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# From Berlin to Bunker Hill: Urban Space, Late Modernity, and Film Noir in Fritz Lang's and Joseph Losey's *M*

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## I. Film Noir and Late Modernity

Recent scholarship on cinema and the metropolis has sought to understand silent films by Dziga Vertov, René Clair, Dmitri Kirsanoff, and Walter Ruttmann in relation to the accounts of urban modernity advanced by cultural critics such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer. <sup>1</sup> Whether we think of Clair's *Paris qui dort* (1925), Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), or analogues from the contemporaneous visual arts such as paintings by Fernand Léger and Robert Delaunay, the collages of Paul Citroen, or photographs by László Moholy-Nagy, these metropolitan representations from the period 1910 to 1930 appear indisputably as dynamic hymns to the industrial progress and productive forces which compose the machine rhythms of urban civilization. But they are also the product of their creators' search for new formal languages to represent the fresh realities of the modern city, a quest made palpable in the account by Blaise Cendrars of Robert Delaunay's struggle to paint the Eiffel Tower or in the aspirations of the makers of the "city symphony" film. <sup>2</sup> **[End Page 63]**

Depicting the turbulent realities of the city and mass production, these works of what, after Christopher Butler, I will call "early modernism," defamiliarize the metropolis. <sup>3</sup> By abstracting and juxtaposing elements of urban culture in visual compositions of striking angles, contrasts, and colors, both the visual arts and cinema of the first three decades of the twentieth century explored techniques of assemblage and montage. Yet this modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and shock associated with the silent film and visual arts of the nineteen-twenties easily lends itself to a depoliticized interpretation as a heroic celebration of modernity, a means of drowning out the anomie and horrors of

mechanization, war, and urban blight associated with industrial societies. Early modernism must, I would argue, be understood both as the cultural recognition of new technological possibilities *and* a means of adapting the human sensorium to the increasingly strident and alienating realities of twentieth-century capitalism. In the words of architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri:

...[I]n its own conditioning mechanisms the city reproduces the reality of the ways of industrial production.... Free the experience of shock from any automatism; found, on the basis of that experience, visual codes and codes of action transformed by the already consolidated characteristics of the capitalist metropolis (rapidity of transformation, organization and simultaneousness of communications, accelerated tempo of use, eclecticism)... these are the tasks that all together were assumed by the avant-garde of the twentieth century. [4](#)

Yet if the late nineteenth and early twentieth century modern culture (spanning roughly from the celebrated writings of Simmel to the end of the nineteen-twenties historical avant-gardes--the period of "classical modernity" in historian Detlef Peukert's phrase) possesses an inherent affinity with cinema through its explorations of montage, spatial dynamism, shock experiences, and fleeting temporality, in what sense does this remain true of the culture that follows it? [5](#) Should we posit a fundamental continuity between the classical modernity of the years 1895 to 1933--a time frame that encompasses the silent cinema, expressionism, cubism, dadaism, and the new objectivity in the arts; the proliferation of a photographically-based visual culture in the mass press; the spatial discoveries of the Bauhaus and modern architecture; and the cultural criticism of Weimar Germany--and the "late" modernity of the nineteen-thirties and post-World War II eras? **[End Page 64]**

Answering in the affirmative would allow us to import now familiar concepts of shock, reification, rationalization, the decay of aura, distraction, *flânerie*, and the blasé attitude developed by Simmel, Kracauer, or Benjamin into our investigations of more recent cinema, and postwar American culture more generally. Or should we not acknowledge a break between the prewar and postwar eras--between early and late modernity--and develop a separate vocabulary of critical concepts to account for the latter and the new (and perhaps today already vanishing?) post-1945 realities of broadcast television, ethnically homogeneous suburbia, institutionalized modernism, urban renewal programs, and American economic and political supremacy? [6](#)

Crucial here is the transformation from the earlier modernity of Taylorist and Fordist machine assembly that reached its acme in the twenties and thirties to the post-World War Two Keynesian economies of electronic technology, aircraft and defense manufacturing; the rise of professional and managerial classes; and the ensuing arrival of computerization and the consumer society. [7](#) To the extent that the post-1945 American city and its spatial dispersion, increased automobile traffic, and large-scale federally supported construction projects differs fundamentally from earlier urban forms, some reckoning with this transformation would seem necessary.

By the time the American film noir cycle emerged in the early forties the historical avant-

garde movements of the twenties had long receded and were eclipsed by artistic tendencies including abstract expressionism, color-field painting, and bebop jazz. No longer geometrically stylized or evoked in the majestic vistas pervasive in the art and cinema of the twenties, the postwar metropolis elicited a new range of visual representations. Matta's and Leon Polk Smith's detranscendentalized appropriation of Mondrian's urban grid in their paintings, Ellsworth Kelly's abstraction of urban details, George Tooker's uncanny canvases of the New York subway system, or Weegee's blunt photographs of crime scenes suggest a more sober--and frequently melancholy--urban aesthetic in the forties. [8](#)

In the midst of these transformations in postwar visual culture, film noir clung resiliently to the black and white cinematography associated with an earlier **[End Page 65]** phase in film history at the very moment when Hollywood narrative cinema was responding to the technologies of color and television. Paul Kerr has noted the economic and industrial determinants of this uneven development that proposes the film noir as "a negotiated resistance to the realist aesthetic." [9](#) Yet the cycle's affinity to urban representations in the visual arts before and after World War Two seems equally crucial if one seeks to understand it in relation to larger cultural and spatial tendencies irreducible to the industrial structures of the motion picture industry.

Many of these postwar depictions of the metropolis betray the visual flourishes of the earlier modernism, and it is possible to watch the opening Wall Street sequence of a film such as Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948) and imagine its overhead abstracting view of pedestrians indebted to the photographic aesthetics of Moholy-Nagy, if not Alvin Langdon Coburn. Yet unlike Karl Struss's famous photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge or the diagonally composed architectural photographs of Alexander Rodchenko from the twenties, film noir deployed the representational strategies of avant-garde photography or modernist painting at the service of an aesthetic transfiguration *without* social transcendence. The metropolis portrayed in the film noir cycle seldom appears defamiliarized or re-enchanted, a space of genuinely enhanced freedom and possibility, but emerges instead as a highly rationalized and alienating system of exploitative drudgery permitting few possibilities of escape.

No longer romanticized as a fantasy domain of speed, dynamism, and new perspectives on quotidian realities, the post-1945 American city increasingly appeared to many artists, social critics, and filmmakers as a cold-hearted and treacherous mechanism more likely to provoke fear rather than awe. At once a return to an early demonization of the metropolis widely prevalent in nineteenth-century American and European literature, these more apprehensive urban representations depicted the threat of the city not in the moral dissolution it might induce in its inhabitants, but in the potential loss of individual identity and the growing power of technological society. [10](#) They promulgated a more skeptical social vision of the benefits of technology suggestive of a later stage in the experience of modernity. Visiting the United States in 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre discerned the potentially dehumanizing effects of technology, **[End Page 66]** especially the mass media, upon the average American,

Thus, when the American puts a nickel into the slot in the tram or in the

underground, he feels just like everyone else. Not like an anonymous unit, but like a man who has divested himself of his individuality and raised himself to the impersonality of the Universal.

