

Introduction

Crime Film and the Messy City

Many a commercial film or television production is a genuine achievement besides being a commodity. Germs of new beginnings may develop within a thoroughly alienated environment.

—Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*



IN 1974, VINCENT CANBY WROTE A piece for the *New York Times*, titled “New York Woes Are Good For Box Office,” that puzzled over the spate of films that had been made in the city over the last few years. What confused Canby was why so many recent films that portrayed New York so unfavorably—he cites *Serpico* (1973), *The Super Cops* (1974), *Law and Disorder* (1974), *Mean Streets* (1973), *Death Wish* (1974), *For Pete’s Sake* (1974), and *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974)—were seemingly so popular:

New York is a mess, say these films. It’s run by fools. Its citizens are at the mercy of its criminals who, as often as not, are protected by an unholy alliance of civil libertarians and crooked cops. The air is foul. The traffic is impossible. Services are diminishing and the morale is such that ordering a cup of coffee in a diner can turn into a request for a fat lip. (1)

Pointing out that New York has been a mess for much of its history, Canby was less fretful about the negative portrayal of the city in these films than curious as to why, at this moment, the mess of the city had become a subject of interest. “Is being a mess box office?” he wondered. Pauline Kael also noticed the departure from the sentimentality that had marked depictions of the city through the 1960s, noting that the new crop of “urban gothic” films “provided a permanent record of a city in breakdown” (1971, 314).

Hollywood, as much as New York, was facing an economic crisis at the end of the 1960s, which it tried to remedy by re-inventing itself for a savvy youth market and cost-cutting wherever possible (Cook, 9–14). Location shooting in cities was attractive for feature filmmakers not only because it was thought to lend realism to a production—a quality that New Hollywood ardently pursued—but also because it was cheaper than shooting in a studio.¹ In New York, shooting a film on location was also easier than ever. In 1966, Mayor John Lindsay created the Office of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting in order to streamline the process of granting permits to shoot on city streets, signaling the city’s embrace of commercial film production.² Between 1966 and 1975 over 440 films were produced in the city. As significant as these developments were, however, they do not answer what is at the center of Canby’s question: why is it that film audiences were interested in New York’s mess?

Contemporary urbanity on film in the postwar era was one facet of mass culture’s broader engagement with the decline of cities. Concerns over the visible changes to the city and the social transformations taking place there in the 1960s and 1970s were not only the purview of politicians, policymakers, and experts, they also echoed through newspapers and popular magazines, the nightly news, journals, nonfiction, and comic books. Like the Vietnam War, the urban crisis lent itself to a visual montage that combined images of the revolt of the inner city, the deleterious effects of urban renewal, and the incivility of a burgeoning counterculture and its attendant repression by police. Rising crime rates and de-industrialization came to be paired with an iconography of crumbling buildings, empty lots, junk strewn streets, and mysterious (frequently racialized) strangers.

At the same time, however, “downtown” was still associated with the cosmopolitan nature of urban life. Cities were still the ineluctable location of cuisine, fashion, art, music, the avant-garde, social and sexual experimentation, and, of course, cinema—all of which could be antidotes to anodyne suburban life. Commercial real estate developments drew on these associations while constructing edifices that began to hem downtown from the disorder of their surrounding environs. Opposition to the

grand modernization projects undertaken by Robert Moses in New York helped to draw attention to the profuse architectural heritage harbored within the physical plant of cities, spurring the momentum of preservation movements. Preservationists and a new generation of urban planners and designers promulgated a new vision of the city, seeing it not as a space to be remade anew, but to be invested in for its existing complexity and semantic richness. In contrast to the expansive, top-down views of the city favored in images of modernist planning, new takes on American urbanism began at street level. Writers on urbanity such as Jane Jacobs (1961), Richard Sennett (1970), and Jonathan Raban (1974) argued that what others saw as mess was dense with significance and vitality. Against both the boosters of suburbia and the *nouveau-agrarianism* of the “back to the land” segments of the counterculture, Sennett’s thesis was (and remains) that it was precisely the disorderliness of modern urban life, in fact, that supplied a path to freedom.

The messiness of urban life, both cherished and vilified, was largely itself an effect of suburbanization. At the end of World War II the mass production of housing on the periphery of cities, encouraged by a home buyer’s market created through the generous financial assistance of the G.I. Bill, the Federal Housing Administration, and the construction of a connective network of expressways, augured the flight of the white middle classes from urban centers. At the same time, the waves of African Americans that had moved to northern and Midwestern industrial cities throughout the twentieth century faced increasing unemployment as manufacturing likewise moved to the suburban periphery and abroad. Persistent unemployment was exacerbated by the displacements of urban renewal projects—which James Baldwin famously dubbed “negro removal”—and the desiccation of social services brought on by the city’s eroded middle-class tax base. Even those who could afford to move away from the city faced the prohibitions on racial mixing written into the Federal Housing Administration’s manual,³ redlining and real estate covenants (contracts preventing the sale of houses to non-white buyers), and the violent hostility of white suburbanites (see Sugrue, 2005). In 1961, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights proclaimed that the suburbs were a “white noose choking the ghetto” and yet, despite the deep economic interdependence between them, the white suburbs not only declined responsibility for the plight of the inner city, they frequently worked to obstruct measures to improve life there, protesting busing programs that would bring inner-city school children to suburban schools, and staging revolts against the use of their taxes to fund social programs in the city. The suburbs instead became ground zero for the “silent majority” conservatism that rejected the liberal program of the Great Society and

its policies for social reform. Despite the fact that it was federal initiatives that had made suburban life possible, and even though the suburbs and the city continued to be firmly economically interdependent, a deep social rift had opened. As the Kerner Commission, charged by Lyndon Johnson with investigating the root causes of urban uprisings, reported in 1968, the nation was “quickly moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal.” The incipient “culture of poverty” discourse promulgated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others, argued that the black inner-city family was caught within a “tangle of pathology” that inhibited outside assistance (1965, 47). As the nation shifted to the right, it also excused itself from the types of urban reform prioritized by postwar liberalism.

