

Spatial Representation in Three Detective Fiction Subgenres*

Zi-ling Yan

Department of English

National University of Tainan, Taiwan

Abstract

In this study I examine a limited aspect of spatial representation in Golden Age, hard-boiled, and postmodern detective fiction. I situate these representations within a theory of architectural enclosure, Tschumi's pyramid/labyrinth distinction, then employ concepts derived from Gestalt theory as pointing up an ideological tendency in the Golden Age floor plans and diagrams by which crime is contained and spaces are normalized. John Dickson Carr's *The Problem of the Wire Cage* (1939) serves as a test case. The subsequent sections offer spatial analyses of Dashiell Hammett's "The Whosis Kid" (1925) and "Dead Yellow Women" (1925) and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1987). Hammett's stories illustrate the breakdown of visual mastery in disorienting spaces whose textual representation parallels the Op's own limited knowledge. Auster's diagrams appear to offer a synthesis of prior positions: he incorporates plans which seem to promise meaning but which ultimately fail to establish certainty. I argue, however, that Auster's plans are most effectively read in their specific socio-historical and political context and that the performative loss of referential certainty in his protagonist reflects a form of critique that differs from earlier genres' use of these figures.

Keywords

detective fiction, space, floor plans, Gestalt theory, representation

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The crime scene, central to all subgenres of detective fiction, consists of a bounded space circumscribing the criminal event. Little has been written, however, about the nature of this spatial configuration. Michael Cook's *Narratives of Enclosure* is the only book-length study that systematically examines an aspect of the problem, in this case, the locked room mystery. Cook remarks parallels between architectural and narrative enclosures, though without reference to theories of spatial production and only a brief mention of the diagrams, floor plans, and maps that form the curious addenda to some Classical and Golden Age stories.¹ In this essay, I take the relatively narrow focus of the floor plan, and to a lesser degree, the map, to theorize the representation of space vis-à-vis these pictorial elements and to consider how their use and meaning differs in the Golden Age, the hard-boiled, and the postmodern detective fiction subgenres.

The dearth of interest in the use of such figures is not confined to literary texts. Scant critical attention has been given to the discursive or diagrammatic representations of architecture generally, as it is concretized in plans. This absence is surprising since such plans ostensibly enable a degree of mastery over space, an access to a totality pregnant with philosophical implications. Plans invoke “a regulative ideal—and a unifying abstract structure” for the spaces they portray (Temple 12), a tendency which Anthony Vidler believes to be self-consciously and progressively articulated in modern architectural drawing since the French Revolution (9-10). Reaching a high point in Le Corbusier, the unifying nature of the plan itself serves as a station en route to the postmodern. Standing beyond the Modernist architect's diagrammatic reduction, postmodern architectural and spatial “design” dematerializes into a “set of instructions” or “an ordering system” (Tierney 81). In this sequence we note the plan's apparent reflective relation to major shifts in cultural sensibilities.

The intensification of critical awareness concerning this historical transformation remains indebted to Henri Lefebvre's seminal *The Production of Space*, which interrogates the notion of space as a frame or container while also explicitly addressing the ideological beneficiaries of this construct and the hegemonic influence exerted by its logic. Lefebvre's critique isolates the moments of a dialectic—explicated further by Edward Soja's descriptions of Thirdspace in the context of productive relations (60-67)—while drawing attention to the mutual

¹ I have only found one essay, Derham Groves's “Better Holmes and Gardens: Sense of Place in the Sherlock Holmes Stories,” which directly pursues the conjunction of plans and narrative in detective fiction, though Sophia Psarra devotes part of her chapter on Borges's detective stories to architectural enclosure (70-87).

distortions effected by the terms themselves and the rejection of a neat process involving moments of conflict between determinate elements.

Philosophically-engaged writers on architectural enclosure like Denis Hollier and Bernard Tschumi, themselves influenced by Lefebvre, have evaded this overdetermined antinomy by offering metaphorical (or literary) approaches to the forestalled dialectic. Indeed, the appeal of Tschumi's "architectural paradox" is evident in the limited body of scholarly writing on the literary representation of space as it pertains to plans and enclosures.² Tschumi's central metaphors, the pyramid and the labyrinth, refer to an engagement with architectural space as primarily visual/conceptual or haptic/intuitive, respectively. Hollier essentially works with the same terms: boundaries are established from the vantage of the pyramid's apex (31)—the viewer achieves conceptual mastery over space which then facilitates the discursive representation of its contents. The labyrinth, in contrast, invokes indeterminacy and ambiguity (Hollier 61). If, like Icarus, one could escape, "one would look down on it, . . . from above. From the summit of the pyramid. The entire labyrinth would fit inside an optical cone"—one would possess "the divine eye of being" (Hollier 72-73). Hollier's notion is reformulated by Tschumi, who remarks "the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time experienc[ing] a spatial praxis" (28). While these abstractions are theoretically, or perhaps ironically, coherent from a detached perspective (suggesting that critical appraisals are securely lodged in the pyramidal/discursive mode), critics like Rosalyn Deutsche remind us that political realities and risks unfold on the ground; she suggests that such models obscure the social dimension of space, reducing it to "natural, mechanical, or organic laws" experienced by "aggregated individuals" (52). This tension is commonplace in detective fiction: the detached isolation of criminal spaces versus their engagement on the mean streets. We come to suspect that drawing lines around the crime scene, especially in the Classical narrative, consistently defines social "contradictions" in order to neutralize them.³

² See, for example, Susan Bernstein's *Housing Problems*, Claudia Brodsky Lacour's *Lines of Thought*, Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny*, and Sophia Psarra's *Architecture and Narrative*.

