of the companion who visits him in his library. The narrator is even a witness when the Prefect comes to Dupin seeking help, so something else must explain the doubling and the reversing of interpretation. That something else, I think, is very simply to do almost with an over-enthusiasm in the writing of "Poe’s Detective God," which makes his solutions to the crimes seem too brilliant, too improbable, too difficult to prevent, for example, Creswell’s reading of the aesthetics of interpretation and Babener’s revelation of the deeply significant links between Dupin and his adversary. And of course, seem is entirely the right word if one thinks back to Nygaard whose reading of Dupin locates the detective’s brilliance mostly in his ability to ‘deceive’ Poe’s readers into not noticing how the position of the detective really operates.

37 Many have observed this possible significance of Dupin’s name. For example, see L. A. Renza, (1985) “Poe’s Secret Autobiography: selected papers from the English Institute, 1982-83,” in W. B. Michaels and D. E. Pease (eds) The American Renaissance Reconsidered (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) pp. 58-89. Also see D. Ketterer, The Rationale of Deception in Poe (Baton-
But although the Dupin stories might appear a little too circular in their contrivances, they merely exaggerate the features of crime fiction variously described by Champigny and Porter, presenting its 'ideal type.' Which, in turn, relates to the strategic adaptation of crime fiction to the need to balance story and plot. What is critical, too, is the space produced by the formal structure of prose narrative for the display and exploration of themes not fundamentally related to the subjective qualities of a story. Nineteenth-century Paris is perhaps only important in the Dupin stories in that it is a sufficiently intellectual and politicized arena for the strategic appearance of crimes detached entirely from the general operations of social life, but what is of more interest to me is the extent to which the boundaries of the text, marked by the formal structure of the plot, are instrumental in determining the specific content of the text, determining the possibility of the solutions Dupin sees.

In the case of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter,” the important and relevant component of the plot to consider is of course Dupin himself. It is, quite literally, his line of sight that determines and arranges the story, deciding who killed Mme. Espanaye and her daughter, who stole the letter, and...

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Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), who notes in a similar context, that Dupin’s initials spell ‘CAD,’ and that Poe’s writings are well known for their predilection for such self-conscious allusion.

See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995). Significant here is Foucault’s analysis of the shift from the moralizing ‘true crime’ reports of the *Newgate Calendar* to the modern detective story, of which Poe, with the 1841 publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” is considered to be the founder. Foucault identifies the detective story, a form in which the end is traditionally the criminal’s capture, not his or her punishment, as part of a gradual process of concealing the violence of the state against its citizens, and hiding things away in general. It is preferable, too, to render crime and violence outside of society, and how better to achieve this end than through the notion of the brilliantly psychotic criminal captured by the superior genius of the lone detective?
more importantly how the letter completes its journey back to its owner, the Queen.\footnote{The most relevant component of the prolonged, complex and indirect debate between Lacan and Derrida over the meaning of “The Purloined Letter” relates directly to this question of the letter’s journey from beginning to end. Lacan’s seminar, delivered in 1966, raises the significance of the origins of the verb ‘to purloin’ in pro-loing/loinger/longe—meaning roughly to postpone or put aside—in terms of the notion of ‘the letter in sufferance’ that always reaches its destination. Here, the function of the letter is solely to complete its journey, necessarily interrupted but not permanently halted by its lengthy residence in the Minister’s hôtel. Similarly, the characters of Dupin, the Minister, the Queen, the Prefect, and Lacan himself assume a sequence of roles. The sequence begins with the King—whose presence is never entirely articulated in the story—adopting the role of ‘blind’ personage, the Queen as the unaware seer and the Minister as robber. The King’s obliviousness to the letter’s existence makes him blind to the dynamic of its theft; the Queen’s certainty as to the King’s blindness makes her oblivious to the possibility of being seen; which moves us to the third role, in which the Minister capitalizes on the exposure of the letter the Queen believes to be unseen. By contrast, Derrida’s analysis of the letter is that it is defined by the very possibility of it not completing this journey, thereby throwing some uncertainty into the process of tracking the desiring unconscious mind (cf. Muller and Richardson). } Poe’s writing of Dupin’s line of sight is particularly interesting in its evident desire to exemplify the genius of the detective, something that is achieved by making his solutions not only singularly correct, but also difficult to look for. It isn’t exactly the point that Dupin’s cases aren’t really as watertight as they might first seem; instead, the significance of Dupin’s position in the text, and its relationship to the territories depicted therein, is that all the subjectivities within the text are rendered meaningless outside of a very specific and contrived historical context, in which the scene of the crime has, so to speak, already been seen.