It was this complete freedom in conformism that struck me at the very beginning. There is no freer city than New York. It is public opinion that plays the role of the policeman. The few Americans I met seemed to me at first to conform through freedom, to be depersonalized through rationalism. They seemed to identify Universal Reason with their own particular nation, within the framework of the same creed. [11](#)



Departing from the more hopeful resonances of his paintings of the twenties and thirties, Edward Hopper produced in 1946 his canvas *Approaching a City*, of which he offered this account: "I've always been interested in approaching a big city by train; and I can't exactly describe the sensations. But they're entirely human and perhaps have nothing to do with aesthetics. There is a certain **[End Page 67]** fear and anxiety, and a great visual interest in the things one sees coming into the city." [12](#) Taking a New York City railroad tunnel as its literal inspiration, Hopper's painting differs notably from his earlier work in its juxtaposition of different modalities of urban space in the postwar period.

Devoid of any human figures, the single largest surface in Hopper's composition is a concrete wall, counterposed to a series of generic buildings whose functions remain unclear and appear to blur the distinction between industrial and residential structures. On the left of the canvas, their windows become increasingly homogeneous and identical as the viewer gazes toward the open mouth of the dark tunnel. Even within the city, the realities of the urban scene are now depicted as if they were foreign and vaguely unfamiliar realities. *Approaching a City* suggests how the contradictory symbols of impersonal edifices and industrial architecture, a familiar New York locale, and the nineteenth-century technology of the railroad (invisible apart from its spatial traces) could simultaneously inform the uncertain present of the postwar moment.

Urban critic Lewis Mumford wrote about New York's Stuyvesant Town housing project a few years later and explored similar ideas (and anxieties) of urban uniformity:

There is now, within New York City's limits, a good handful of housing projects in various stages of completion.... Yet almost all of these projects are solemn reminders of how different the postwar world is from what most people hoped it would be....

When I first inspected Stuyvesant Town a year ago, the development seemed to me an unrelieved nightmare. Though the buildings are not a continuous unit, they present to the beholder an unbroken facade of brick, thirteen stories high, absolutely uniform in every detail, mechanically conceived and mechanically executed, with the word 'control' implicit in every aspect of the design. This, I said to myself, is the architecture of the Police State, embodying all the vices of regimentation one associates with state control at

its unimaginative worst. But the entrepreneurs of this enterprise are not commissars; they are the president and directors of a great life insurance company, and they have performed this feat of regimentation in the name of free enterprise and individual initiative. . . . [13](#)

Mumford's description of this postwar building as a nightmare of architectural monotony cleverly turns the prevalent Cold War criticism of the Soviet Union **[End Page 68]** and its standardized construction to bear upon America. [14](#) His suggestion that American capitalism and economic prosperity were not synonymous with the best of all possible worlds also found cinematic expression at the time. Mumford himself narrated Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke's 1939 film *The City*, an excoriation of the polluted and mechanized metropolis that resonates in much American culture of late modernity, including film noir. [15](#)

"I never liked cities: noise, confusion, dirt, and the people in them," says Franchot Tone in *Phantom Lady* (1944). [16](#) One need only think of the urban decrepitude in *The Crooked Way* (1949) and *The Window* (1949) as further instances of such metropolitan squalor, or recall Robert Ryan's egress from the violent metropolis into the snowy wilderness in *On Dangerous Ground* (1952) and Sterling Hayden's return to his Kentucky farm in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) as prototypical attempts by film noir protagonists to flee from the ravages of the disenchanting postwar urban world. Seldom do the narratives of most films noir conclude with characters expressing hopefulness about their future life in the metropolis.

I would suggest that this conspicuous pessimistic worldview is less a projection of post-1945 French film culture onto Hollywood than an indication of the film noir cycle's imbrication with a more pervasive urban malaise articulated within much postwar American cultural, architectural, and social criticism. From architect Joseph Hudnut to Lewis Mumford to the paintings of Hopper, the newly emerging metropolis of the forties and fifties appeared to many contemporary observers increasingly bereft of its former glories, a site of social and technological alienation, the domain of the "invisible city" ringed by expanding centerless suburbs. [17](#) This new form of settlement--guttled by urban renewal in its center and surrounded by highways and tract homes on its periphery--must be understood as a vital social content of the film noir cycle (not merely a set of stylistic attributes or backgrounds) that registers the discourses and tensions of postwar American urbanism and removes the still-contested notion of film noir from long, sterile debates about genre and relocates it within American social, urban, and cultural history. But this spatial infrastructure is hardly unified, and presents itself in two discrete, but interrelated types which I will suggest reappear throughout film noir. **[End Page 69]**



The decay of the city center, controversies around downtown urban renewal precipitated by passage of the Housing Act of 1949, public apartment projects, and the growth of pedestrian zones in response to the spread of the automobile define the conditions of what I call "centripetal space" of the postwar American city: the navigable metropolis whose fabric of neighborhoods, public landmarks, and zones of safety, danger, and transgression form an unbroken chain from the nineteenth-century urban fictions of Emile Zola and Arthur Conan Doyle to twentieth century works by Alfred

Döblin, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler that culminates in film noirs such as *The Naked City* (1948) and *Criss Cross* (1949). <sup>18</sup>

No less significant is the conceptual complement of "centripetal space," the dispersed realm of "centrifugal space": a world of highways, movement, and the replacement of metropolitan density and verticality by suburban sprawl. During the period of 1940 to 1947, sixty million Americans, or almost half of the population, had moved to new homes. And although the urban population grew by forty-five per cent from 1950 to 1960, it doubled the amount of land it occupied. <sup>19</sup> Centrifugal space is organized around speed and the redeployment of surveillance away from tracking the human body in the city toward the automobile and data collection as exemplified in films such as *Plunder Road* (1957) and *City of Fear* (1959). <sup>20</sup> They explore a "post-urban" spatial environment less defined by the movement of pedestrians and increasingly permeated by the circulation of immaterial information.

Joseph Losey's 1951 remake of Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) offers a rich point of entry into the analysis of urban space in film noir, for like the city in which it is set, Los Angeles, the film is constructed on an unstable foundation and occupies a faultline between centripetal and centrifugal space. It allows us to analyze how a key text of the Weimar cinema was remade in a different cultural and spatial setting and suggests how both the original film and the remake respond to and articulate distinct instances of social and political crisis. Losey's *M* represents a significant, if little known, contribution to the film noir cycle that highlights important features of the spatial environment and visual culture of late modernity, many of which were already prefigured in Lang's original. I will begin with a consideration of spatiality in Lang's *M* and then examine the metropolitan environment in Losey's remake. **[End Page 70]**

## II. Skirmishes of Vision and Power: Berlin in Lang's *M*

A significant characteristic of urban space in Lang's *M* is the permanent tension between the verbal and the visual registers of the centripetal metropolis, presented in his film as a realm that is read *and* seen, a battleground whose combatants are the perceptual modes of reading and seeing. From the very first image of the credit sequence in which the letter "M" is set against the dark silhouette of an ominous figure, the film continually opposes letters to shapes, words to images, and reading to seeing. In its opening minutes the film cuts from a shot of a school to a busy city street where Elsie Beckmann is conducted to the other side by a traffic policeman standing before a school crossing sign. Written language, compared here with an officer of the law, maintains spatial order throughout the film. The advertising column against which Elsie bounces her ball announces the reward for the capture of the murderer, whose menacing shadow looms against the silent text. An empty street is punctuated by the cry "Extra! Extra!" as the urban crowd clamors to purchase the latest issues of the Tabloid *Uhu* at a kiosk. While people read a poster describing the murders, the camera tracks slowly away from the scene and suggests the process of reading as a community activity.