³ Tschumi's influence on literary studies is nonetheless notable. Brodsky Lacour and Bernstein, both concerned with literary representations of architecture, discern tension between materialist and idealist notions of space—a problem already evident in Descartes in the relation between "*dessein* and *dessin*, or discourse and architectonics" (Brodsky 35). The discursive/architectonic divide also figures in Bernstein, citing Tschumi (2-3), though her assessment derives from Hegel's treatment of architecture in the *Aesthetics* as a contradiction between object (conceptual mastery) and dwelling (praxis). In all three cases, Descartes, Hegel, and Tschumi, we find an

To limit the scope of the essay, I confine my inquiry first to spaces that are visually literalized in Golden Age floor plans and diagrams. Informed by the pyramid-labyrinth relation, my thesis is that the floor plan invokes a form of conceptual mastery, and its gesture of control over the crime event facilitates class-based anxiety-reduction in that it concretizes spatial boundaries, subjecting its elements to scrutiny from outside and above by the detective, who then discursively configures solutions in line with idealized (i.e., class-based) forms of justice. Clearly, I do not attempt to define the entire subgenre in this way, but rather see the plan as having a synecdochal function, *pars pro toto*, within the texts that employ them—they receive little critical scrutiny just as the larger ideological assumptions behind the guarantors of truth are infrequently questioned. After referencing a range of Golden Age diagrams, I offer a more detailed analysis of John Dickson Carr’s *The Problem of the Wire Cage* (1939). Although Tschumi and Hollier are useful to generalize the contours of our problem, a more concrete set of theoretical tools is necessary for detailed analysis. To that end, and especially in the examination of Golden Age plans, I employ concepts and techniques borrowed from Gestalt theory, a body of work that achieved prominence in the English-speaking world at about the same time as the rise of the Golden Age detective novel. In the subsequent section I consider the absence of plans and diagrams in hard-boiled detective fiction by examining two stories by Dashiell Hammett, “The Whosis Kid” (1925) and “Dead Yellow Women” (1925): both involve the shutting-down of vision and a shift to haptic modes of perception. Hammett’s texts are distinctly labyrinthine, in contrast to the visual mastery afforded by the plan. Unlike the denouements in which detectives forge clues into a coherent narrative, the meandering quality of many hard-boiled texts—the beads-on-a-string structure evident in novels like *The Dain Curse* or *The Big Sleep*—not only preclude a totalizing vision, confined as it is for the Op or Marlowe to first-person perspectives, but in some cases also disables the detective’s summation (epitomized in a story like “House Dick” where the solution is delivered by the criminal). Finally, I turn to the resurrection of diagrams in Paul Auster’s postmodern detective novel *City of Glass* (1987). The complexity of Auster’s self-conscious merger of Golden Age mastery and hard-boiled uncertainty results in a hybrid form whose concrete depictions of space threaten the collapse of reference points. These points still exist in the parent genres despite their different narrative styles, even in the hard-boiled in that the investigative process typically functions under the aegis of moneyed clients or institutional

irreducible relation between knowledge and control, which threatens to block dialectical resolution.

(though corrupted) norms of social justice. Unlike his Golden Age and hard-boiled counterparts, Auster's detective's engagement with space, both in his unsuccessful attempts to reduce it to a manageable picture and his eventual loss of self-reference in homelessness, infuses political urgency into the novel.

Before we turn to the specifics of the Golden Age plan, an overview of relevant Gestalt terminology is necessary—the major concepts are in fact well-illustrated in a passage from Ngaio Marsh's 1939 novel *Overture to Death*. Responding to journalist Nigel Bathgate's puzzlement over the investigation's progress, Marsh's detective Chief Inspector Alleyn remarks to his assistant Fox: “‘We are, . . . two experts on a watch-tower in the middle of a maze.’ ‘Look at the poor wretch [i.e., Bathgate],’ we say as we nudge each other, ‘there he goes into the same old blind alley. Jolly comical’” (239). Alleyn's architectural metaphor exemplifies the omniscient detective's analysis “from above,” the capacity to attain insight through apprehending discrete groupings of elements or vectors within a bounded and structured field. Like Bathgate, readers are customarily restricted to ground-level hapticity (“in the middle of a maze”); the detective's panoramic advantage typically remains inaccessible to readers until the end. Understood in this light, Alleyn's remark evokes principles central to Gestalt theory, as developed by its best-known exponents Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler, in terms of how knowledge is acquired and converted into solutions.

First, we note Alleyn's privileging of the visual; although both Koffka and Wertheimer extend Gestalt applications to other senses, sight dominates Gestalt theory. The grasp of the whole structure is, moreover, for Wertheimer the determinative moment for sorting what he terms “part-processes” (“Gestalt Theory” 2). The whole constitutes a bounded field comprised of the totality and its visual contents (Köhler, “Some Gestalt Problems” 60)—Alleyn's elevated vantage circumscribes the maze within a total field.⁴ Apprehension of the plane, which Köhler understands to be a pre-conscious process, entails differentiation between geographical and behavioral spaces or modes (Koffka 51-53), which I describe in more detail below. Structure is grasped holistically “from above” (Wertheimer, *Productive* 35) and based upon an intuition of geographical space. The analysis of discrete elements in the behavioral space involves interpretations which exceed mere add-summativ logic—in the context of detective fiction, this refers to sorting

⁴ Gestalt theorist David Katz formulates it thus: “meaning and meaningful processes are considered to be on the same plane, and a distinction is made between coherence of parts based on internal necessity and mere superficial coexistence” (85).

data which points to solutions beyond the limited significance of any isolated element. The investigator then undergoes a transformative insight (Köhler, *Gestalt* 371-72) involving productive thinking. Typically, this means α -type imagination and its holistic grasp of totality triumphs over β -type fact collection that emphasizes the mere amassing of data, or, worse yet, γ -type blind trial (Wertheimer, *Productive* 246)—and indeed, we note how often the Golden Age detective wins out over the efficient but intellectually-plodding and unimaginative official who adheres to established protocols.⁵