The explicit narration of the stories as past events reinforces Dupin’s invulnerable position, located as he is in the formal boundaries of the plot, from which vantage point he is never subject to the influences of the qualities of the story, but rather producing of them. But of course, being above, before and outside of the text, only means it seems like there’s nothing else to see...
Zen walked down to the grim bulk of the Castel Nuovo, crossed the wide boulevard which ran along the seafront and waited at the tram stop opposite. It was theoretically possible to take a bus from his home to the port, changing in Piazza Municipio, but given the vagaries of the city’s public transport system Zen preferred to use the funicular and trams and walk the rest. Bus stops in Naples were purely notional markers which could be, and frequently were, moved without warning, and which in any case provided no guarantee that a given service would ever appear. But if a track existed, Zen reasoned, sooner or later something was bound to come along it.40

Aurelio Zen is considerably more adventurous than C. Auguste Dupin when it comes to moving from place to place, and he certainly sees things his more scholarly companion might have trouble even imagining. From relatively humble beginnings, Zen rises to the dizzying heights of Rome’s elite Criminalpol force, travelling to, among other locations, Naples,41 Perugia,42 Piemonte,43 Sardinia,44 and briefly returning to his home city of Venice in Dead Lagoon. His career hardly follows a steady trajectory—early on in the series he is consigned to administrative duties in Rome, and later he transfers himself to Naples in disgrace, moving sideways in rank but effectively demoted—but he usually seems to recover from bouts of stasis or backward movement and find his way upward through the system.

It is perhaps a little unfair to make anything of the differences between Dupin and Zen when their respective roles and contexts are resolutely not alike, just as the previously registered presence of Prendergast’s Paris doesn’t exactly fit.

40 Dibdin, Così Fan Tutti, p. 12.
41 Ibid.
Reading out of context, though, turns out to be a strikingly appropriate means of understanding how it is that points of view and lines of sight are constructed in narrative. In particular there is that previously mentioned notion that Zen and Dupin are operating at opposite ends of a similar set of power relations. The less privileged—and consequently more devious—access to meaning afforded to Zen fits with the discussion of Poe because it illustrates what is left out, or rather how things are left out, when the text attempts centralized control of what the reader sees.

All of the Zen novels provide a wealth of material for a detailed commentary on the protagonist’s attempts to deal with the failure of the city spaces he traverses to match up with official ideas of those same spaces. The New Italy as figured by Dibdin is presented as a carefully managed exercise in public relations, the immense bureaucratic machine, riddled with institutionalized corruption, focusing not so much on changing how things get done as merely behaving as if things really are different than they used to be. Of course, things are different precisely because of this shift in thinking, but things aren’t different in exactly the way they’re supposed to be.

But out of all the novels, most can be drawn from two in particular: Dead Lagoon, in which Zen returns to Venice after many years away, and Così Fan Tutti, in which Lorenzo da Ponte’s libretto for Mozart’s opera of 1790, Così fan tutte, is used by Dibdin to structure the chaos that ensues when Zen requests transfer.

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from Rome to Naples in unfair disgrace. The city is certainly a presence in both texts, the operatic rendering of Naples providing a brightly parodic contrast to the streets and waterways of Venice and the Laguna Morta, claustrophobic in their familiarity to Zen and simultaneously terrifying in their subtle, alien contrasts to the city he knew as a child. That invasion of the personal is another facet to be dealt with: conspicuous largely by its absence in the Dupin stories, the reader of Dibdin is made painfully aware that Zen’s frequent professional failures and humiliations are hardly matched by a successful private life.