Following the tradition of Jack the Ripper and Weimar serial killer Peter Kürten, the murderer Beckert writes a letter to the newspaper, and hopes to convey his deranged

condition to the reading public. <sup>21</sup> Inspector Lohmann corrects a typographical error in a police report on the state of the investigation. Frau Beckmann reads the melodramatic magazines delivered to her door by the letter carrier. The detective reads in his notebook the addresses of former mental patients. And the "lawyer" in the final court sequence administers the law on the basis of the books next to him on the table. Each of these incidents underscores written language as the social tie that binds an isolated individual to larger organizational and social structures.

Verbal discourse is the domain of rationality, the "glue" that holds together the social world of the city. Like the letter "M" that will later be stamped upon his shoulder, these textual signifiers attach the individual body to a larger social body. Unlike earlier avant-garde modernist representations of Berlin such [End Page 71] as in Ruttmann's city symphony film, the metropolis in Lang's film is rendered not as a stylized or geometric visual abstraction but as an ensemble of readable messages and visual maps. The urban "conditioning mechanisms" described by Tafuri appear in *M* not to deform and reform space through montage but perform the task of linguistically locating and "addressing" city dwellers.



A striking illustration of this is found in the film's predilection for high angle overhead shots. This suggests the mechanisms of surveillance and "total mobilization" associated with the First World War and proposes *M* as an early precursor of later American urban dragnet and police procedure films of the forties such as *He Walked By Night* (1949). <sup>22</sup> These shots (the urban crowd unjustly accusing an innocent man, the "controlled" space of street intersections, the police marching through the nocturnal city to conduct their manhunt, an underworld member watching the police convoys from a window with binoculars, the blind organ grinder) depict both the police and the underworld. Just as the much discussed cross cutting between these two allegedly distinct groups actually functions to suggest their similarity, the use of high angle shots suggests a common mode of controlled vision that eludes the control of both the law and the criminals.

These elevated views propose photographic and cinematic surveillance as key elements of a late modernity that appropriates earlier avant-garde techniques developed in the aftermath of the First World War. <sup>23</sup> The high overhead angles of these shots recall the visual aesthetic of the "new seeing" ("*das Neue Sehen*") associated with Weimar period photographers such as Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko. <sup>24</sup> Yet unlike their photographs, the elevated views in *M* never transform the depicted individuals and street scenes into visual abstractions and the resulting images in the film are more analogous to maps or aerial reconnaissance photographs than artworks. No longer a purely aesthetic enterprise, the facility with which the movie camera can adopt multiple standpoints and explore space in all directions appears in *M* to support a more ominous agenda of social control than that suggested in the buoyant rhetoric of the photographers associated with the New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*).

Here in the mobilization of bodies, technology, and surveillance practices in the centripetal metropolis--the controlled space of police maps, elevated reconnaissance [End Page 72] vision and burglar alarms--is where we might begin to construct a

genealogy of film noir in the cinema and late modern visual culture of Weimar Germany. This would allow us to jettison the long stale deliberations about the influence of expressionist cinematography and continuities in directorial style and approach both Weimar cinematic texts such as *M* and the American film noir cycle as examples of the spatial culture of late modernity. For in its presentation of a systematically organized metropolis where, in the words of Friedrich Kittler, "from the national postal service to the public telephone to the license plate on every registered vehicle, media are at work replacing people with their addresses," *M* explores the relation between legible urban space and social control, the linkage between the rationalization and surveillance of space and the "addressability" and visibility of urban subjects. [25](#)



Although the accents and dialogue of characters in Lang's film clearly identify Berlin as its setting, the one visual clue that irrefutably confirms this appears in the shot when Schränker studies a map in the course of organizing the beggars and we recognize the shape of Berlin's central park, the **[End Page 73]** Tiergarten. This suggests a metamorphosis in the representation of the metropolis from an ensemble of recognized visualizable neighborhoods or locations (evident in the city films of Ruttmann, Feuillade, or Vertov with their extensive location photography) to a set of discrete spaces which lose their geographic specificity and become mappable entities. We find this idea conveyed in the shot of the police circling the city map with a compass, but also in the enlarged poster of a suspect's fingerprint displayed in the police headquarters. Like the map of the city in the underworld headquarters, the traces of the criminal suspect's finger also have been divided into sections.

*M* intimates that a paradoxical consequence of increased spatial mastery and surveillance--the very ability to locate and "address" spatial users--might well be the concomitant loss of a city's experienceable identity by those who inhabit it. The anonymous metropolis, unfettered from the historical associations of particular sites of memory and public spatial practices, a realm that Henri Lefebvre calls "abstract space," informs Lang's film. [26](#) According to **[End Page 74]** Lefebvre, abstract space is dominated by technological mediations, commodification, conceptualizations, and visual stimuli. He writes,

...If one were to try and enumerate the 'properties of abstract space, one would first have to consider it as a medium of exchange (with the necessary implication of interchangeability) tending to absorb use... But its rationality has something in common with the rationality of the factory...It is in this space that the world of commodities is deployed, along with all that it entails: accumulation and growth, calculation, planning, and programming...This immense process starts out from the physical truth (the presence of the body) and imposes the primacy of the written word, of plans, of the visual realm, and of a flattening tendency even within that realm itself... [27](#)

Quantitative relations of measurement, exchange, and calculation usurp the place of the body in abstract space and reduce its three dimensions to the domain of maps, blueprints, and the trajectories of spatial users, a tendency evident in the film's enthusiasm for the written word. This reduction of space to linguistic coordinates also



manifests itself in the search activities of the police and underworld, most dramatically in the assignment of exact street locations to each beggar.

Traditionally celebrated for its "realism" and ostensibly concerned with protecting the Berlin citizenry from dangerous psychopathic behavior, *M* contains surprisingly few representations of inhabited public urban space. <sup>28</sup> It depicts a mostly studio-fabricated Berlin notably lacking in monumentality and composed of streets with little more than display windows. <sup>29</sup> These spatial realms of the knife, toy, and book stores visited by Beckert evoke fascination with the consumer merchandise displayed behind the glass and the luster of consumer objects. They elicit the gaze of Beckert, his potential child victims, and the film spectator, and insinuate the powerful lure of the visual as an erotic force opposed to verbal language, a notion suggested by the effect the balloon and photographs--rather than the spoken language of his interlocutors--exercises upon Beckert in the final trial sequence.