To be sure, these theoretical tenets must be historically situated since they are neither neutral nor self-evident facts. Despite Gestalt theory's experimental underpinnings, its practitioners do not entirely relinquish the appeal to transcendence—most cogently expressed in Koffka's retention of the ego—so as to reduce space to abstract terms. Classical detectives are suspended between these positions in that they bracket a world that they also enter, albeit as outsiders. They emerge in the secularized context of nineteenth-century chaotic capitalism and positivism as hybrid figures, whose appeal in part derives from an ability to re-enchant the world through reinvigorating the community in the face of a de-spiritualized atomism (Saler 602). At the same time, although transcending the conventional limits placed upon readers' more pedestrian vision, Classical detectives attain insight through the discourse of facts and evidence demanded by contemporaneous transformations in juridical processes in Western Europe and America.⁶ This hybridity is illustrated by key early figures like Dupin and Holmes, who exhibit a talent for grasping totalities; they are, to cite Jonathan Crary writing in the context of Gestalt theory, observers "who perceive organized structures, not accumulations of disjunct sensations, [observers] marked by innate form-giving and form-apprehending capacities" who demonstrate "an effort to endow human perception with an inherent meaningfulness, coherence, and even orderliness amid its perpetual mutation, instrumentalization, and decomposition" (158). The demand for a solution and closure is commonly achieved by delimiting space-time parameters, bases for suspicion (means, motive, opportunity), and the validity of clues which are then raised to the status of evidence; it entails the arrangement of these elements according to principles of good form which sometimes means disregarding official regulations. Dupin and Holmes, both disparagers of police

⁵ For a concise genealogy of the Gestalt School and its major concerns, see Crary (156-58). In addition to the major works remarked in the text, see King and Wertheimer (63-81) and relevant chapters in Murray. For useful summaries of major works (many of which remain untranslated), see Ellis.

⁶ See Thomas for an overview of this development, especially chapters 1 and 2.

method if not the police themselves, exhibit the “structural insight, structural mastery, and meaningful learning” (Wertheimer, *Productive* 246) important to their transformation of Köhler’s total field.

Finally, we must consider the agency behind the spatial representations themselves. The plans and maps encountered in Classical or Golden Age texts are usually not directly attributable to the detective or other in-text characters. But, neither are they regarded as the narrator’s or author’s work.⁷ Such diagrams are not credited in the publication data, further obscuring their origins and the editorial decisions behind their inclusion. Their presence is an added but likely unremarked mystery, and yet the representation of space within the plan offers a privileged coign of vantage. They resemble what Michel de Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* terms a god-like perspective, certainly an apt description of the Golden Age detective’s “totalizing eye” (92) or Nicholas Temple’s “mastering totalization” (11) as opposed to the hard-boiled gumshoe’s more modest outlook. The contrast calls to mind de Certeau’s distinction between place and space, respectively. Place invokes “the law of the ‘proper’ rules” in that “the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines” (117), as if divorced from conscious human agency. Place favors the map in which elements are reduced to objects within a fixed economy of meaning (i.e., exchange value, connoted by *propre*). In contrast, Hammett’s Op is constantly in motion and frequently unable to reduce the “scene,” now expanded to the entire urban fabric, to meaningfully bounded units. Auster brings these threads together—his detective actively produces a plan which ends up confirming his relative powerlessness to affirm meaning, but the real space-time nexus of the plan also leads to a direct and more self-conscious politicizing of spatial representation when linked to the protagonist’s homelessness, a performative loss of the *oikos* linked to contemporaneous developments in late capitalist America.

The Golden Age Plan

A curious feature of Golden Age authors’ use of floor plans, cross-sectional diagrams, and maps is that their inclusion rarely gives rise to much reflection. Yet the plan is typically more than an aid to a solution: it literally enframes a field of action and establishes a figure-ground relation serving as a platform for collecting evidence. The plan’s visual concretization of the field does not typically raise

⁷ Robert Van Gulik, who produced city plans, maps, and illustrations for many of his Judge Dee novels, is an exception.

questions as to how boundaries are demarcated, a point also true of Gestalt field formation (Marx and Hillix 178-79); nonetheless, authors bracket knowledge within such enclosures, in which detectives invest objects, traces, relationships, etc. with value or declare them valueless. The familiar process masks the interaction between Kurt Koffka's geographical and behavioral settings (corresponding to "reality and appearance," respectively [Koffka 35]). Briefly, Koffka's behavioral domain is "the perceived world, the world of commonsense experience" whereas the geographical domain "is the world as studied by the physical scientist" ("Koffka" n. pag.); the latter circumscribe the parameters of reality that we normally take for granted—something like the idea of a map. A key problem, then, is to develop the criteria to differentiate "things" from "not-things," which for Koffka means deference to an ego. This ego is of central importance for its ability to become self-conscious of the behavioral/geographical divide, and this is easier to see when we give plans some serious thought.

Little critical attention has been given to the subject of plans although they have a long history, first appearing in Charles Felix's 1862 *The Notting Hill Mystery* (Panek 127) and in other early texts like Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), Brander Matthews's *The Last Meeting* (1885), and Gaston Leroux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1907). Though by no means universally employed, a noticeable increase in the use of plans begins in the interwar period.⁸ Even before they became commonplace, Carolyn Wells, in her prescriptive *The Technique of the Mystery Story* (1913), claimed that "some plots cannot be clearly understood without a plan" (145)—this assertion, apparently thought to be self-evident, is not explained. Her view is echoed by Willard Wright (S. S. Van Dine), who believed diagrams enhanced realism. In the introduction to his anthology *The Great Detective Stories* (1927) he writes: "The plot must appear to be an actual record of events springing from the terrain of its operations; and the plans and diagrams so often encountered in detective stories aid considerably in the achievement of this effect" (7).⁹ More recently, Michael Cook in his *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction* proposes that plans are one among several framing devices found in detective fiction, though he also suggests they add "authenticity by

⁸ They are far from universal, however; prominent Classical and Golden Age authors who do not use them include G. K. Chesterton, Arthur Morrison, L. T. Meade, Arthur B. Reeve, Jacques Futelle, Arthur J. Rees, J. S. Fletcher, Ernest Bramah, Eden Phillpotts, Gladys Mitchell, Earl Derr Biggers, and Nicholas Blake.