The social formation of suburbia was then, categorically anti-urban. Yet as familiar as this characterization may at first seem, a number of curious, and interrelated, wrinkles present themselves. First, of course, is the fact that both the suburbs and the central city are part of a larger contiguous fabric of urbanization. Though the suburbs may have occasionally trafficked in Jeffersonian visions of an agrarian life divorced from the corrupting influence of the city, in truth suburban life was still economically, physically, and experientially imbricated with the center (see Fishman, Castells). Second, because these two spheres remain so tied, the suburbs gained definition only negatively. That is, the suburbs were primarily distinguished by reference to, and circulation of, tropes of the central city such as crime, overcrowding, and pollution. Finally, the significant reason for this negative identity was that by the 1960s, the suburbs themselves had come to be broadly derided as the epicenter of American conformity, mass-produced banality, and cultural homogeneity. As the urban historian Becky Nicolaides (2006) observes, in the postwar era, a shift in cultural perception occurred wherein all of the damaging aspects attributed to urban life, in particular the impossibility of achieving authentic forms of community, shifted to the suburbs. Though dissatisfaction with suburban life was typical within baby boomer counterculture, it was also a recognized and risible target of middlebrow critique, from cartoons in the *New Yorker*, William H. Whyte’s columns for *Fortune* that became *The Organization Man* (1956), and popular songs like Malvina Reynolds’ “Little Boxes,” (1963), The Monkees’ “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” (written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin), and even Dionne Warwick’s “Papier Maché” (“Twenty houses in a row, eighty people watch a TV show. Paper people, cardboard dreams, how unreal the whole thing seems.” [lyrics by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, 1970]).

Despite its material ties, the geographical distance of suburbia from the central city, the isolation of ghettos, and horizontal character of loop-

ing highways and shopping complexes enabled the notional separation of suburbia from downtown and the inner city.

In his study of postwar suburban culture, Eric Avila (2004) describes the gulf between the suburbs and the inner city (after a lyric from George Clinton) as “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs.” For Avila, popular culture helps to invent new types of whiteness by mediating the racial geography of separation and privatization, characterized through the sanitized worlds of Disneyland and the managed perspective of freeway systems that obfuscated views of the inner-city neighborhoods they passed through, preventing a comprehension of the multiplicity of urban lifeworlds harbored within the contemporary built environment. Yet as the incipience of anti-suburbanism demonstrates, the ersatz, vanilla culture of the suburbs was by no means monolithic. A quickly emerging disenchantment with the suburbs, in fact, produced renewed interest in the city as a place of contingency, heterosocial encounter, and autonomous reinvention; everything that the suburbs were not. This image of the city is captured in works ranging from WAR’s “City Country City”—an extended track from their bestselling *World is a Ghetto* album (1972) that transitions between an unhurried pastoral passage to a more frantic rhythmic funk to signify a movement into the city—and Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild Side,” to Ralph Bakshi’s *Heavy Traffic* (1973) and Paul Cadmus’s painting “Subway Symphony” (discussed in chapter 4). Reed famously populates his song with characters who have converged on New York from Long Island and Miami in order to use the city to explore new identities and desires.

A sense of possibility extended to the city’s material environment. In contradistinction to the monotonous landscape of tract housing, the central city, clutter and all, offered the experience of an architecturally variegated territory. More so than the automobile-centered suburbs, the city offered pedestrian experiences that necessitated negotiating labyrinthine spaces and contact with the people who moved through them. Whereas the suburbs promised order and peace but delivered homogeneity, the city, as Sennett framed it in *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (1970), issued a healthy chaos that calibrated to modern life’s adventure of dislocation. As the residential and domestically-focused suburbs became the nation’s *interieur*, the post-industrial city emblemized an indeterminate external world.

Given this context, an answer to Canby’s question begins to come into focus. As “America’s city,” New York and its mess came to represent the status of the central city as a social and cultural project and as a space of social possibility. On the one hand, “mess” could designate the panorama of visual disarray and unrest comprising the non-suburban

realm. On the other hand, mess also portended an emergent form of urban representation, one that confronted the prospects for urban life head on. To be sure, films like *The Out-of-Towners* (1970) and *Law and Disorder* featured plots trading on and amplifying anti-urban motifs. Yet shooting commercial features also encouraged filmmakers to open themselves to the multitude of representational possibilities afforded by the urban environment and to develop new ways of interpreting this territory.