Filmed in full profile tableaux from *inside* the shop facing toward the street as seen from the point of view of the merchandise, these scenes confront the spectator with the space of the city *behind* Beckert and the young girls. They reveal an active urban space visible only to the film viewer. Here the tensions are not **[End Page 75]** between the verbal and visual registers but rather between front and back, the static yet seductive display window opposed to the dynamic street, the restricted gaze of Beckert opposed to the omnipotent vision of the film audience who can see both the merchandise and the city. Mirrors in the window of the knife store and in the doorway of the grocery store (where Beckert discovers himself branded with the letter "M") allow him to see objects behind him.

The reverse shot from the point of view of the merchandise in each of these display window scenes can be contrasted with that in which Beckert stands in front of the bookstore window that displays both paintings *and* reading material. In this scene we see the bookstore only from the point of view of the characters, as if books and the written material on display, unlike other commodities, were incapable of returning the gaze. The rotating spiral and vertically moving arrow visible in the shop window appear as signs of ekphrastic dissonance, a reminder of the ultimate untranslatability of the visual into the verbal. They evoke a tension between the image and the text and highlight Beckert's constitution as a murderer who is seduced by the force of the visual. Paradoxically, his sole knowledge of the crimes he commits comes from reading about them on the posters plastered throughout the city, a suggestion that even the criminal perpetrator requires verbal discourse to learn of his own actions.

Describing his visit to Berlin in July 1930, Antonin Artaud wrote perceptively of the fascination with the spectacle of the display windows evident in its cityscape: "If I did not suffer from my perpetual headaches, I should greatly enjoy the life of Berlin, a city of astonishing luxury and frightening licentiousness. I am constantly amazed by what I see. They carry their obsession with eroticism everywhere, even into shop-windows in which all the dummies thrust their bellies forward." <sup>30</sup> Lang's *M* confirms this characterization of Berlin as a display case that functions as an erotic lure for the gaze of the passerby, especially Beckert. From the 1928 "Berlin im Licht" event that festively illuminated the city

streets, to the pervasive concern with store displays and building advertisements among architects, interest in the visual presentation of the city's nocturnal face and potential appeal to consumers was pervasive during the Weimar Republic. <sup>31</sup> [End Page 76]

Yet *M* contains little of the New Objectivity architecture and bold neon advertisements widely associated with Berlin's modernity during the Weimar period and thereby anticipates the drab and subdued representations of the post-expressionist metropolis pervasive throughout film noir. Despite its portrayal of the most advanced technology of the day, the city in *M*, like the urban environment that would later manifest itself in film noir, appears spartan and functional, decrepit and almost under repair, as in the shot of the large storm pipe outside of the produce store where Beckert gives Elsie a slice of apple.

The cinematic representation of late modernity in *M* may well hinge less upon the depiction of actual architectural spaces than the presentation of more intangible changes involving the role of technology and urban forms in our perception and experience of the metropolis. Beckert's obsession with viewing objects behind him culminates in the confession during his trial of walking through the endless streets of Berlin and being followed by himself. Yet this very desire to attain the visual mastery enjoyed by the film's spectator emphasizes the ocular- centrism [End Page 77] of *M* and the manner in which both pathological and normal urban subjects apprehend an increasingly abstract urban space less through bodily experiences of urban passage and increasingly through visual and verbal mediations.

### III. Bunker Hill and Losey's *M*

In an interview Joseph Losey relates his initial aversion toward the idea of remaking *M*,

[Lang's *M*, E.D.] is and remains a classic, which one doesn't want to compete with, so for a variety of reasons I somewhat reluctantly undertook my version. One was that there was a considerable Hollywood pinch because of political pressures, and I didn't want to go a long time without work. Another was that I was very much interested in David Wayne, whom I thought brilliant and extraordinarily right for the part. And I undertook it with a restriction on the structure and basic story line, because the censorship office wouldn't pass it as a new script, only as a remake of a classic. Therefore my treatment of the central figure came into direct conflict with the whole structure.... All that emerges from the film, really, is a couple of--I think--remarkable sequences, some previously unseen aspects of Los Angeles, and a fantastic performance from Wayne. . . <sup>32</sup>

A fundamental difference between the two versions of *M* involves the significant role assumed by the television medium in Losey's 1951 remake. Whereas the citizens of Berlin learn about the child murders from the newspaper and the posters plastered on the surrounding walls of the city, the residents of Bunker Hill in Los Angeles primarily obtain their information from television broadcasts they watch together in public. <sup>33</sup> The special report by the chief of police that presents "Five Don'ts" to warn parents how to protect

their children is viewed in a television store window by a group of city dwellers. Looking at the static photographs of city neighborhoods, narrated by the law officer, replaces reading as the activity that bonds isolated individuals into a community.<sup>34</sup> Notably, in Losey's film the murderer Harrow never writes to the newspaper, an insinuation that in the social world constituted by television in fifties America communication was increasingly visual and unidirectional.

Live television coverage of news events became an increasing fact of life for **[End Page 78]** Los Angeles residents in the late forties and early fifties. The 27-hour live broadcast by KTLA in April, 1949 of the attempt to rescue Kathy Fiscus, a young girl trapped in a San Marino well, is a frequently cited instance of the origins of the now familiar television media event.<sup>35</sup> By February 1951 local television stations had positioned cameras atop Mt. Wilson to catch flashes of atomic tests being conducted near Las Vegas. The live transmission that same year of the hearings conducted in Washington by the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC) and the heavily televised Eisenhower-Nixon campaign in 1952 suggest the increasing political significance attached to the constitution of a community of television viewers. Losey's film grants the mass media a more prominent role than they possess in Lang's film and presents the newspaper publisher as the third agent of power (together with the police and the underworld) engaged in ruling the city.<sup>36</sup> It insinuates the growing force of television to shape urban experience and community in Los Angeles.<sup>37</sup>



The film's opening sequence on the Angels' Flight funicular railway conveys the spatial separation of its setting, the Bunker Hill neighborhood whose destruction by the agents of urban renewal coincides with Losey's filming. Bunker Hill was one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city, dating back to the nineteenth-century and full of irregularly shaped streets and Victorian-era mansions converted into long shabby rooming houses memorialized by writers such as Raymond Chandler and John Fante.<sup>38</sup> Losey's predilection for this earlier location for films such as *Act of Violence* and *Criss Cross* (1949), associates his remake with the film noir cycle.<sup>39</sup> Under the aegis of urban renewal, an idea much in vogue after the recent passage of California Community Redevelopment Act of 1948 and the federal Housing Act of 1949, this area would undergo a fundamental transformation during the fifties to reconstruct its spatial identity from a decrepit residential district into the crown of a revitalized downtown.<sup>40</sup>

Sixteen months after Losey completed principal photography of *M* on Bunker Hill, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles voted in 1951 to condemn most of the buildings in the neighborhood.<sup>41</sup> The Los Angeles depicted in his film bears witness to the decentralizing dynamic of centrifugal space and the emergence of abstract space of the postwar American metropolis.<sup>42</sup> **[End Page 79]** It suggests an unresolved conflict between the representation of Los Angeles as receptive to the future and "forward-looking" and an ambivalence on the part of many residents toward the history of their built environment.<sup>43</sup> Although ultimately unsuccessful, the efforts to prevent the redevelopment of Bunker Hill and the public outcry against its destruction suggest that the embrace of urban renewal and modernist planning principles was hardly universal.<sup>44</sup>