⁹ Wright echoes Hans Gross: "Of very great importance are the so-called plans or tables on which the result of the enquiry is shown in a graphic way, so that the connection of the most important incidents can be gathered by a single glance at the plan" (50).

providing pictorial evidence” (178). Cook’s parallel between the narrative frame and architectural setting in which crime scenes are enclosed (14) is convincing, though I question whether sketch plans actually serve as “a pictorial version of the text” (108). Rather, these plans probably escape the critical attention directed towards the text; they are embedded in unreflective notions of represented space.

Everyday experience reinforces the idea that floor plans convey an unproblematic reality; we are typically unconcerned with institutional mediation in the plan’s anti-perspectival flattening of space divorced from its hidden constituting agency. But in the mystery, this correspondence cannot be taken for granted. Instead, the isolation of events, clues, and evidence within the plan is highlighted by “empty” but functionalized space: the study, library, or dining room. A human presence is sometimes indicated to define surveillance boundaries, as with the diagrammed disposition of police officers in *It Walks by Night* (Carr 6) or *The Bishop Murder Case* (Van Dine 415, 417); humans may be reduced to an objectified body, either an ominous “X” or, as depicted in Van Dine’s *The Scarab Murder Case* (29) and Carr’s *The Problem of the Wire Cage* (71), a tiny drawing of a prostrate corpse. Such plans resemble architectural diagrams which “stress object rather than experience” (O’Neill 3) whereby humans become reference points viewed from a detached and privileged vantage.

The focalization of the floor plan, almost always elevated, is therefore at best ambiguous. Often enough, the plan is simply appended, without explanation, as the frontispiece, the unpaginated section preceding the novel and collated with publication data, the inside cover, or merely an insertion in the text. The behavioral space of the plan is defined partly by its functionalization, whose range of uses derives meaning from class-based associations—the library is not a feature of every home, but the unrepresented kitchen likely is. Moreover, the individuality of owners and guests is secured inasmuch as bedrooms in the plan are frequently inscribed with names.¹⁰ But property-less servants do not fare as well in that their quarters, if referred to at all, are either indicated by gesturing toward an off-plan space or displayed as undifferentiated enclosures. Thus, the plan’s spatial organization generally correlates with ownership and power. Kim Dovey remarks that this representation of space is the norm in architectural drawings, which tend “to mediate social interaction—particularly the visibility and invisibility of others” (13),

¹⁰ Examples are found in Leroux, Van Dine, Sayers, Queen, Carr, and Boucher. Christie is the most sustained user of this form, e.g., *Murder on the Orient Express* (91) and *Murder in Mesopotamia* (42).

sometimes accomplished by mere omission.¹¹ More pointedly, these classed spaces extend to other exclusive cultural or commercial forums like the plans of theaters in Queen's *The Roman Hat Mystery* (x) and Marsh's *Vintage Murder* (8) or the airplane in Christie's *Death in the Clouds* (n. pag.). The country house remains the best example: though traversed by servants, it belongs to the masters. This practice extends to plans of the hotel suites of Christie's "The Jewel Robbery at the Grand Metropolitan" (*Poirot* 120) and Carr's *To Wake the Dead* (43) but more generally pertains to restricted private property, which characterizes the maps of Miss Marple's St. Mary Mead (Christie, *Vicarage* 67). Rarely do we encounter represented space uncoupled from private ownership—property lines are visible and plots bear their owner's names, and for internal spaces, restrictions on use is taken for granted.¹² The corpse in the library excludes rather than integrates the servants. Despite the exceptional events transpiring around them, the functionalization of space reduces their role to discovering the body in the course of their cleaning duties. The drive to reestablish normalcy is spurred by the uncanny transformation of the safe interior—library, tennis court, or other privileged space—into a murder scene, an event that rarely impacts the off-plan servant spaces.

But instead of drawing attention to class discrepancies, spatial configurations are viewed as intellectual puzzles that hinge upon the correct reading of clues facilitated by an elevated visual mastery. In this sense, Wertheimer's α -type thinking is amenable to axial and isovistic analysis divorced from Hillier and Hanson's claims about space as a form of social mediation (2).¹³ Imaginative insight into the permeability of space or lines of sight merely reconfigures objects within an unexamined field of relations. The plans for Ellery Queen's *The Dutch Shoe Mystery* and Edmund Crispin's *The Case of the Gilded Fly* illustrate this. In Queen's hospital problem, explaining access to the crime scene involves rethinking how an elevator functions as a lateral rather than a vertical conduit. Retrospectively, this point is obvious from the diagram preceding the narrative and is hinted at repeatedly in the text (109, 150, 286). Crispin's plan requires that we reconfigure a

¹¹ This is true of plans in Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (24) and Van Dine's *The Benson Murder Case* (30) even though servants are important to both cases. Plans which depict undifferentiated servant spaces include Van Dine's *The Greene Murder Case* (30), Sayers's *Clouds of Witness* (15), and Ellery Queen's *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (n. pag.).

¹² The seriousness of the "misappropriation" of the master's space is illustrated by the butler Brunton's dismissal in Doyle's "The Musgrave Ritual" (535-36).

¹³ Such methods, stripped of any overt social dimension, are obvious in plans for Carr's *The Three Coffins* (39, 215), Christie's "Dead Man's Mirror" (*Mews* 215) and *Murder at the Vicarage* (37).

corridor, not as directing vectors along its length, but rather, as facilitating movement across its width, given the placement of windows (72). These plans, involving reconfigurations *within* the field, never question the givenness of what subtends it (tellingly, the institutional bases of hospital and university); we do not start from an unstructured situation, but from a world. The elevated view of the Golden Age novel is rendered “natural” by our contiguity with a “pre-existing” world—phenomenology’s *Umwelt*, Gestalt’s geographic setting—which is already real, and which under normal circumstances remains peripheral to vision. But analysis of the behavioral and geographic settings is, Lyotard notes in a discussion of Gestalt theory, problematic in that “it is only insofar as these two ‘universes’ are reified that the problem arises concerning their relationship, and particularly concerning their antecedence or even their relative causality” (83). In its phenomenological sense the floor plan’s concretized spatialization of relationships offers an instance of eidetic bracketing—the positing of a spatial arrangement is the relation implied between the arrangement and consciousness.