Consider, for example, how the word “gritty” has become a byword for the films of this era; used most often in criticism and publicity to signal the use of seedy and unsavory milieus, such as the world of street hustling rendered by *Midnight Cowboy* (cinematographer Adam Holender, 1969). Yet within 1970s cinema, “grit” is more than just a thematic value, it is also a visual aesthetic. The term is most frequently used when describing the desaturated colors achieved by cinematographers who “pushed” film stock—underexposing by a stop during shooting and overexposing in the lab. A favored technique of cinematographers Gordon Willis (*Klute* [1971], *The Godfather* [1972]) and Owen Roizman (*The French Connection* [1971], *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*), pushing is responsible for the way that daytime outdoor scenes become imbued in brackish tones of green and deep brown.⁴ Part of the appeal of this technique was that it helped cinematographers better manage the shifting patterns of daylight at a location. In its kinship to the color and feeling of rust and mud, pushing makes the city textural, amplifying the chromatics of deindustrialization. In certain ways then, when we use the word grit, we are referencing a visual quality developed within 1970s practices tied to location production.

Grit, moreover, is a term that through the 1970s extends beyond film aesthetics to capture a broader sensibility toward the changing American landscape. As the utopian aspirations of architectural modernists like Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and their adherents came under question, attention was turned toward America’s vernacular landscape (for, example, in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown’s pioneering *Learning from Las Vegas*). Part of this turn, inflected by the nostalgia that would mark postmodernism, aestheticized rusting industrial fixtures and factory interiors. Artists in New York who colonized the Cast Iron district that came to be known as Soho and Tribeca, for example, prized the rawness of the factory floors they converted to lofts, often leaving artifacts of industry exposed. An article for the American Institute of Architects’ *AIA Journal* entitled “Rediscovering the Gritty Cities” also exemplifies this turn. Published less than ten years after Robert Smithson’s ironic travelogue “Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” in *Artforum*, the article features photos and text that establish grounds for a reap-

preciation of the architectural forms to be found in industrial towns of that state, as well as those of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and others along the rust belt. The authors draw attention to the variety of street designs, housing types, and shopping districts to be found in these cities, even gesturing toward familiar forms of urbanism occurring there: “Hoboken may be the liveliest downtown of them all,” they write, “stimulated by the newest ethnic group—the large Latin population—and young couples from Manhattan buying brownstones” (Procter and Matuszeski 27).

Looking over Canby’s list of messy New York films, one genre predominates: the crime film. It is not difficult to see why: crime fiction and urbanity have been deeply connected, from the detective story, to the gangster drama, to film noir. During an era in which the intense antipathy directed toward the city mixes and mingles with a renewal of interest in the city as a cultural space, crime film would rush in to reflect the anxieties, delusions, and fantasies surrounding urban life. In representing the city as a zone of danger and criminal enterprise, the crime film necessarily asks us to look at its surfaces closely, to re-experience it. As the architectural critic Geoff Manaugh has argued, “crime is a way to *use* the city,” a way, in other words, to explore and re-purpose buildings and streets, to destabilize dominant understandings of inside and out, private and public. The same could be said for the form and genre of crime cinema and the city. Detective films, police procedurals, and gangster films orient us to the unseen or unnoticed aspects of modernity—the details subsumed in the crowd, surreptitious patterns of circulation. In crime narratives traditional distinctions between background and foreground dissolve, bringing us closer—bringing us *into*—the city.

Crime film is a form disposed to accessing and examining urban society. Some scholars who have looked at the relationship between the crime genre and the city, particularly during the era of the 1970s (and 1980s) have suggested that crime films primarily reinforce an anti-urban, white supremacist ideology (see, for example Kellner & Ryan 1988). Representing black and Latino ghettos as drug-ridden territories ruled by violence, hemmed in only by a necessarily martial police force, films from *The French Connection* to *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx* (1981) legitimize the culture of poverty discourses (and policies) that animate both liberal piety and right-wing revanchism. It is imperative no doubt to regard urban formations as both the product and object of systems of power and domination. This is particularly important in relation to what we call crime. Crime is a term that has been made slippery through its historically shifting social construction. In the modern era, the power to name the acts that can be called crime has been held by the ruling classes and wielded to sustain their interests through the regulation and control of

poor and marginalized populations. What spaces after all, immediately come to mind when the word crime is uttered? Is it the corridors of Wall Street or the domestic realm, the sites of so many of the crimes of our modern world, or is it streets, parking lots, underpasses, and parks? What I am calling the urban imagination involves returning to the very public grounds of crime's social construction, its pre-empirical formation beyond the statistics, the social science, and the color-coded city maps. In this book I locate this associational realm of the imagination in the margins of journalism, popular visual culture, urban sociology, and, most centrally, popular cinema, and argue that there is more to see and hear in the 1970s crime film if we do not rely solely on interpretive approaches that seek to either redeem or condemn.

The sense of the term "imagination" used here is not the modern, transcendent conception, which regards imaginative images and processes as wholly separate from the world, but rather the older, more immanent sense in which the imagination necessarily partakes of reality. As the anthropologist David Graeber puts it, this conception of imagination sees it as "a kind of circulatory system through which perceptions of the material world would pass, becoming emotionally charged in the process and mixing with all sorts of other phantasms, before the mind could grasp their significance" (21). Attending to crime cinema's urban imagination is a way to emphasize the virtual, expressive, fantastical, creative, and occasionally utopian dimensions of film that fuse with actual locations, events, social realities, and material conditions, to create cinematic experience. Exploring this realm involves looking beyond strictly narrative meanings, toward the recurrent images, tropes, motifs, gestures, and backgrounds that comprise the crime film. In doing so, this book reveals that the crime films produced at the beginning of the 1970s were hardly as clear-cut as common descriptions like "anti-urban" or "dystopian" suggest—or, at the very least, that we should use these terms as points of entry rather than as a way of shutting down discussion.