Like the film noir cycle more generally, Losey's *M* can be approached as a site for the cinematic analysis of this postwar geographic metamorphosis, an opportunity for recording architectural and urban fragments of earlier historical moments before their imminent disappearance. Unlike Lang's studio-filmed *M* in which the urban specificity of Berlin nearly vanishes, Losey's remake emphasizes those older urban forms and ambients that, following Ernst Bloch, I would describe as "non-contemporaneous" elements and "declining remnants" of an unrefurbished past.<sup>45</sup> In an age of rampant suburbanization and **[End Page 80]** spatial deconcentration, urban centrality and a traversable scale could no longer be taken for granted. Produced in the context of the late forties vogue for actual location semi-documentary filmmaking (itself an indirect consequence of the shortage of lumber for film set construction caused by the boom in suburban house starts!), *M* explores Bunker Hill as an instance of centripetal space displaced in 1951 Los Angeles, a spatial and temporal anomaly.<sup>46</sup> The city attracted its share of prominent visitors after the Second World War, one of whom, Jean-Paul Sartre, described it as follows:

Los Angeles, in particular, is rather like a big earthworm that might be chopped into twenty pieces without being killed. If you go through this enormous urban cluster, probably the largest in the world, you come upon twenty juxtaposed cities, strictly identical, each with its poor section, its business streets, night-clubs and smart suburb, and you get the impression that a medium-sized urban center has schizogenetically reproduced itself twenty times...

This is due to the fact that these cities that move at a rapid rate are not constructed in order to grow old, but move forward like modern armies, encircling the islands of resistance that are unable to destroy; the past does not manifest itself in them as it does in Europe, through public monuments, but through survivals. The wooden bridge in Chicago which spans a canal two steps away from the world's highest skyscraper is a survival. The elevated railways, rolling noisily through the central streets of New York and Chicago, supported by great iron pillars and cross-girders, nearly touching the facades of houses on either side, are survivals. They are there simply because no one has taken the time to tear them down, and as a kind of indication of work to be done.

I remember this Los Angeles landscape in the middle of the city, two modern apartment houses, two white cubes framing an empty lot with the ground torn up--a parking space... When one turned around a block of houses, the hill disappeared; its other side had been built up, covered with asphalt, streaked with tar roads, and pierced with a magnificent tunnel.<sup>47</sup>

Sartre's description of a decentralized Los Angeles divided into smaller cities echoes the urban planning literature of the period and accurately captures the character of Bunker Hill in Losey's *M* and in other films noir. According to the creed of the postwar planners, each smaller "nucleated" city in Los Angeles would contain commercial and industrial centers and what Sartre calls "survivals" (Bloch's "non-contemporaneous" elements).

Surrounded by the encroaching Harbor Freeway and the Third Street Tunnel to the West, Bunker Hill in **[End Page 81]** 1951 was indeed an "island of resistance" and a challenge to the postwar expulsion of residential dwelling units from the city's central business district.

Rapid growth and dispersal frustrated the tradition of spatial monumentality Sartre ascribes to the European metropolis, and it is tempting to hypothesize that to a greater extent than other American cities Los Angeles registers collective memories not in spatial constructions but through cinematic representation. The military metaphors of the bomb attack, the nucleated city, and the island of resistance suggest the relationship in Los Angeles between the aggressive urbanism of the Cold War era and the film noir cycle. [48](#) "Anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image," as Benjamin presciently noted. [49](#)

Unlike the concentrated "centripetal" space of Berlin in Fritz Lang's *M*, the space of Los Angeles in Losey's *M* has mutated into an abstract "centrifugal" space organized around the automobile and the mobilized gaze. From the construction of parking structures and streets designed for the automobile to the building of the vast network of freeways, urban form in Los Angeles follows what one 1949 metropolitan theorist calls "the cardinal principle of movement": "all conflict or interference must be removed." [50](#) The army of beggars mobilized by the underworld in Berlin is replaced by a fleet of radio-networked taxi drivers in Los Angeles. Driving through Bunker Hill, the cab driver surveys the street through the windshield of his car, a clue that the automobilized gaze has supplanted the overhead angle as a constituent element in the perception of abstract space. [51](#) Unlike Lang's *M*, spatial surveillance in Losey's film substitutes the roving, horizontal view from the automobile and the road for the fixed and vertically elevated perspective in the centripetal metropolis.



The film's appropriation of the Bradbury Building as the site of the manhunt for the child murderer, a Los Angeles landmark associated before its 1982 appearance in *Blade Runner* with films noir such as *D.O.A.* (1950) (also filmed by Losey's cinematographer Ernest Laszlo), and the 1953 *I, the Jury* (filmed by John Alton) evokes the plight of public space and the pedestrian in the postwar American city. Built in 1893 by mining millionaire Lewis Bradbury, who commissioned an unknown draftsman, George Wyman, to design the **[End Page 82]** structure, the building's open central courtyard remains a prime example of French wrought iron decorative architecture with the trademark glass skylight illumination associated with the typological form of the arcade. [52](#)

Wyman's design has been apocryphally understood to bear the influence of Edward Bellamy's 1887 utopian novel, *Looking Backward* and the book's description of commercial architecture bathed in light. Once associated by writers and critics such as Emile Zola and Walter Benjamin with the phantasmagoria of capitalist visuality, the iron and glass architecture that appears in *M* in the form of the Bradbury Building is a degraded remnant of this earlier thinking, the "new" of the modern that has long since become antiquated. [53](#) But its manifestation in a 1951 film set in Los Angeles suggests

an earlier mode of urban public space in danger of becoming forgotten. In the words of architectural historian Esther McCoy,

The aesthetic quality of the Bradbury Building is largely derived from the superb environment of an inner court flooded with light. It is an early and excellent example of a break with facade architecture and the acknowledged unpleasantness of a busy city street. By treating the inner court as facades, the architect has supplied an off-street leisurely and enriched space which denies the bustle of Third Street and Broadway. [54](#)



The Bradbury building functions in *M* as a non-contemporaneous remnant, an unexpected fragment of the past that calls the present into question. Transposed from Europe to Los Angeles, its nineteenth-century grandeur and pedestrian-friendly space is as anomalous in 1951 Los Angeles as were the arcades **[End Page 83]** **[Begin Page 85]** encountered by Benjamin and the surrealists in Paris during the twenties. It appears in the film without masses of consumers or pedestrians, an uncomfortable hybrid between an interior and exterior realm that is spatially and temporally displaced in the heart of 1951 Los Angeles, a telling comment on the social predicament of the American city in late modernity that would soon be assailed by the bulldozers of urban redevelopment.

Unlike Lang's depiction of the display windows in his *M*, Losey's remake adopts a less enthusiastic stance toward this mode of capitalist visual display. Filmed by daylight on actual Los Angeles streets, the display window scenes exude a less violent and seductive character and emphasize their setting and the point of the view of the characters. This skepticism toward the urban commodity spectacle is most apparent in the scene where members of the underworld search the Bradbury Building for the murderer and destroy its many glass windows. At once a critique of the culture of the phantasmagoria, the surface, and the gaze, Losey's representation of this structure also presents it as a viable public space threatened by the mindless destruction of the capitalist plunderers.