In judgments, we make reference to something pre-existing the intention, a “pre-categorical” or “pre-predicative” experience, which comprises “a philosophical condition of possibility, constituting the ground (*Boden*) into which all predication sinks its roots” (Lyotard 63). In an ideologically-threaded representation, we must attend to the practice of accentuating the behavioral and obscuring the geographical spaces in the plan (despite their mutually-conditioned relation) to determine how this practice affects the formulation of truth. The detective’s transcendence frequently functions to frame meaning, though this is certainly not always the case—for instance, the ironic (n+1) solution structure characterizing Anthony Berkeley’s Roger Sheringham novels, particularly *Roger Sheringham and the Vane Mystery*, *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*, and *The Second Shot*. But the detective’s occasional failure does not touch the plan: the plan is what it is. Even in a self-consciously unstable novel like *The Second Shot*, the spatial parameters of the map (n. pag.) as a framed social field are never placed in question (despite the fact that we later learn it contains falsehoods), only the veracity of characters’ statements about where they actually were situated within it.

Lyotard’s key contribution here—the reification of these strata demarcating its historical situation—is important to our understanding of the dialectical tension arising between them. Koffka points toward this idea by remarking that figures emerge from a ground, which not only “serves as a *framework* in which the figure is suspended” but in which it is determined (184). The orientation of elements is “relative to a frame” which demarcates boundaries (185), emphasizing the

importance of knowing how those boundaries are erected. In the context of the plan and the clue puzzle generally, significant events (crime, clue, or hidden relation) emerge within a bounded social situation and are subsequently invested with significance. But this significance is generally taken, in Koffka's sense, to be that "it is the figure we are 'concerned with,' the figure we are remembering, and not the ground," even though "the thing-non-thing difference [emerges] in the figure-ground articulation of the field" (186)—the world of the figure, then, is also what Köhler terms "the world of direct, or immediate, experience" (*Gestalt* 23). The boundedness of space is the initial gesture toward bracketing the exception of criminal transgression as well as the meaning-bearing elements that establish guilt.

To reiterate, the detective isolates elements leading to the transformation of relations *within* the field, not a reconstitution *of* the field itself.¹⁴ We note this relation in the diagram for John Dickson Carr's mystery *The Problem of the Wire Cage*, in which the victim is strangled on a clay tennis court. The murder resembles a locked room mystery given the multiple layers of enclosure—the wire cage of the title, a thick hedge, and lines of closely planted poplars bracketing the crime scene. Carr's diagram, depicting the court and adjacent spaces, consists of an inscribed surface literally displaying rule-bearing lines and the physical traces of human actors—the victim's footprints, but also the labor of the anonymous worker who chalked the lines. The net and the markings that designate the divisions of the court, necessarily made and remade on this surface in that they are periodically obliterated, are viewed from an unlikely perspective. The prone figure of a man lies near the net; the heavy rain preceding the murder wet the surface so that a set of footprints, later determined to be the dead man's, leads to the corpse. The complicated murder method, a Carr trademark, is less interesting than the plan's representation of a socially-mediated field. Given its familiar form, the court requires no explanation; despite its class associations in the novel, it could function as a general concept unattached to any specific locale. The hero, Hugh Rowland, in fact reduces it, quantitatively, to dimensions measured in feet, and tellingly, Dr. Fell remarks: "We have seen such courts so often that we tend to forget how they are constructed" (Carr, *Wire* 285). What he earlier called its "invisibility" (254) refers to how we take such spaces for granted. And yet, the court depicted *in this novel* literally defies apprehension since the diagram, as we see it, is unavailable to in-text characters. Although the killer has a view "towards the tree-enclosed tennis-court"

¹⁴ This point is suggested by Köhler in a letter to Abraham Luchins: Köhler remarks the "functional whole" of the field that exceeds the object's visual presence but which is necessary to *Prägnanz* (Luchins and Luchins, *Problem Solving* 223).

from his “look-out tower” (study), the narrator establishes that “nobody could see the court from any position” (Carr, *Wire* 46), a conceptual space converted into a plan.

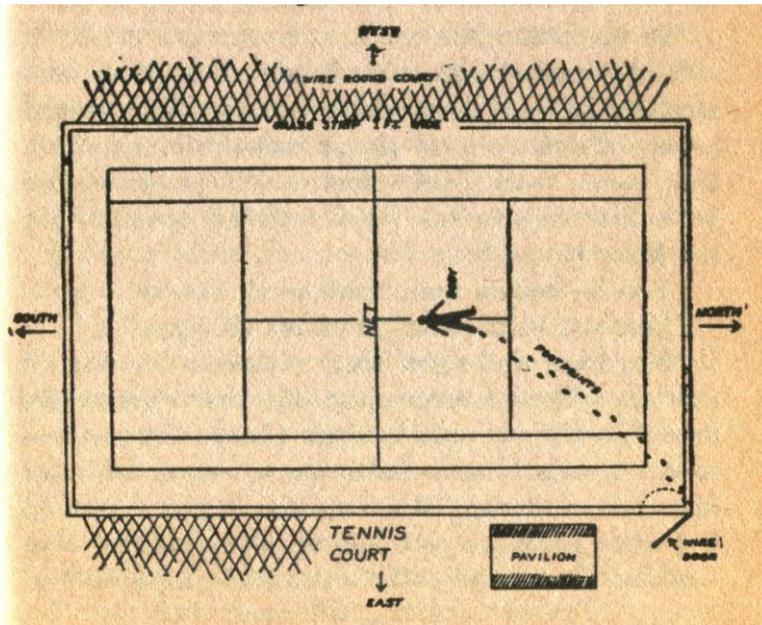


Fig. 1. The tennis court diagram by John Dickson Carr from *The Problem of the Wire Cage*. Zebra, 1967.