At the end of the 1960s, the question on the minds of many, from the counterculture, to right-wing editorials, was: is the city, in all its messiness, actually livable? Is the city a sociogeographic formation that will continue into the future? Implicit in this question was an interest in what kinds of life were made possible by the city. When people returned to city centers, they sought out ways of life within formerly industrial spaces; they formed alternative, subcultural communities that thrived with minimal conveniences. So, too, did dominant culture once again come to value architectural heritage, refurbishing urban infrastructures for purposes of consumption and entertainment. The "downtown renaissance" that occurred in varying degrees across American downtowns was

underpinned by a reevaluation of urban life. How, in what is almost unanimously regarded as a resolutely anti-urban nation (see White & White, Conn), did it come to pass that Americans returned to the city? One answer, this book suggests, can be found in the urban imagination that courses through the crime films of the 1970s.

The connections between crime, film, and urbanity explored in this book is partially inspired by a persistent thread found within the work of Siegfried Kracauer. Throughout his major works, from his 1920 writings as a cultural critic collected in the anthology *The Mass Ornament* (1995), to his post-World War II books *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of The German Film* (1947) and *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960, 1997), Kracauer explores a connection between the surfaces of urbanity and mass cultural representation, film in particular. In *Caligari*, Kracauer analyzes a cycle of “street films” in the Weimar period—Victor Grune’s *The Street* (1923), Bruno Rahn’s *The Tragedy of the Street* (1927), Joe May’s *Asphalt* (1929)—in which characters express their discontent with bourgeois domesticity by seeking sensation and vice on city streets. Even if many of these films concluded with characters returning home, submitting themselves to the realm they abandoned, for Kracauer their images of pavement, crowds, and traffic demonstrated that “in the Germany of the time the street exerted an irresistible attraction,” and that “Life . . . is not worthwhile within the boundaries of the ‘system’; it comes into its own only outside the rotten bourgeois world” (1947, 158, 159). In his later work, Kracauer expands *Caligari*’s mode of analysis to theorize film as a medium predisposed toward material life. The significance of urban imagery he discerns in *Caligari* becomes in *Theory of Film* evidence of the way that the camera is able to gather in and put on display a physical world that a culture of rationality has unduly abstracted. Moving between D. W. Griffith, Italian neo-realism, and documentary, he presents a case for cinema as a medium whose functions of recording and revealing allow spectators to re-experience material phenomena (*Theory*, 41–74).

The detective story, and crime films more generally, are of sustained interest for Kracauer. In the 1920s, he wrote a book on detective novels, *Der Detectiv-Roman: Ein philosophischer traktat*, a portion of which was translated and published in *The Mass Ornament* (“The Hotel Lobby”) and, after emigrating to the United States in 1941 he wrote one of the earliest essays on what came to be known as film noir (“Hollywood’s Terror Films: Do they Reflect an American State of Mind?” [1946, 2012]). In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer (much like his close critical acquaintances, Erwin Panofsky and Robert Warshow) isolated the crime genre for the ways its subject matter was explicitly “cinematic” in nature. That is, crime plots emphasized movement, detail, “things normally unseen,” and “the flow

of life”—the latter a nebulous concept meant to emphasize the “stream of material situations and happenings . . . a material, rather than a mental continuum” (71). Sleuthing and thrillers for Kracauer were narrative forms that successfully match and open themselves toward particularly cinematic subjects like contingency, the surfaces and objects of physical life, and movement. The detective searches for “material clues normally unperceived,” necessitating the use of close-ups; the scientific nature of detection “justifies the attention . . . to physical detail.” Finally, Kracauer writes, “it is inevitable that detection should take on the form of a chase,” a form of emplotted motion that, like dance on film, reveled in spontaneous human movement through the everyday world.

In thinking through the popular dimensions of Hollywood cinema, this book also adopts Kracauer’s concept of the “homogenous cosmopolitan audience,” first introduced in the essay “The Cult of Distraction,” in order to think through how the aesthetics of mass culture carry the power to connect audiences of disparate backgrounds (1995, 325). For Kracauer, mass cultural forms like cinema were defined by their power to dissolve traditional cultural distinctions. The homogeneous cosmopolitan audience, exemplified by the four million people of Berlin, was one in which “everyone has the *same* responses, from the bank director to the sales clerk, from the diva to the stenographer” (325). Written in 1926, Kracauer’s concept of audience usefully frames the continued growth of Hollywood over the ensuing decade and corresponds with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s commentary on the unanimity and cohesiveness of the American culture industry (94).