Aurelio Zen, as might be gathered, is a complex character, and it is in part true that the formal success of the Dupin stories is dependent on an absence of such complexity in their protagonist (apologies here to those who favour Lacan’s reading of “The Purloined Letter”). In Dead Lagoon, the use of Venice as the primary setting for Zen’s attempts to determine the whereabouts of missing businessman Ivan Durridge brings about a series of events which highlight the significance of acknowledging that the mysteries in crime fiction are often at least as much to do with the detective as they are related to the crimes to be solved. More importantly, though, the mysteries in the Zen novels say a great deal about the complexity of points of view in urban space, and how pre-emptive framings of that space are inherently flawed and partial.

45 Lorenzo da Ponte, Cosi Fan Tutte = Women are like that: An opera in two parts (New York: G. Schirmer, 1952).

46 There are some exceptions to the ‘blank’ rendering of Dupin, most notably the relationship between Dupin and the Minister that is alluded to in “The Purloined Letter.” It is made clear that Dupin’s evident glee at his defeat of the Minister’s cunning is due at least in part to some great, unspoken wrong done to him by the Minister in the past. Nevertheless, the exact nature of the wrong is left conveniently unexplained.
Dead Lagoon begins with Zen’s return to his home city of Venice. He is employed here only superficially as a policeman, having arranged a temporary transfer from Rome so that he can carry out a private investigation into the disappearance of Durridge, who had been living on a private island in Venice’s Laguna Morta (Dead Lagoon). What Zen finds when he gets there is that Venice has become threatening and alien not exactly because it has become a different city and not exactly because Zen himself has become a different person, but rather as a result of an indecipherable combination of both of those things.

Zen’s excuse for being in Venice is to investigate the prolonged and terrifying harassment of Ada Zulian, known locally as la contessa and for whom Zen’s mother had been employed as a cleaner many decades previously. Zulian has been in and out of mental institutions for much of her life, ever since the still-unsolved mystery of the wartime disappearance of her daughter, Rosetta. When Zen reads of Zulian’s repeated complaints to the local police about mysterious and unseen (by anyone other than Zulian) intruders in her home, he determines that the case is just obscure enough to make his transfer from Rome simultaneously believable and uncontroversial (the implication is that people of influence forcing the investigation of unimportant crimes is hardly unusual or unexpected).

Uncontroversial hardly describes Zen’s attempts to involve himself in the Durridge case, though, and Zen is most notably brought into conflict with the Nuova Repubblica Veneta (New Venetian Republic), a new political party whose policies appear to be a particularly reactionary combination of romantic
invocations of the need for a collective challenge to the impending cultural and
economic death of Venice and outright fascism. The association of their leader,
Ferdinando dal Maschio, with the recently redefined Republic of Croatia has led
him to be persuaded to aid in the capture of Ivan Durridge for horrific war crimes
committed a few years before in Sarajevo. Durridge, or Duric as he is really
called, was to be kidnapped and transported to Croatia with the aid of Dal
Maschio's private helicopter charter company, but he falls or is pushed to his
death when the helicopter is over an uninhabited island in the lagoon. It's never
exactly clear what did happen to Durridge / Duric except that Dal Maschio is
involved, and as with all of the other Zen stories the technical and moral
ambiguity of the central crime is hardly the point.

What comes closest to being the central point is instead Zen's transition
from initial bewilderment at the familiarity of his home city, to a growing
confidence in the resurgent strength of his ties to Venice, to a realization that
perhaps Venice is a city he no longer knows at all. Repelled by the disturbingly
empty rhetoric of the Nuova Repubblica Veneta, Zen finds his attempts to pin
down the involvement of the smooth charlatan Dal Maschio with a number of
illicit activities creates an intense and bitter resentment of his presence. The deaths
of a corrupt policeman (tortured and murdered shortly before Zen had been due
to reveal his association with a drug gang) and of Tomasso Saoner, childhood
friend of Zen and new right hand man of Dal Maschio (who drowns himself after
Zen psychologically tortures him with revelations of Dal Maschio's corruption and,
more cruelly, false stories of his manipulative contempt for Saoner) are to a certain extent the result of Zen’s presence in Venice.