The experiential (behavioral) mode enacted within the chalk lines transforms a smooth and undifferentiated surface into a framed arena of competition between individuals (i.e., the bourgeois worldview)—furthermore, the lines establish means to judge the validity of actions. Individual cases may give rise to umpired disputes, but the lines inscribed by the rules themselves are not placed in question. The surface is subjected to disturbances through use and is periodically repaired, though not actually reconfigured. Taking these abstractions together, the court embodies features of many Classical-Golden Age tales (and plans) in which events are bracketed within visually represented parameters. They are assessed from a privileged vantage and interpreted by the detective; transgressions are registered in accordance with generally unchallenged norms, and the social fabric is “mended,” at least until the detective’s intervention is again required. As with a number of

games employing courts or fields, the establishment of limits, literalized in tennis by lines and obstacles, and extended by protocols of set structure, service, and score-keeping is the establishment of meaningful order (and conditions of transgression) upon an ostensibly undifferentiated ground. That field is potentially brought into vision by attending to the inscriptions marking its surface—a tendency that increases in the heightened, often self-parodying, self-awareness of many Golden Age writers—though the labor which subtends this field’s production remains invisible.

Hammett and the Closure of the Visual Field

In contrast to the mastery exerted over visually determinable space literalized by Golden Age plans, a privileged or elevated interpretative vantage appears infrequently in hard-boiled tales; these more closely resemble labyrinthine spaces. This tendency is built into the fragmented narrative structure itself. To be sure, the structure is reflective of an underlying historical situation, best expressed by Jameson when he writes (in the context of Chandler), “the detective’s journey is episodic because of the fragmentary, atomistic nature of the society he moves through” (*Raymond Chandler* 11), one in which the detective threads the disparate locales but remains unable to draw them together into a coherent whole, much less a unified picture. On this basis the floor plan is unsurprisingly absent from these stories, despite the general congruence of Golden Age and hard-boiled timeframes. One explanation, itself insufficient, is the uncertainty introduced by first-person detective voices; the first person is a common device in the Classical mystery but is usually confined to the less-than-astute sidekick who documents the exploits of the detective hero. Although hard-boiled pioneer Carroll John Daly, as well as the subgenre’s three most prominent authors, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald, carved out strong first-person detective perspectives, the majority of hard-boiled and pulp detectives are third-person narratives.¹⁵ Hammett’s use of the first person in his Continental Op stories is nonetheless significant in that it seems to restrict agency to the investigator, confirming that he is often (literally) in the dark. The hard-boiled tale’s restricted visual field, a

¹⁵ Numerous series detectives bear out this claim: Whitfield’s Jo Gar; Nebel’s MacBride and Kennedy, Donny Donahue, and Jack Cardigan; Fleming-Roberts’s Diamondstone and Jeffrey Wren; Norbert Davis’s Max Latin and William Dodd; Frederick Davis’s Clay Oakley, Ravenwood, and Guy Kerry; Dent’s Lee Nace; Gibson’s Norgil. Some employ first-person sidekicks, like Constiner’s The Dean or Daly’s Vee Brown series.

metaphor for limits on comprehensive knowledge (and the de-emphasizing of esoteric knowledge), does not mean that solutions are not forthcoming. The difference is that the scene is not converted into a plan detached from the observer; it is a lived experience demanding the presence of the investigator, and irreducible to a purely ratiocinative exercise. This knowledge-vision link is highlighted in the focus texts by the spatial disorientation characterizing strange houses or apartments, especially during moments of important action, as we see in two examples from 1925, “The Whosis Kid” and “Dead Yellow Women.”

The investigation in “The Whosis Kid” starts by chance—the Op spots a man whom he believes to be a wanted criminal, a belief based on a tip he received from a fellow operative eight years earlier in a different city. A stakeout and surveillance job follows based on the possibility that the subject’s suspicious behavior is worth investigating. Shadowing one man leads to shadowing another, still without the clear prospect of an arrest—the absence of any broader vision contrasts with the bounded field of investigation premised upon a specific crime which prompts the Classical detective’s interest. The confusion in Hammett’s tale mounts as he picks up one trail after another: none have a clear-cut objective, all are characterized by violence. The journey ends in an apartment, which slowly fills up with the dramatis personae—five actors, in addition to the detective. Already half-way through the story, the Op thinks to himself: “If everybody got together here, maybe whatever was going on would come out where I could see it and understand it” (“Whosis” 216). Although cognizant of the apartment space as a container that might lead to positive knowledge, the detective’s role in determining and isolating meaningful relations within the behavioral setting is negligible—to “see it and understand it,” he reflects, is beyond his capacity. When the first inkling of what kind of crime has been committed emerges, vision is shut down and other senses take over—one character, prompted by the Op, turns off the lights. The ensuing scuffle is impressionistic and counter-visual: “Darkness—streaked with orange and blue—filled with noise” (“Whosis” 230). The Op fights against unseen opponents. “The room was the inside of a black drum on which a giant was beating a long roll. Four guns worked together in a prolonged throbbing roar” (“Whosis” 230-31). The detective never independently “sees” the complete picture in that the summing up is delivered in the last pages by others. Under the circumstances, the idea that a plan could point towards a solution is doubtful. But the absence of a plan also foregrounds the uniformly criminal status of the characters: spaces cannot be normalized (they are destroyed like the wrecked apartment, not reconstituted like Carr’s court). Neither could normalcy be predicated upon the hidden labor of a

servant class since the occupants overtly dispense with rule-bearing “lines” subtending their behavior. As the thieves fall out, the only solution is wholesale attrition in which the detective also participates.