Post-war developments in socio-spatial arrangements and the increasing differentiation of media forms and markets have made it difficult to conceive of culture on a mass basis. In the late 1960s and 1970s, changing patterns of exhibition and market segmentation augured new forms of segregation within popular cinema. As multiplex theaters emerged in the suburbs, the centralized run-zone-clearance system of theatrical booking, wherein films would open in downtown theaters before radiating to neighborhood and rural theaters, was gradually abandoned (Cook, 399). Theater chains that were prohibited from simply divesting themselves of underperforming downtown cinemas created the conditions for a cycle of popular film aimed at a black audience. In *From Sweetback to Super Fly: Race and Film Audiences in Chicago’s Loop*, Gerard Butters brilliantly traces how black-oriented cinema—commonly known as Blaxploitation, a label that unfortunately erases the many non-exploitative films produced for black film-goers during this era—in Chicago played a significant role in galvanizing black audiences and reinvigorating downtowns as black cultural spaces.

Although the emergent power of youth audiences had realigned Hollywood's priorities in the late 1960s, the industry held onto an understanding of itself as a mass cultural form, and many of its products in the 1970s reflect a will to rebuild the mass audience that had made it so successful in the past. Many films produced in the 1970s, crime and action films in particular sought out (and found) audiences in both the cities and the suburbs, from *Klute* and *The French Connection*, to *Shaft* (1971) and *Detroit 9000* (1973). In fact, as this book will show, this traversal between the city and the suburbs becomes, in films like *Klute* and *Death Wish*, a central theme. Further, it was the crime film, more often than other genres, that was capable of making this traversal because its narratives invariably represented the urban spaces in which people of different identities and backgrounds mixed together. While acknowledging and building on the important scholarship connecting specific experiences of gender and race to film and urban life, this book hews more closely to the massified experiential stratum of film spectatorship elaborated by Kracauer, elucidating recurring urban images and motifs in films that traversed the apparently incommensurate social realms of the chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs in order to emphasize the shared, rather than divergent aspects of the urban imagination. Such an emphasis is not meant to erase the fact that the city is experienced in very different ways by different social groups, but rather to draw attention to the coagulation of mass culture, film and urbanity that forms the common basis of this variegated experience, the way that different people used the same films to see *into* their sense of the city. It is from this common ground that we can begin to understand how the meaning and shape of the American city transformed.

The remainder of this introduction develops Kracauer's line of thinking about the crime film, connecting it to the historically specific dimensions of American urbanity and urban discourse in the 1970s to set the stage for the chapters that follow. Here I show that the crime film's openness toward a material continuum as a generic form enabled a reflexive space for American audiences to grapple with the materiality of urban transformation, and that, at the same time, changes within understandings of urbanism itself provided a unique opportunity—a special sort of messiness—within which crime films could flourish.

The Basic Armature of the Crime Film

Of the crime films on Canby's list, each could be said to fit within a well-established subgenre like the police procedural (*Serpico*, *The Super Cops*) or the underworld drama (*Mean Streets*), or to develop new variations on the urban thriller (the vigilante film with *Death Wish*, the suspenseful

hostage/heist plot with *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*), or offer comedic takes on familiar crime film tropes (*Law and Disorder*, *For Pete's Sake*). In fact, this short list covers only a small portion of the films made in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s that thematize criminality in some way. We might also include, *The Incident* (1967), *Madigan* (1968), *The Detective* (1968), *Coogan's Bluff* (1968), *No Way to Treat a Lady*, (1968), *A Lovely Way to Die* (1968), *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), *Born to Win* (1971), *Little Murders* (1971), *The Anderson Tapes* (1971), *Panic in Needle Park* (1971), *Come Back, Charleston Blue* (1972), *Super Fly* (1972) *The Hot Rock* (1972), *Across 110th Street* (1972), *Shaft's Big Score* (1972), *The Seven-Ups* (1973), *Badge 373* (1973), *Cops and Robbers* (1973), *Black Caesar* (1973), *Gordon's War* (1973), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *Report to the Commissioner* (1975), and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). The list grows even larger if we move beyond New York to include all of the location-shot crime films made during this period in cities such as San Francisco (*Point Blank*, [1967], *Bullit* [1968], *They Call Me MISTER Tibbs!* [1970], *Dirty Harry* [1971], *The Organization* [1971], *The Laughing Policeman* [1973], *Magnum Force* [1973], *The Mack* [Oakland, 1973], *The Conversation* [1974], *Freebie and the Bean* [1974], *Mr. Ricco* [1975]), Los Angeles (*The Split*, [1968], *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* [1971], *The Bus is Coming* [1971], *The New Centurions* [1972], *Cisco Pike* [1972], *Hickey & Boggs* [1972], *The Outside Man* [1972], *Trouble Man* [1972], *The Stone Killer* [1973], *The Outfit* [1973], *The Long Goodbye* [1973], *Busting* [1974], and *Newman's Law* [1974]). Crime films that featured other major American cities include: Chicago in *The Spook that Sat By the Door* (1973), *Three the Hard Way* (1974), and *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974); Detroit in *Detroit 9000*; Cleveland in *Up Tight!* (1968); Philadelphia in *Trick Baby* (1972); Washington, DC, in *Top of the Heap* (1972); Boston in *The Boston Strangler* (1968), *Fuzz* (1972) and *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973); Seattle in *The Parallax View* (1974) and "McQ" (1974); and even Galveston, Texas, in *Together Brothers* (1974), among others.⁵ The prevalence of crime subjects within urban-set films is perhaps unsurprising, the world of crime has been a durable source of popular fascination and a key to understanding the mysteries of the modern city. Crime genres of all sorts have always formed a significant portion of cinematic production, not least because both criminals and the investigators that invariably follow them are avatars of the visual—from the deceptions of camouflage and disguise to the eye for microscopic detail, signified by the magnifying glass, that penetrates inscrutable appearances. Relatedly, crime endows the popular dimension of film with topicality and social import. Though crime narratives may take place in any period or setting, crime films tend to be contemporary-set stories, frequently

sensationalizing current events circulating within other popular texts, from novels to newspapers.