While at the end of the courtroom scene in both films the police seize the child murderer and protect him from the angry crowd, Losey's *M* presents Langley, the underworld lawyer and defender of the rule of law who attains a more prominent role in the remake, as a victim of this process. Filmed in the spring and summer of 1950 during the height of the HUAC witchhunts, Losey's *M* takes the political persecutions of the Hollywood blacklists as its allegorical subtext, a subject of obvious personal interest to a man who joined the American communist party and was subject to intense FBI surveillance in the early forties. The suspension of the rule of law during the American Cold War conflict with communism is alluded to in the film's frequent references to corrupt policemen, victims, and retribution. [55](#)

That Lang's *M* film was remade at all by Losey is a consequence of both the German and the American versions sharing the same producer, German exile Seymour Nebenzal. [56](#) Besides *M*, Nebenzal is known for his German films, *Menschen am Sonntag* (1923), *Westfront 1918* (1929), and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933). He also worked in the

United States where he produced two **[End Page 85]** films directed by Douglas Sirk, *Hitler's Madman* (1942) and *Summer Storm* (1944), as well as an early film noir, *The Chase* (1946). *M* was the last film Nebenzal ever produced, and his decision to remake it with Joseph Losey led Fritz Lang to claim its ownership. Writing in a Los Angeles newspaper at the end of the film's production, Nebenzal offered this account of his fight with Fritz Lang and his motivations for remaking *M*:

Mr. Lang makes the statement that the old picture was built around the sex criminal being caught and tried by a group of organized beggars in a kangaroo court. He also says that because there is no organized group of beggars in the United States, therefore the premise of the original film is not valid here. I am surprised to hear that the matter of organized beggars should be the premise of the old picture. I always thought, and still think, that the problems connected with a sex criminal of this type, his menace to the community and the treatment of such criminals was the basic premise of the story--a problem which is much more acute today in the United States than the few isolated cases were in Germany in the early 1930s.

Mr. Lang further states that '*M*' is a classic and it is

stupid to try to improve on it. My reasons for making an English version of the picture are the followings (sic):

1--The German language picture is by now antiquated in its psychological approach to the problem.

2--As I have already pointed out, the problem is becoming more and more acute.

3--The German picture was never generally released in the United States, but was shown only in some art houses and by the Museum of Modern Art. Only a very small percentage of theater goers have seen it--and they had to depend on subtitles. [57](#)

Produced during a short period of political calm between the HUAC hearings that originated in October 1947 and recommenced in March 1951, the decision to remake *M* appears as a canny strategy on the part of Nebenzal and Losey intended to circumvent censorship restrictions and tackle the real problem "becoming more and more acute" in 1950 in Hollywood around the time of *M*'s production. In September 1950, three months after its principal photography was completed, the last of the Hollywood Ten went to jail after their legal appeals proved unsuccessful. As Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund note in their book *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, by 1951 no one without a political clearance approved by the House Un-American Activities could work in the Hollywood film industry. [58](#) By the time Karen Morley, who plays the murdered **[End Page 86]** Elsie's mother, was called by Losey to act in *M*, she had already been blacklisted for involvement in an UAW documentary against racism. Waldo Salt, the dialogue writer for Losey's film and an unfriendly witness before the Committee in 1947, was once more subpoenaed in March 1951.

Writing of the film's premiere, a newspaper reviewer noted "Many in the cast, whose names have been associated with communistic fronts and activities, brought about a picket line in front of the two theaters, the pickets' signs protesting the use of 'known reds' in the film and therefore urging non-patronage." <sup>59</sup> With their common narratives involving victims, murderers, surveillance, the mass media, lawyers, guilty parties, the desire for retribution, and the reestablishment of legal authority, both *M* films appear as instances of a single cultural narrative about the scapegoat that circulated in German and American societies undergoing political and social crises. <sup>60</sup>

Whether we think of the elaborate security system in the Berlin warehouse or the Bradbury building, the prominence of television and automobile-dominated space in Losey's remake, or the eradication of an older centripetal space organized around the corporeal experience of pedestrians in both versions of *M*, these films betray a fascination with the new media and perceptual technologies which developed in tandem with cinema. Unlike the visual art or cinema of early modernism, the compelling object of their attention is less the architectural or pictorial facade of the city than the non-cinematic technological mediations through which urban space increasingly is experienced. The culture of late modernity exemplified in *M* and explored throughout the film noir cycle is perhaps best understood as a response to the new experiences of space, time, speed, and social control brought about by the convergence of cinema with television, the automobile, and surveillance technologies. The two versions of *M* remind us of the political stakes of these new perceptual modalities, their continuing ability to organize our experiences of the metropolis, and the growing inextricability of space and representation throughout the course of the twentieth century.

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## Notes

1. Early examples of this work are Annette Michelson, "The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* 10, no. 7 (1972): 62-72 and idem, "Dr. Crase and Mr. Clair," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 31-54. More recent instances include Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern*



*Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); James Donald, "The City, The Cinema: Modern Spaces," in Chris Jencks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 77-95; Richard Prouty, "The Well-Furnished Interior of the Masses: Kirsanoff's *Menilmontant* and the Streets of Paris," *Cinema Journal* (Fall 1996): 3-17; and Colin McArthur, "Chinese Boxes and Russian Dolls: Tracking the Elusive Cinematic City," in David B. Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 19-45.

2. See Blaise Cendrars, "The Eiffel Tower" (1924) in *Modernities and Other Writings*, ed. Monique Chefdor, trans. Esther Allen in collaboration with Monique Chefdor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 105-10. For a discussion of the city symphony tradition see William Uricchio, "Ruttman's 'Berlin' and the City Film to 1930," Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1982.

3. See Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Despite Butler's cursory treatment of cinema and the truncation of his study at 1916, I find helpful his understanding of early modernism, exemplified in the following passage, "The strains and tensions inherent in city life thus helped to provoke the antagonistic solidarity which is typical of the avant-garde.... I believe that in all these groupings there was a primary tension in their confrontation with the city, between an introspective alienation and a celebration of the sheer energy and collective diversity of life.... It is the latter response which is most distinctive of early Modernism. It sees the city as the site of a new kind of sensibility, which can only express itself through disjunction and juxtaposition..." (137). It is instructive to recall that around this same time in 1917 Victor Shlovsky coins the notion of *ostranenie*, or "making strange."

4. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigi La Penta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 81, 84.

5. In *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, tran. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 164, Detlef Peukert defines the "classical modernity" of German society as the period from the eighteen-nineties to the ninteteen-thirties "marked by a formative phase before the war" and a "subsequent phase of crisis and development." Its significant features include "highly rationalized industrial production, complex technological infrastructures and a substantial degree of bureaucratized administrative and service activity." (82) One must be cautious about extending Peukert's definition to other nations experiencing different stages of industrialization during this time period. For stimulating discussions of the inherent affinity of the cinema with early modernity see Charney and Schwartz, eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*.