Later the same year, also in *Black Mask*, Hammett published “Dead Yellow Women,” another tale involving visual deprivation and spatial dislocation.¹⁶ Although this time there is a client, Lillian Shan, she is not forthcoming about her affairs, thereby limiting the Op’s ability to construct a narrative frame around the case. The Op’s investigation eventually leads him to an underworld figure, Chang Li Ching, to whose house he gains admission. Once inside, the Op’s experiences of space parody of the Golden Age plan, highlighting the detective’s helplessness:

This running upstairs and downstairs, turning to the right and turning to the left, seemed harmless enough. If he [the Op’s guide] got any fun out of confusing me, he was welcome. I was confused enough now, so far as the directions were concerned. I hadn’t the least idea where I might be. But that didn’t disturb me so much. If I was going to be cut down, a knowledge of my geographical position wouldn’t make it any more pleasant. If I was going to come all right, one place was still as good as another. (“Dead” 207)

The tortuous route to Chang ends pointlessly; no useful information is acquired. A second visit resembles the first, though the Op makes an overt reference to plans: “For a while I amused myself trying to map the route in my head as he went along, but it was too complicated, so I gave it up” (“Dead” 221).

Confusion also characterizes the Op’s surveillance of the opulent Shan house. To avoid alerting his opponents, the detective must conduct the stakeout in a state of virtual blindness. During his wait, and later, when the house is suddenly overrun with men (illegal Chinese immigrants), he must rely upon all his senses except vision. Sitting in darkness, the Op becomes aware of taste and smell (“I chewed on a plug of tobacco—a substitute for cigarettes”), the tactile (“the frame of the cellar door touched my shoulder”), and the aural (“Fresh sounds came to me—the purr of automobile engines close to the house”) (“Dead” 216-17). As the men enter the house, the Op’s non-visual senses are assaulted: “The passageway was solid and alive with stinking bodies. Hands and teeth began to take my clothes away from me. I knew damned well I had declared myself in on something. I was one of a

¹⁶ A third story from 1925, “The Scorched Face,” also involves the confused, labyrinthine interior of a strange house.

struggling, tearing, grunting and groaning mob of invisibles. An eddy of them swept me toward the kitchen. Hitting, kicking, butting, I went along” (217-18). The elevated view would be pointless under these blackout conditions; determinative judgments arise from having occupied the right spaces, not by exercising mastery over them. The Op relies upon others, sometimes the criminals themselves, for solutions; he works within unmappable spaces defined by his opponents.

In the two 1925 stories, the reductive visual function of a plan to frame the field of operations is abandoned. Under similar constraints, Classical authors like R. Austin Freeman find inventive ways to recuperate vision as the dominant mode of knowing even when it is literally shut down. In *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*, Freeman’s detective Thorndyke devises an apparatus by which his sidekick Jervis can determine his compass orientation and distance traveled within an enclosed van, data that are later recorded on paper (98) and compared to a map. Vision is reestablished by converting blind measurements into a diagram that reveals precise spatial coordinates seen from above. In contrast, Hammett’s stories transpire in confusing houses, irreducible to plans, which serve metaphorically to point up the Op’s inability to master behavioral settings. Neither can he frame the *Boden* by bracketing meaning, nor can he confidently decipher the movements in their immediacy without outside aid.

Auster’s Forestalled Synthesis

Although Hammett’s Op does not achieve visual mastery, a coherent concept of space still underlies his actions; the closing of the “totalizing eye” shunts perception (and knowledge) onto other senses. But in Hammett solutions arrive which serve the interests of the institutionally or individually powerful, though not in the depressing mode common to Marlowe’s and Archer’s sense of unachievable justice. Auster’s postmodern detective confronts a more generalized de-anchoring: in Gestalt terms his “hyperspatial loss of position simultaneously means a loss of critical position, a lack of vantage point from which to criticize or to position critique” (Fugmann 94). In *City of Glass* the protagonist Daniel Quinn, a writer of detective stories, becomes involved in a case by chance in which he impersonates the “detective” Paul Auster. The client, Peter Stillman, Jr., calls Quinn by mistake to ask for protection from his deranged father, who years earlier had subjected him to cruel experiments, and who now is being released from the custody of a hospital ward. Quinn’s job is to determine Stillman Sr.’s whereabouts and monitor his movements. Doing justice to the complexity of this novel would require a lengthier

summary, and so my focus here will be only to isolate Auster's engagement with spatial representations.

In the middle of the novel, having located Stillman, Quinn shadows his man's apparently aimless wanderings, recording all of his actions as he observes them in a notebook. Later, we learn that Stillman's behavior, which consists of picking up debris from the streets of Manhattan, is part of a program to restore language, to rename broken objects which have lost their functions so that their new names correspond to their essences.¹⁷ Lacking the means to make coherent sense of Stillman's observed behaviors,¹⁸ confined as he is to the ground-level, unenlightened perspective reminiscent of Hammett's Op, Quinn decides literally to "map" out Stillman's movements ("for no particular reason that [Quinn] was aware of" [Auster 80]). He starts by framing the space that Stillman traverses, an "empty" representation of Manhattan's Upper West Side;¹⁹ Stillman's wanderings are bounded by streets or geographical features, which Quinn subdivides by indicating intervening thoroughfares. Quinn's visual representation is ostensibly an idle or even desperate action, pursued in the absence of concrete clues, a γ -type stab at explaining Stillman's behavior. Although a writer of detective novels and therefore an insider to the constructed nature of their plots, Quinn holds the view that detectives, through acute observational powers, identify and assemble clues leading to solutions that the average person does not immediately perceive. In such a universe, "the implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation" (Auster 80). Underneath these surface effects, as in a Golden Age novel, a stable fund of meaning guarantees the exchangeability of signs (Little 138)—a claim that Stillman's behavior undermines.

¹⁷ Stillman's objective is in line with Koffka, who opines that "the acquisition of true knowledge should help us to reintegrate our world which has fallen to pieces; it should teach us the cogency of objective relations, independent of our wishes and prejudices, and it should indicate to us our true position in our world and give us respect and reverence for the things animate and inanimate around us" (9-10).