On the one hand there is a striking continuity in the forms of urbanity extended by crime cinema. It is not difficult to discern connective threads between the naturalism of *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and *Mean Streets*; the urban exploitation of *Traffic in Souls* (1913) and *Death Wish*; the reformism of *Regeneration* (1915), *Dead End* (1937), and *Serpico*; or the kinetic action adventure of the *Nick Carter* (1908, 1909, 1910, 1911) series and *Shaft* and its sequels. On the other hand, there is an historical specificity encoded in these texts, one that relates to the currents within popular culture they drew on, the urban context in which they were made, and the sociological discourses on crime they make reference to. Raoul Walsh's *Regeneration*, the story of a lower-class criminal from the Bowery reformed through the efforts of a social worker makes sense against the political backdrop of Progressive-era America. While sustaining this reformist mode, *Serpico* places itself in relation to the transformation and professionalization efforts of the New York City police force in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as with the Knapp Commission hearings into police corruption.⁶ Charting the urban imaginary of the crime film involves acknowledging its proclivity for directly referencing topical social issues, its intertextual relations with other popular arts, as well as its dialogic relationship to the crime as a generic form.

As a cultural object that has historically opened itself to topical issues and contemporary environments, the crime film invites us to look at it as both a distinct form and as a form open to being shaped by social, historical, and urban forces. Although all popular films define themselves both through relatively fixed textual features and the historical contexts in which they're produced, the crime film has, more than most other genres, foregrounded the latter, even while sustaining the former. Thus, to provide an accurate account of the flourishing cycle of crime films in the early 1970s involves a method that weaves between close analysis and a historicism that places visual codes within an evolving network of cultural meanings.

The urban and sociological disposition of the crime film is widely recognized but it has more often been presumed than specified. Gangster films and noir have tended to dominate genealogies of the crime film, subsuming the resilience and formal particularities of subgenres like the police procedural and the heist film, as well as the specificity of particular periods beyond the postwar noir cycle. Granting balanced force to both form and context has animated a small body of work on crime films, including essays by Tom Gunning (1995, 1997, 2009), Vivian Sobchack (1998), Murray Pomerance (2013), and the collection *Mob Culture: Hidden*

Histories of the American Gangster Film (Grieverson, Sonnet, Stanfield, 2005). Edward Dimendberg's *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (2002) is perhaps the most sustained study of the interaction between crime narratives and urbanity. Dimendberg's interdisciplinary intervention is to detour the questions of formal and stylistic essentialism that had dominated one branch of noir scholarship while also deepening an understanding of noir's historical relationship to the built environment that had been glossed by others. By pointing to the significance of noir's material grounds—backgrounds, settings, milieu, location, visual perspectives on urban spaces—Dimendberg's work also follows in the critical tradition of Kracauer. The method of *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* also pairs nicely with Sobchack's essay "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir, which uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (the literary figuration of time-space) to illustrate "lounge time"; the way that the prevalence of waiting around in bars, nightclubs, and diners in noir film hyperbolizes the empty temporality and homelessness endemic to postwar culture. In the work of both scholars, character motivation and psychology is de-centered in order to give greater prominence to the enveloping urban contexts that the noir cycle registers.

Influenced by this work, but moving beyond noir, the present study is also situated within a growing body of scholarship that eschews the putative anthropocentrism of narrative film in order to attend to a material environment that has frequently been cast as a neutral, non-determinative background. For American cinema this emergent scholarship has given a fuller presence to the proto-suburban landscapes of 1920s Los Angeles slapstick (Wolfe, 2011), electric lighting in noir (Keating, 2015), the streets of Times Square in 1960s sexploitation films (Gorfinkel, 2011), skyscraper films (Schleier, 2009), and apartment plots (Wojcik, 2010). Such approaches ramify a new take on film genre that departs from the syntactic/semantic framework productively established by Rick Altman (1999) in order to invite us to look at the worlds and environmental contexts that Hollywood films have furnished for our exploration. This work also sustains the sensibility of Kracauer, who, first watching American films from afar, found within their fiction a material world dense in sociological detail. In "Why France Loved Our Films," he wrote "May I mention too, those scenes from the completely average film *Mannequin* (1937), in which Joan Crawford, walking down a cheap staircase, switches off, from habit, the bulb, and afterwards, in the elevated train, talks and talks to her young lover. Behind such fragments of New York life the immense city itself seems to appear" (36).