The transition from Zen’s all-too-brief confidence in Venice to the time it becomes finally alien is marked by professional and personal failures at ever turn: Zen’s attempts to help Ada Zulian backfire when he succeeds in capturing the men who really are harassing her and they turn out to be her nephews, determined to scare their aunt back into an asylum so that they can then appropriate and sell a valuable piece of land she owns. Zulian chooses to believe, officially at least, that her nephews were only playing practical jokes on her, forcing Zen to drop the charges he has laid against them. Secure in the knowledge that her nephews will behave themselves from now on (if they don’t, one call to the police will cause Zen’s original charges to be reinstated), Ada Zulian cares little that Zen is left looking incompetent with the collapse of his case; Zen’s affair with Dal Maschio’s estranged wife, Cristiana Morosini, has Zen falling in love and vowing to remake his home in Venice, only to discover that Dal Maschio has been using Cristiana all along in order to spy on Zen; and the Venice Chief of Police finally decides that the present and future power of Dal Maschio far outweighs any obligation he has to fulfil every suspicious whim of an increasingly annoying and embarrassing Criminalpol officer, leading him to force Zen off the Durridge case and out of Venice. In the end, Zen realizes this city he thought he knew better than any other has merely been playing clever tricks of familiarity, and his presence has never been welcome at all. The novel’s closing lines are particularly telling:
A middle-aged couple, oddly but neatly dressed, stood beaming at Zen. The man said something incomprehensible. Zen shrugged and shook his head. The man repeated the phrase more slowly, pointing to a map in the guidebook he was holding. Zen understood only that he was asking directions to somewhere in English. He closed his eyes and tried to summon up a few words in that language:

'I'm sorry,' he replied with an apologetic smile. 'I'm a stranger here myself.'

Dead Lagoon is most clearly different from the other Zen novels in that Zen returns to Venice with a growing sense of confidence in his ability to enact a kind of personal control over the city's spaces. In the other tales, the dominant system of control is always acknowledged to be one or both of two alternatives: the bureaucracy of the state and the (slightly) less formal infrastructures of organized crime, neither of which ever turns out to be particularly distinct from the other. This is not to say that elsewhere Zen refuses to offer any kind of challenge to existing networks of power, but it is only in Dead Lagoon that he makes a conscious separation between 'sectors' of the city (and how those sectors are singularly controlled), temporarily believing 'his' Venice to be distinct and distinguishable from more typically prevalent versions. That separation proves to be his most critical error, and in the end it is what undermines his position and produces abject failure.

By contrast, Così Fan Tutti sees Zen attempting to make the most of his passive role in official readings of the city, in this case Naples. The novel begins some time after Zen has been transferred from Rome and he is nicely settled in his undemanding—albeit professionally limiting—position with the Port Authorities. For once, rather than disrupt established and corrupt norms, he's content to take

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47 Dibdin, Dead Lagoon, p. 354.
advantage of ‘the way things work,’ contriving to do as little work as possible and focusing instead on side projects, the most interesting of which turns out to be quite closely related to that nearly eponymous libretto.

Da Ponte’s story is that of Ferrando and Guglielmo, two Neapolitan soldiers who are, respectively, engaged to the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella. Don Alfonso, a rather cynical and jaded character, dares the men to put their lovers to the test, believing in the fundamentally untrustworthy nature of women (cosi fan tutte is roughly and misogynistically translatable as ‘all women behave like this’). Provoked by Alfonso, the soldiers pretend to have been called back to Naples on duty and then ‘return,’ disguised as two Albanian noblemen. Don Alfonso and the sisters’ maid Despina convince the women to welcome the two apparent strangers, and eventually the four become betrothed.

In order to reveal the success of his scheme, Alfonso publicly announces the return of the Neapolitan forces, forcing the ‘return’ of Ferrando and Guglielmo, the confessions of Fiordiligi and Dorabella, and contrary to his expectations a happy reunion.

Dibdin’s novel, in part, tells the same story, except that this time, superficially at least, it is the integrity of the male characters that is called in to question. The sisters Filomena and Orestina are engaged, respectively, to Sabatino and Gesualdo, seemingly a pair of small-time Mafiosi, but the sisters’ mother, Valeria Squillace, views the proposed unions with horror. On the advice of Aurelio Zen, whom Signora Squillace meets at a party and as a consequence of slight deafness in one ear thinks to be called Alfonso Zembla, a trap is set for the
unsuitable suitors closely resembling that played out in Cosi fan tutte. Zen persuades Valeria to send the sisters on a trip to London and in their absence introduces Sabatino and Gesualdo to two prostitutes whom he has paid to impersonate newly arrived Albanian immigrants.