6. In *Late Modern: The Visual Arts Since 1945* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1980), Edward Lucie-Smith writes "Where Dada challenged the existing aesthetic and social order, post-war art has built that challenge *into* an order." (12). At stake in my use of the notion of late modernity is not simply the aging and assimilation of the cultural products of an earlier modernism but also the suggestion that the modes of perception and experience these objects engendered have themselves become socially managed and incorporated, frequently in ways that their original avant-garde progenitors would no

longer recognize. Late modernity should therefore be understood as an interim phase between the era of classical modernity of the modernist avant-garde (1900-1935) and our own postmodern era which came into existence after the Cold War fifties.

[7.](#) For an excellent account of the expansion of the electronic, aircraft, and machine tool manufacturing industries in response to the Second World War and the cold war see David F. Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. 5-9. A good discussion of Fordism is found in Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. 135-62.

[8.](#) For a helpful study of the postwar moment in the arts see Elizabeth Sussman with John G. Hannhardt, *City of Ambition: Artists and New York: 1900-1946* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

[9.](#) See Paul Kerr, "Out of Whose Past? Notes on the B Film Noir," *Screen Education* (Autumn-Winter 1979-1980): 45-65.

[10.](#) For histories of the earlier tendency see Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus The City* (New York: New American Library, 1962) and Eugene Arden, "The Evil City in American Fiction," *New York History* 35 (July 1954): 259-79.

[11.](#) Jean-Paul Sartre, "Individualism and Conformism in the United States," (1945) in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 109.

[12.](#) Edward Hopper, interview by John Morse, *Art in America* 48 (1960): 60, quoted in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 388.

[13.](#) Lewis Mumford, "Prefabricated Blight," (1948) in *From the Ground Up* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, n.d.), 109.

[14.](#) Engaging this Cold War sentiment, designer Norman Bel Geddes wrote that "architects and designers know Americans do not want to be standardized." See "Bel Geddes Sees Wider Use of Prefabrication in Homes," *New York Times*, 15 Mar. 1942, 1.

[15.](#) For a discussion of *The City* see Howard Gillette, Jr. "Films as Artifact: *The City* (1939)," *American Studies* 18, no. 2 (1977): 71-85, and Scott MacDonald, "Ralph Steiner," in Jan-Christopher Horak, ed., *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 205-33.

[16.](#) Director Robert Siodmak's 1944 film is based upon Cornell Woolrich's 1942 novel written under the pen name of William Irish. For a discussion of the anti-urban themes in the book see David Reid and Jayne L. Walker, "Strange Pursuit: Cornell Woolrich and the Abandoned City of the Forties," in Joan Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir* (London: Verso, 1993), 57-96. In my forthcoming book *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, I argue that representations of the city and spaces of late modernity such as the highway in film

noir cannot be traced back to a single literary, cinematic, or artistic source but must instead be understood as both reflective and productive of the postwar cultural and intellectual formation.

[17.](#) Joseph Hudnut, *Architecture and the Spirit of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 157-68.

[18.](#) See Edward Dimendberg, "Kiss the City Goodbye," *Lusitania* 7 (1995): 56-66.

[19.](#) Cited in John B. Rae, *The Road and the Car in American Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 226-27.

[20.](#) See Edward Dimendberg, "The Will to Motorization: Cinema, Highways, and Modernity," *October* 73 (Summer 1995): 90-137 and idem, "City of Fear: Defensive Dispersal and the End of Film Noir," *ANY* 18 (Spring 1997): 14-17.

[21.](#) For an excellent account of the historical context of *M* in relation to serial murders in Weimar Germany see Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[22.](#) Here I am indebted to the brilliant analysis of Anton Kaes. See his "The Cold Gaze: Notes on Mobilization and Modernity," *New German Critique* 59 (Spring/Summer 1993): 105-117. Blaise Cendrars offers a telling recollection of his military service during the First World War and its structuring of his perception: "At night, at the front, when I was not out on patrol, the universe came pouring through my de luxe loophole, a loophole cut through an armored plate, a slit, a Judas-hole, through which I could take a look at the world beyond or fire a rifle at the enemy..." Blaise Cendrars, *Sky: Memoirs* (1949), trans. Nina Rootes, intro. Marjorie Perloff (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1992), 191.

[23.](#) "By means of its tirelessly surveying eye and 'cold gaze,' the camera becomes a participant in the desire for disciplinary power and mobilization in *M*. It is ubiquitous, a third all-encompassing force (in addition to the police and the underworld), covering every inch of the terrain... Fritz Lang's *M* exemplifies the single gaze that wants to see everything constantly; it narrativizes the nexus between warlike mobilization, surveillance, and social control." Kaes, "The Cold Gaze," 115-16.

[24.](#) See Renate Flagmeier, "Von Oben und Unten--Das Neue Sehen Lernen," in Hans Joachim Neyer, *La course au moderne-Genormte Verführer. Massenmedien in Frankreich und Deutschland, 1919-1933* (Berlin: Werkbund-Archiv, 1993), 51-57; and David Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography 1927-1933* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978).

[25.](#) See Friedrich Kittler, "The City is a Medium," trans. Matthew Griffin, *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (Autumn 1996): 724.

[26.](#) Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 306-21. See also Edward Dimendberg, "Henri Lefebvre on Abstract Space," in Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds., *Public*

*Space* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

[27](#). Lefebvre, 307-08.

[28](#). Lang himself frequently emphasized the exactitude and alleged realism that informed his work on *M*. See Fritz Lang, "Mein Film *M*--ein Tatsachenbericht" (1932) in Fred Gehler and Ullrich Kasten, eds., *Fritz Lang. Die Stimme von Metropolis* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1990), 267-70. The most notable instances of public space in the film include the apartment house and street scenes at its beginning, the location photography of the garden colony during the police investigation, and the street sequences outside the bar raided by the police and the warehouse in which Beckert hides.

[29](#). One might note the persistence of display windows as an urban topos in a range of films including Lang's later American productions such as *Scarlet Street*, *The Woman in the Window*, Jacques Tati's *Playtime*, and Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*.

[30](#). Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Completes* 3:193, quoted and translated in Martin Esslin, *Artaud* (London: Fontana, 1976), 34.

[31](#). See Ernst Reinhardt, "Gestaltung der Lichtreklame," *Die Form* 4 (February 15, 1929): 73-84; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Licht, Schein, und Wahn. Auftritte der elektrischen Beleuchtung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Erco Edition/Ernst & Sohn, 1992), esp. 61-79; and Karl-Heinz Metzger and Ulrich Dunker, *Der Kurfuerstendamm. Leben und Mythos des Boulevards in 100 Jahren Deutscher Geschichte* (Berlin: Knopka, 1986), esp. 108-12.

[32](#). Tom Milne, *Joseph Losey* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 85.

[33](#). In the very first shot of the film a stack of newspapers remains immobile on the street as the Angels' Flight funicular ascends, as if to suggest the increasing distance between the cultures of print and television.

[34](#). For a discussion of early television consumption in public see Anna McCarthy, "The Front Row is Reserved for Scotch Drinkers: Early Television's Tavern Audience," *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 31-49.

[35](#). See Mark J. Williams, "From 'Remote' Possibilities to Entertaining 'Difference': A Regional Study of the Rise of the Television Industry in Los Angeles, 1930-1952" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1992), 103-236.