In attempting to specify crime film's relation to the urban environment, one immediately confronts the problem that what is usually

called a crime film in fact encompasses a number of subgenres, each with distinct and sometimes overlapping sets of conventions, formulas, plot situations, and iconography. Gangster films, social problem pictures, prison films, heist/caper films, psychological thrillers, police procedurals, detective films, serial killer films, and a number of others crowd within the classification, bobbing in and out of prominence depending on the historical period. Noir, a period strictly defined by crime films produced between the early 1940s and the mid-1950s exerts an inordinate gravitational force on the idea of the crime film—expanding, depending on the variable employed, across years, decades, continents, and generic categories. The present work is less interested in creating a classificatory framework for crime's subgenres and their hybrid forms in order to describe what crime films *are* and hence how the films of the 1970s fit or do not, than in describing what crime films *do* (and have done) with the urban environment at a particular moment. Thus, it is not an essential character for the crime film that is sought, nor a prescription for how crime films should deal with the city, but rather a tracing out of the particular *affinities*, within crime films, for urban settings.

The most pronounced affinity between the fictional form of crime and the modern city is expressed through the detective story. Though the detective story has antecedents in gothic and sensation literature, as well as other narratives of discovery and revelation (from *Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet*), the stories of Edgar Allan Poe are commonly cited as the definitive point of emergence. Prior to creating the character of C. Auguste Dupin, Poe wrote "The Man of the Crowd," in which a narrator who has been sitting in a coffee house, classifying passersby, becomes so struck by a strange man he cannot help but follow him. For Walter Benjamin, "The Man of the Crowd" represented an "X-ray" of the detective story because it contained a basic armature—"the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who manages to walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd" (27)—that would be sustained in the more formalized investigative adventure literature to follow. Benjamin refers to Poe in the course of his essay on the Paris of Charles Baudelaire, who was also drawn to Poe's story, and who would go on to suggest the wanderer as an emblematic figure of modern life. Detection, however, gave form and narrative direction to the more aimless classifying gaze of the flâneur, allowing for a literature both distinctively urban and visual to continue.⁷

The critic and mystery writer G. K. Chesterton also recognized the detective story's itinerant nature, stating that the movement and visual scrutiny of the detective comprised a poetic approach to the surfaces of urban environment:

Men lived among mighty mountains and eternal forests for ages before they realized that they were poetical; it may reasonably be inferred that some of our descendants may see the chimney-pots as rich a purple as the mountain-peaks, and find the lamp-posts as old and natural as the trees. Of this realization of a great city itself as something wild and obvious the detective story is certainly the Iliad. No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey the casual omnibus assumes the primal colors of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. (1901, 119–120)

For many critics and commentators on detective stories—and even narrative art more generally—it is the solution (or resolution) of the mystery that forms the principle area of interest. In turn, the detective has frequently been cast as a heroic paragon of logic, the detective story teleologically advertising the normative virtue of sober reason.

Yet, understanding the detective story as a parable of rationality confuses its content with what is its final effect: the solution that recasts, and indeed re-tells, everything we have seen before it in a process of making logical that which seemed inconceivable (for example, homicide by orangutan in the middle of nineteenth-century Paris). It neglects everything that precedes the solution, what Benjamin suggests is the story's "basic armature": a crowd, a strange encounter, a parade of visual detail, a pursuit. Kracauer agrees: "The eventual discovery of the criminal," he observes, is functionally necessary but "more or less in the nature of a letdown" (*Theory* 275). Chesterton too corrects this forgetfulness, reminding us that for much of the detective story, just as we are involved in a journey across the city, so too, before everything has settled again, we are in a heightened, often anxious, state of awareness that animates spaces, people, and objects.

That this type of narrative and its basic armature would in turn flourish within cinema is unsurprising: both the detective story and film were formed within the crucible of urban modernity and both were premised on examining and interpreting the hieroglyphic fabric of the urban environment. Theoreticians as diverse as Jean Epstein, Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, Erwin Panofsky, and others commented on cinema's capacity to vivify, defamiliarize, and renew a cognition of the world in much the same way that Chesterton, writing shortly after cinema's emer-

gence, wrote about the detective story. Crime stories and film technology intensified each other's spatial representations. In mystery films, Panofsky writes, space is "doubly charged with time as the beholder asks himself not only 'What is going to happen?' but also 'What has happened before?'" (1992, 239).

A doubling could also develop by folding narrative intrigue into film's documentary images. Consider, for example, American Mutoscope & Biograph Company's *The Black Hand* (1906), the story of the abduction and ransom of the young daughter of a butcher by a notorious gang (coded as Italian immigrants). The kidnapping sequence begins with the intertitle "The Threat Carried Out" then provides a wintry image of a Lower East Side street in which a continuous traffic of bodies streams into view from both the depths and the edges of the frame. This deep shot establishes itself as a documentary view as a number of onlookers stop to gaze directly at the camera; the realistic street scene a contrast to the staged, studio-shot scenes that have preceded it. Eventually, the butcher's daughter emerges from the background and begins to interact with a man searching for something on the sidewalk. In a moment, a carriage pulls to the side of the road, and the searching man helps snatch the girl. Here, the dense visual detail and actuality of the *mise-en-scène* amplifies spectatorial suspense. The knowledge that a threat is about to be enacted charges the frame, demanding anticipatory investment. Unlike documentary street scenes that invite us to comfortably watch the crowd's variety, or, as one early film catalogue puts it, "study its many interesting phases," (quoted in Gunning, 1997, 35), here we are tensed in our inspection. The kidnapping itself enacts a paranoia that Gunning argues is at the center of the modern cinematic thriller: the ability to see or to read a scene of terror but the inability to control it (57). But the scene also gains power through a reality effect. The weight of the descriptive detail supplied by the *mise-en-scène* mirrors the crowded perceptual field of the modern urban environment. The anticipation of a threat to be carried out introduces a game of visual cognition that the scene itself always seems to win at—the kidnapping is underway before we can discern its outlines. Still, the shot of the busy street has a synchronic effect different from our everyday experience. As spectators (relatively) safely ensconced in our seats, we can really look at these streets and their people, even if danger is omnipresent. This game of description and anticipation is sustained, as I will show, in urban crime thrillers of the 1970s like *The French Connection*, a film which deftly intertwines documentary and fictional elements to similar effect.