It all turns out to be considerably more complex than Mozart or Da Ponte might ever have imagined when, at the end, with the return from London of Orestina and Filomena, much unexpected detail is revealed: Sabatino and Gesualdo are not criminals but undercover policemen; Iolanda, the ‘Albanian’ with whom Gesualdo pairs, turns out to be a transvestite (which does nothing to alter Gesualdo’s attraction); and Orestina adapts rather too successfully to London’s body-piercing and tattooing punk rock scene, so much so that she is all but disowned by her mother and returns to London in self-righteous disgrace. Zen, in his capacity as the Don Alfonso character, discovers that Naples and the characters it contains are much harder to read than he ever imagined, and this is also true of his allegedly more professional activities as commander of the harbour detail of the Naples police force. Unlike his misreading of Venice, though, Zen’s obliviousness to the complexity of Naples has certain positive results.

Zen has been transferred to Naples from his prestigious position in Rome’s Criminalpol after a previous investigation dug too deeply into Venetian corruption (the transfer to Naples is Zen’s voluntary compromise to avoid a “punishment
posting" to Sicily). Adapting a little too well to the ‘relaxed’ pace of his new office, Zen allows a reasonably innocent case of software smuggling to spiral out of control and involve him with the activities of what seems to be a terrorist vigilante group, known as Strade Pulite (Clean Streets) and responsible for the murder of several known criminals. Strade Pulite turns out to be nothing more than a front for one of many ongoing wars between Naples’s various organized crime factions, and Zen’s accidental, blundering discovery of this destroys the case Sabatino and Gesualdo had been building against those involved. Much to their chagrin, Zen emerges, officially, as a hero, swept along by the Naples Chief of Police’s desire to claim success in destroying a large part of the city’s underworld. Zen finds himself advantageously trapped between the official and the unofficial, perpetually tricked by things not being exactly as they seem.

Most significantly of all, Zen’s superiors, those who attempt (usually successfully) to wield the unspoken forms of centralized control, become victims of the public self-aggrandizement of the Naples police chief. Declaring Zen to be a hero for breaking the case, the chief insists that Zen had been in Naples as an undercover agent of Criminalpol all along, with the express purpose of solving the Strade Pulite case. In short, Zen becomes a hero entirely along the lines

49 Zen’s ignominious voluntary demotion leaves him rather less than rigorously committed to his new position, and he seeks to turn his job at the Port Authority into an extended—if at first unwanted—vacation: “And he was in no hurry. Quite the contrary! For the first time in his career, Aurelio Zen was his own boss, to the extent that anyone ever could be in the police force. If he came in late and left early, or even failed to show up at all, the only way he could be found out was if one of his own staff snitched on him. And he had been at great pains to ensure that they had a vested interest in making sure that this never occurred” (Ibid., p. 12).

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established by the hidden faces wielding the real power. That he does so by accident is perhaps merely a deeply satisfying form of poetic justice.

By using Da Ponte’s libretto in the ways described above, Dibdin seems to be passing rather ironic comment on his earlier novels, in which Zen took things rather more seriously than perhaps was good for his career (upsetting his superiors at almost every turn); his sanity (forcing himself to do the work of many, yet singled out for the most vicious of criticisms); or his health (just one more pack of full-strength Nazionali cigarettes to help him think things through...). In Naples, Zen is determined to take things easy and yet the outcome in his promotion back to Rome is quite similar to others in the series when the dogged persistence of his intellectual efforts sometimes pays off, albeit never in ways that are expected. In fact, Dead Lagoon and Cosi Fan Tutti present differences that are possible to read as mutually applicable commentary, in which the most significant point of all is that the darkness of the earlier novel is produced in similar fashion to the moments of near farce in the later. Or to put it another way, whenever Zen thinks himself to have brought the spaces of his Italian cities under control, he finds out only too late that he has simply been led deeper into their labyrinthine webs.
Conclusions: Forward, through the text