[36](#). This point is expressed more directly in the screenplay of the Losey film. Consider the following exchange between J.W. Colt, publisher of the *Morning Herald*, and Marshall, head of the criminal underworld. Marshall says to Colt, "Let's be honest, John, we're not too far apart in our thinking about the police department. I've been enjoying the series you've been running... We want you to have an exclusive story." Colt responds in turn to Marshall's invitation to be present when the child murderer is turned over to the police by blackmailing Carney, Chief of Police: "Look, Carney, I have a proposition... How would you like your picture in the paper arresting the big boy himself... Marshall, of

course. And wait--with the baby killer. What do I want? Only a transcript of your secret testimony in front of the grand jury... Now, don't take that tone. I feel the public is entitled to all the facts, and if you don't..." *M* Screenplay by Waldo Salt, page 99-A, Script Collection of Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California. This exchange intimates that the newspaper publisher is the most powerful of the three men. A similarly cynical view of the power of the print media is evident in Billy Wilder's 1951 film *The Big Carnival*.

[37](#). At this same time the motion picture industry was discovering how television could be used to produce greater results at the box office by reaching residents across Los Angeles. An advertisement for the 1950 Columbia release *711 Ocean Drive* noted "44% of those from homes with television sets volunteered they had heard about *711 Ocean Drive* on television. 76% when asked said they had heard about the picture on television. Television added 25% to attendance. The best buy in Los Angeles is television." *Variety*, 20 Oct., 1950, 9.

[38](#). Two widely known literary representations of Bunker Hill appear in John Fante's *Ask the Dust* (1939) and Raymond Chandler's *The High Window* (1942).

[39](#). Unlike these two films noir in which Bunker Hill appears dominated by illicit criminal activity, Losey's *M* depicts it as decrepit, but still respectable, neighborhood inhabited by middle class families, members of the underworld, and the psychologically disturbed child murderer.

[40](#). The definitive account of the transformation of Bunker Hill after the Second World War remains to be written. Useful chronologies can be found in Pat Adler, *The Bunker Hill Story* (Glendale: La Siesta Press, 1968); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990); Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sainsbury, "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill," *California History* 74 (1996): 394-407; and Virginia L. Comer, *Angels' Flight: A History of Bunker Hill's Incline Railway* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1996).

[41](#). The June 28, 1950 edition of *Variety* notes on page six that "Director Joseph Losey winds Seymour Nebenzal's production of *M* tomorrow four days under schedule."

[42](#). For a good summary of the trend toward decentralization see Greg Hise, "Homebuilding and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles: The Roots of the Post-World War II Urban Region," *Journal of Urban History* 19 (1993): 95-125.

[43](#). Loukaitou-Sideris and Sainsbury, "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill," 394. This thoughtful article critically appraises the razing of all 396 buildings and the displacement of the low-income residents in ninteteen-sixty by a partnership of public and private capital. Its analyzes the imposition of modernist city planning principles of superblocks and the separation of pedestrian from automobile traffic in the subsequent redevelopment of Bunker Hill in the sixties and seventies and suggests it as a prime example of the spatial politics of postwar late modernity. Yet the largely approving (if not overly formalist) account by these authors of the "mixed-use" street form and "contextual landscape" in the original neighborhood downplays the crime and social problems prevalent during the

forties and fifties which served as a pretext (however justified) for its redevelopment. I would suggest that the very difficulty in making sense of the history of the Bunker Hill redevelopment points to the loaded character of notions such as "urban blight" and the differing conceptions of city form, modernity, and progress with which Los Angeles was understood at the time.

[44.](#) For a helpful contemporary survey of the mixed opinions on the redevelopment of Bunker Hill see Les Wagner, "Rejuvenation of Bunker Hill to Start Oct. 1," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 22 June 1960, 8.

[45.](#) Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Steven and Neville Plaice (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 108.

[46.](#) For a discussion of the production pressures which encouraged location filmmaking at the end of the forties see William Lafferty, "A Reappraisal of the Semi-Documentary in Hollywood, 1945-1948," *The Velvet Light Trap* 20 (Summer 1983): 22-26.

[47.](#) Jean-Paul Sartre, "American Cities," (1945) in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Collier, 1962), 120-22.

[48.](#) See Edward Dimendberg, "City of Fear: Defensive Dispersal and the End of Film Noir," *ANY (Architecture New York)* 18 ("Public Fear" 1997).

[49.](#) Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 86-87.

[50.](#) Mel Scott, *Metropolitan Los Angeles: One Community* (Los Angeles: The Haynes Foundation, 1949), 94.

[51.](#) Indeed, the murderer Harrow is presented to the underworld jury in a garage where is imprisoned in a convertible, the top of which is unrolled to introduce him to the arbiters of justice.

[52.](#) Although it shares many architectural elements with the arcade, the Bradbury Building is an enclosed space rather than a passageway between streets or blocks and should be distinguished from it. For an exhaustive study of the architectural type see Johann Friedreich Geist, *Arcades: The History of a Building Type*, trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983).

[53.](#) For a discussion of the glass architecture of the arcade as a phantasmagoric space see Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.m.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 1: 211-31; and Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth Century France*, trans. Katia Sainson-Frank and Lisa Maguire (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), esp. 71-73.

[54.](#) Esther McCoy and Raymond Girvigan, "Bradbury Building," *Data Book Report: Historic American Buildings Survey* (Los Angeles: American Institute of Architects Preservation Committee, September, 1963). For a discussion of the recent renovation of

the Bradbury Building see Aaron Betsky, "Full Circle," *Architectural Record* (January 1993): 108-10.

[55](#). Consider the following dialogue from the screenplay of *M* spoken by a marine sergeant in the film: "An outfit like ours is what they need. The boys down in the legion post got an idea how to handle this guy! This gets any worse we'll form a vigilante committee." These lines, which do not appear in the film, suggest the activities of the House Committee. *M* script, scene 53A, Collection of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

[56](#). There exists a striking parallel between the two versions of *M* and the manner in which each marked a changed relation of its director to his respective national cinema. After directing *M* in 1931, Lang made *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* in 1932. In July 1933 he left Germany and began his career abroad, first in Paris, then in Hollywood. After directing *M* in 1950 (released in March, 1951), Losey made *The Big Night* in 1951. In order to avoid a subpoena from HUAC, Losey left Los Angeles for Paris in July 1951 and then began a period of work in Europe. Two years and one film after directing their versions of *M*, both men had left the cultures and cinema industries where they formerly had prospered.

[57](#). Quoted in column by Ezra Goodman, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 28 Jun. 1950.

[58](#). Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983), 387.

[59](#). Lowell E. Redlings, "M Remake Genuine Thriller: David Wayne Impressive as Psychopathic Killer," *Citizen News*, 26 Oct. 1951. Clipping in film file in collection of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

[60](#). The scapegoat theme is particularly evident in the final zoom shot of the film's opening credit sequence in which the director's name appears against the frightening silhouette of the child murderer standing on the beach, his craggy physique bearing a strong physical resemblance to the film director. The comparison between Langley, sacrificial victim of the bar, and Losey, victim of the blacklist, is also suggested by the similarity between their names and the fact that Langley is an amalgam of Lang and Losey. For a stimulating treatment of the scapegoat motif see Rene Girard, *Violence and the Scapegoat*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1977).

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