The descriptive aspects of detective and mystery genres are further elaborated by the literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov. In his essay "Typology of Detective Fiction," (1977) Todorov identifies the prominence of

description and milieu in the American hardboiled tradition defined by the work of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and others. Developing a suggestion by the experimental writer Michel Butor, Todorov argues that earlier formulations of the detective story like the whodunit could be separated into two stories that roughly correspond with the formalist distinction between *fabula* and *sujet*, story and plot (45). The first story, the murder, has already happened, and is nestled inside the second story, the story of the investigation. The detective's investigation that is, involves a plotting out of what exactly happened before. This requires, Todorov states, a certain transparency of narration. "[T]o keep the second story from becoming opaque, from casting a useless shadow on the first, the style is to be kept neutral and plain, to the point where it is rendered imperceptible" (47).

Both this narrative organization and adherence to neutral description, however, are transformed in the hardboiled thriller. For the thriller fuses the two stories, or "suppresses the first, and vitalizes the second" (47). The concern of Hammett's and Chandler's detectives is usually not just a single murder, but a crime that is ongoing, a crime that the investigator is very much enveloped by, rather than apart from. One effect of this change is to privilege the narrative significance of the environments moved through by the investigator, downplaying, in comparison with the whodunit, the claims of the past on the present: "No thriller is presented in the form of memoirs: there is no point reached where the narrator comprehends all past events, we do not even know if he will reach the end of the story alive. Prospection takes the place of retrospection" (47). Unlike the whodunit, the detective thriller is oriented towards the present rather than the past; this present, moreover is less secure, more dynamic than the ground on which the detective of the whodunit enunciates the crime, for in the thriller crime and danger are ongoing and environmental.

Though he is describing differentiations among literary forms, Todorov's distinctions help to explain how it is that the thriller rather than the whodunit has been the dominant format within the broad assemblage of subgenres making up crime cinema. If film is understood as a medium disposed to showing over telling, it follows that it would gravitate toward a form given to description and milieu. Though, particularly within noir, flashback narration is prevalent, it is has less often been used as a tool for a detective's recounting of a crime.⁸ More common, from the gangster film to the heist film to the police procedural, the narrative places protagonists in worlds and situations of encompassing danger, facing anxiously forward, rather than back. While the question of what has happened before lingers, the thriller places the viewer within a dangerous and uncannily mysterious

present. Consider that in the preponderance of recent Sherlock Holmes films and TV series (Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* [2009] and *Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows* [2011], as well as the BBC's "Sherlock" [2010–]) elements of danger, suspense, and sensational action are showcased as much as, and often more so, than Holmes' famous ability to reconstruct the story of a crime, as is a densely detailed London milieu.

As in the *Black Hand*, the crime thriller more generally has frequently depended on actual urban sites for its effects, the streets of Paris in Louis Feuillade's *Fântomas* (1913–1914), for example, or the sewers of Los Angeles in *He Walked by Night* (1948). This principle was further elevated within the semi-documentary procedural cycle of the late 1940s, which broke away from the standardized street designs on studio lots to seek out different varieties of setting. Films like *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), *Boomerang!* (1947), and *The Naked City* (1948) foregrounded the use of locations through voiceover and documentary montage in order to enhance their claims of authenticity. As one critic wrote of the post-war vogue for realism: "in a long-brewing reaction against phony studio sets and 'actors,' [Hollywood] found a new, newsreel, newspaper reality in the semi-documentary technique—actual locations, peopled by men and women whose 'glamour' came from within not without" (Phillip K. Scheuer "Movie Realism at Peak in 1948" [26 December 1948] D1). The attraction to urban location was not solely the verisimilitude offered by identifiable topography and landmarks, they also counted on accruing visual interest through the infinite variations of physical infrastructure gathered within the modern city, a heterogeneous and intersecting collision of pedestrian passages, edifices, and transportation corridors, bridges and tunnels, grand public buildings and tiny commercial alcoves, park spaces and abandoned lots, palatial residences looking over this built landscape, and dark underground recesses hidden from view. As James Sanders points out, cinematographers and location scouts began to fulfill more significant roles in a film's overall look than the production designer (whose job had been mostly aligned with studio-based practices), assuming responsibility for selecting sites that would be both consistent with, and add variety to, a film's design (342–43). In the threading of diegesis with locale, documentary views become infused with intrigue and, conversely, intrigue gains power from veritable settings. In turn, the city as a visual experience becomes defamiliarized and renewed. As much as the city may be inevitably become psychic space, it is foremost a material space, one that both enables and delimits visuality and grounds possibilities for action.

The full range of urban contexts—cultural, social, material—participated in by the crime film has been circumscribed in part due to the