He crossed a square in front of a gaunt, graceless church and set off along a back canal, watched by a clan of feral cats perched on the wooden crates which had been set up for them to shelter in. The darkness which had fallen seemed to have seeped into Zen's mind. Listening to Ada Zulian's pathetic attempts to both admit and deny the tragedy which had shattered her life, shadow-boxing with the intolerable facts, had been a deeply disturbing experience. For the first time, he began to wonder whether the truth about the mysteries which surrounded him was not merely unknown but in some essential way unknowable.50

If the city was written, it happened long before it came into view. Luckily, when it was finally seen, it seemed that the city had already been arranged, and the streets, if strangely silent, were breathtaking in the orchestrated poetry of their connections. A wildly intricate geometric maze, maybe, but one guaranteed to lead its victims out through the clear blue light of the solution. Nagging doubts persisted though, even after exiting the maze, and some began to wonder if the clatter from the hidden alleyway, the vaguely glimpsed reflections in the smoke-grey glass, the possibility of other, less traveled routes, if some of these things really were as significant as fading memories seemed to suggest. And most surprisingly of all, this city that they had been told was such a very strange and difficult place remained in the minds of the doubters simply, eerily familiar. Much later, the memory of the city had become so slight and weightless that few were even certain they had been anywhere at all.

That the city consists of competing and contested narratives is hardly a new or revolutionary claim, nor is it particularly difficult to justify. Agreeing upon—or even presenting—a response to the city's composition, however, is far less simple,
particularly with regard to the need for exploring the processes by which the city is arranged in text. What I have been alluding to throughout this section, via my readings of crime fiction, is that those processes are critical in understanding the workings of narrative, and more importantly the mobilization of the city in narrative. It would perhaps be misleading to claim an incompatibility between narrative and the city, the movement of the former hindering the innocent representation of the latter; instead it is helpful to think of a transformation being enacted when the city is represented in text, a transformation in which the city is not so much simply seen as it is complexly dealt with. To conclude, I want to return to Prendergast’s Paris, for a brief example from the real city that succinctly explains why it is that ‘writing the city’ might be usefully thought of as a way forward through the positionings of narrative.

In his reading of the Paris insurrections of 1848, Prendergast adopts what some might feel to be a remarkably backwards approach to the question of urban history. Dealing primarily with Flaubert’s fictional L’Education sentimentale and its contrasts to Michelet’s historiographical Histoire de la Révolution française, Prendergast pays particular attention to such apparently finicky literary concerns as sentence structure and punctuation. His reason for this tactic has to do, I think, with an understanding that the textual management of space—the production of points of view—is critically and materially important in the make-up of the city. It is moreover extremely interesting to observe the pronounced differences between the two texts: “Where Michelet writes about 1789 in the hope that it might

50 Dibdin, Dead Lagoon, p. 304.
continue to be a living model for 1848. Flaubert writes about 1848 as if 1789 were indeed the model, but dead rather than alive."\(^{51}\)

Prendergast’s interest lies in what he refers to as “the changing terms of historical imagination…and the rhetorical form of those terms,”\(^{52}\) and rather refreshingly ‘rhetorical form’ is hardly conceived of as merely obscuring what might lie behind the text. In fact, a great deal of Paris and the nineteenth century is concerned with exactly how historical event becomes narrative, and more specifically how it is that there are not merely plural narratives and singular events. Not that Prendergast’s book has no specific, underlying urban theme: he very clearly wants to address the acceleration of Paris, and the history of how it seemed to have become newly indecipherable. Almost a cliched reading, one might think, except that Prendergast’s analysis of rhetorical form is all about demonstrating the extent to which individual acts of representation were and are fundamentally implicated in perceived collectives of urban space. He is not, for instance, presenting a ‘sociological’ (in the very worst sense of the word) reading of the individual fighting against social space, but rather attempting to draw out fragmented structures of labyrinthine power, which operate via “the deep narcosis of the commodity phantasmagoria”\(^{53}\) that is Benjamin’s key focus. The makeup of those structures, too, is in part the visual and textual narratives Prendergast considers, including very much the precise composition of those narratives.

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\(^{51}\) Prendergast, Paris and the nineteenth century, p. 108.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 108.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p. 213.
In the case of Flaubert and Michelet, the various rhetorical and syntactic devices employed in the construction of components of ‘Paris’ produce on the one hand Michelet’s writing of 1848 as a moment of ‘le Peuple,’ “not the property of individuals, still less of great names of the revolutionary story; the emphasis falls rather on anonymity but an anonymity that has a clear moral and political identity—the unified and collective will of the People,”54 and on the other hand Flaubert’s vision: “an image of historical process from which nearly all sense of visible purpose and meaning has been removed...a narrative which systematically fragments as it recounts, which refuses not only the epic register, but also the very idea of a ‘history’ that could by represented as a coherent and intelligible whole.”55 Prendergast suggests and demonstrates that it is possible to link the “narrative indeterminacy”56 of L’Education sentimentale to the Benjaminian structures that dominate his conclusions. This link is not achieved by maintaining that Flaubert somehow ‘did it by accident’ in response to, for instance, sociology (thereby claiming the author as nothing more than an illustrative tool), but instead by a reversal, related to those finicky literary concerns, which says simply that texts are part of the city.

But perhaps the most important conclusion of all—for me as well as for Prendergast—is not simply to do with texts being part of the city, but also connected rather fundamentally to recognizing that points of view themselves are inseparable from the formation of urban space. My readings of Poe, after all,

54 Ibid., pp. 109-10.
55 Ibid., p. 111.
demonstrate that the contrivances which contribute to the make up of Dupin’s position are brought into view only when one examines how that detective’s spaces are made possible. What is also fascinating is that in many respects Dupin’s spaces and the construction of his position are not simply improbable but impossible, a product of the detective’s ownership and design of the crimes to be solved, and how and where they take place. Dibdin is perhaps only being more realistic than Poe when he makes quite sure that his detective never quite gets to grips with exactly how the city’s past has played itself out: the real solution always seems to be just around the corner and two streets away. There’s no moral high ground, though, since it’s clear that the kind of privileged position occupied by his ‘French’ counterpart is sometimes exactly where Zen would like to be.

Returning, with Prendergast, to the real city and the significance of points of view, his contribution seems to be a rare, genuine consideration of the importance of the treatment of the city in text, how it is dealt with. He has quite rigid ideas regarding the kinds of structures that are in place in Paris, is equally adamant as to why it isn’t very helpful to think of the experience of the city in terms of “a very fast-moving postmodern trip,” and clearly doesn’t mean to say that the facts are more present in Baudelaire’s prose poetry than they are in conventional historical archives, but nevertheless the question of how the city is written remains at the heart of his text. In summary, my argument is that close scrutiny of the operations of textual representation is a necessary precedent to examinations of the city.

56 Ibid., p. 124.
57 Ibid., p. 211.
because on laterally close inspection the clues to the historical formation of urban space are right there in the sentences.
CONCLUSION: Resolving the History of the Written City

Resolving urban history is perhaps most commonly thought of as a process of sifting through a series of conventional (and visible) archival records, steady drawing out the processes which have culminated in the city of a more recent time. This sifting and distillation usually seeks an unacknowledged compression of the city into a suitably powerful and convincing narrative explanation of the city of a more recent time. Perhaps it uncovers particularly obscure documents and artifacts; reveals stories long buried and hidden; looks long and hard and finds answers and solutions never before stated. There are, however, additional strategies for conceiving of resolution in urban history, not for my purposes in the sense of a challenge to the traditional archive, but in terms of adding to conventional urban research rather more localized histories, internal to the text.

At the heart of the concept of a localized history, internal to the text is something akin to Prendergast’s focus on the ‘dealing with’ of the city in text; the notion that texts about the city are not separate from the city but instead shape and are shaped by the city. It is not by chance that Dibdin’s Italian cities were the last to be discussed and analyzed here, and what is most significant of all is the unique role Venice and Naples play in shaping and directing the mysteries of which they are a part. Of course, I do not mean to ascribe some mystical, organic qualities to the structures of cities, or still less hint at some form of environmental determinism. And nor does Dibdin. It is the case, however, that Dibdin writes the
investigations of Aurelio Zen as having a lot to do with the cities in which they are set.

Mosley and Poe, albeit along respectively very different lines, shape their cities according to the demands of their detectives: the brilliance of C. Auguste Dupin's intellect; and Easy Rawlins's struggles with racism and poverty. Both detectives move through their cities, L.A. and Paris, but a clear separation is maintained by simple virtue of the direction of their movements: toward the solutions to the crimes they detect. It is true that by the time Easy reaches the end of each of his investigations, solutions to the issues of poverty and racism have not been attained and no real progress has been achieved. It is also true that L.A. is presented by Mosley as being shot through with poverty and racism, but these truths do little more than require L.A. to be a representation created by the function or needs of the protagonist.

Zen by contrast is never able to create representations of his cities that entirely 'work,' or fulfil his function or needs. Indeed, if Zen has a function aside from the essential attraction of his character it is perhaps to demonstrate the impossibility of fixing the spaces of the New Italy in place. Zen's attempts to manage Venice, for example, come to nothing precisely because of a desire to produce an order and logic to that city which leaves him blind to its many other less co-operative systems and channels of power. Dibdin's relishing of the entertaining value of the confusions presented by the New Italy transfer the 'point' of the mysteries and crimes from tidy resolution to necessarily incomplete solutions with many questions left unanswered.
There is a vast difference it seems between crime, detective and mystery stories in which things are mostly resolved and those in which things are mostly not resolved. However, what Dibdin’s fictions express most strongly here is the extent to which absence of resolution is not equivalent to saying nothing. With regard to the city, for example, at the close of Dead Lagoon and Così Fan Tutti, the reader is left with a clearer sense of how Venice and Naples work and how various individual perceptions of space intersect with each other. Venice and Naples, in the Zen novels, are incomprehensible in very particular ways. It is a fictional sense of how Venice and Naples work, clearly, but my point is not to impose the disorder of such fictional space onto more obviously real versions of cities. My point, rather, is that there need be nothing indiscriminate in expressing the incomprehensibility of urban space or in using narrative as a means of working through such incomprehensibility. Understandings of incomprehensible cities, then, can be most effectively achieved by means of close textual analysis, and least effectively achieved by the maintenance of a separation between cities and texts.

My readings and interpretations of Mosley, Poe and Dibdin, and of the academic texts dealing with L.A., have been achieved by what I refer to above as a localized history, internal to the text. Local in the sense of the immediate operations of the text; history in the sense of establishing a chronological order of the operations of the text; and internal in the sense of the text ‘in itself.’ A useful explanation of the form of such histories is to think of them as a process of working out the order in which things happen in text, the reasons for that order,
and how the order is achieved. When urban space is incorporated into this method, the explanation, simply, locates around the urban—the order ascribed to the city in text, the reasons for that order, how it is achieved, and so on—rather like the focus of regressive and progressive tensions in narrative around the crime in crime fiction.

In a sense, what has preceded this conclusion has been little more than working towards a starting point for detailed and specific urban histories, histories which seek to understand how particular cities are produced in text. What I have been doing is laying the groundwork in the form of readings of texts that variously demonstrate how it is that the connections between their formal, structural complexities and the stories they seek to tell is a critical intersection. The issue is not the need to brush aside the ‘interference’ of textual structures with the subjects they help to represent, but rather to understand two things in sequence: first that texts about the city are very much a part of the city; and second that texts about the city produce the city at that critical intersection between subject and textual structure.

As I have already mentioned, a sustained challenge to conventional archival histories is not my intention here, and it is not even something I think to be entirely necessary. What I am proposing instead is precisely archival histories of cities, albeit histories which encompass rather more than mere established historical fact, and include exactly the kinds of texts Prendergast considers. But what I am also suggesting is that the issue of how texts are produced, and in turn how they contribute to the production of their subjects, be a necessary component
of archival analysis. The production of urban space does not merely occur in text, but urban space is produced by its writing in text, both in terms of individual texts creating individual representations, and with regard to the significance of conventions in different forms of representation. The complex city subjects for such detailed and lengthy forms of analysis are out there; it's simply a matter of resolving to track them down.
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