¹⁸ Stillman is also described as "broken down and disconnected from his surroundings" (Auster 68)—an object that Quinn tries to reconfigure as a component of meaningful discourse.

¹⁹ Cf. Van Dine's maps of the same part of New York depicted in *The Bishop Murder Case* (415, 417).

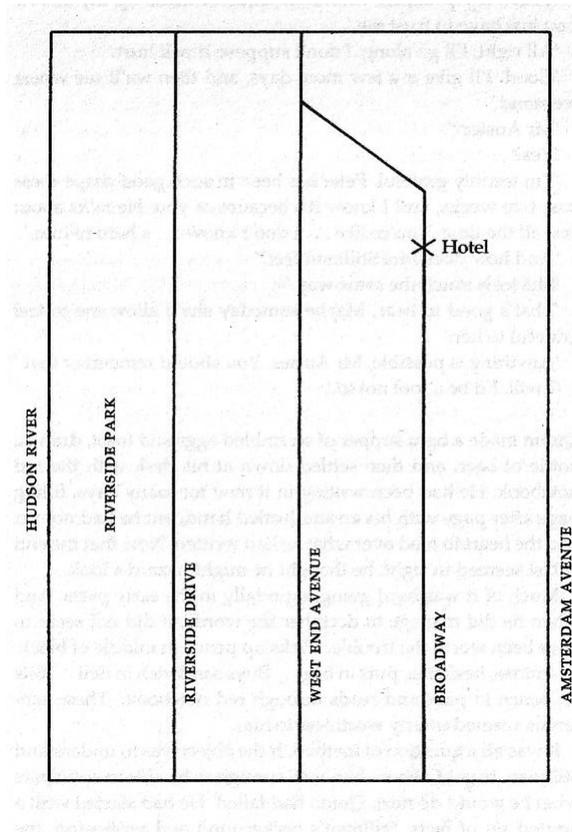


Fig. 2. Quinn's map of Manhattan's Upper West Side by Paul Auster from *City of Glass*. Penguin, 1990.

As if in mockery of his skepticism, when Quinn sketches out Stillman's walking routes on successive days, figures begin to emerge from this ground, at first fanciful, but then, to his mind, more definite. Because Quinn records Stillman's movements in detail, he is able to graphically depict his pathway within the established spatial boundaries. He subsequently "discovers" these movements to possess meaning, understanding them to spell out letters. From these limited data he then contrives to extrapolate the phrase "The Tower of Babel" (linked to Stillman's erstwhile language experiments). The bounded space presents a surface upon which events transpire and are inscribed, producing a text that the detective maps out and recognizes. But the purposefulness of the "terrain," as Stillman later terms it in

conversation with Quinn, is precisely the delimiting function of a well-conceived scientific experiment, parameters he claims that “are small enough to make all results conclusive” (Auster 92). Further reflection leads Quinn to interrogate his own role in determining meaning, concluding that “Stillman had not left his message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down” (Auster 85). Quinn’s own role in establishing parameters, recording data, and discerning patterns counters these doubts: “And yet, the pictures did exist—not in the streets where they had been drawn, but in Quinn’s notebook” (Auster 86). Does Quinn discern letters, or merely give value to his observations in an effort to establish good Gestalt, as in the tendency to see a circle in a figure in which an arc is missing? Auster’s self-conscious use of the plan thus both extends and critiques the tradition; this dialectical engagement expresses the desire for meaning and the suspicion that meaning is manufactured as a consequence of that desire and therefore dubious. But this reading, safe as it is unsatisfying, fails to recognize how this engagement is deployed within its socio-historical context.

Auster-Quinn’s dispensing with property markers (save the seedy, and therefore precariously situated Hotel Harmony) in the highly capitalized commercial and residential areas of Upper West Side Manhattan is itself a meaningful gesture within the historical moment of the novel. Steven Alford’s fine essay “Spaced-Out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*” helps establish an analytic framework to address the absence of reference points. Alford, drawing upon de Certeau, notes the relation between the detective-mapper and Stillman’s movements in which “signification . . . emerges from movement without being of it” (626; emphases in original). This capacity changes when Quinn loses his home—what Alford calls Quinn’s “point of origin”—a space in which his map-making activities transpire. The loss of the *oikos* (Alford) erases the means by which to decisively establish directions. Citing Georges Van Den Abbeele, Alford explains “that the *oikos* is not a geographical location but ‘a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all points in relation to itself’” (623). While still in possession of his apartment, Quinn is able to obtain to an elevated meta-position where he works out Stillman’s itinerary. But anxiety over Stillman Sr.’s disappearance ends up de-anchoring Quinn; the novel becomes increasingly surreal, with Quinn living in an alley for three months in front of Stillman Jr.’s apartment, a decision that leads to his eviction *in absentia*.

Returning to the map, we should note Pascale-Anne Brault's important observation that Auster's diagram cannot be generalized: it is limited by the English language and New York City (235). Brault considers the problem of translating the novel into French, or of resetting the action in another city such as Paris. Such mapping is responsive to spatiotemporal norms, or so it seems. Auster's site specificity should not have the generalized character of a tennis court, and yet the emptying out of content, which retains only a bare grid of streets, reduces space to undifferentiated property, emptied of human content, and viewed as a blank slate for development irrespective of any human dimension. Set in the context of Manhattan in the early 1980s, the novel must be read vis-à-vis that which escapes vision, namely, the displacement of thousands due to the aggressive gentrification of the borough's low-income housing zones.²⁰ The social consequences of Manhattan rent and sale price increases between the 1970s and 1990s may be inferred by examining some raw numbers: average sale prices per foot increased from \$45 in the 1970s to \$250 in the 1980s to \$590 in the 1990s. Similar increases are registered in the rental market, from \$335 to \$1700 to \$3200 per month in the respective decades (Miller 16). Individual neighborhoods underwent different rates of change, but aggressive gentrification was already encroaching upon Quinn's Upper West Side community, which also encompassed Stillman's Hotel Harmony. This section of Manhattan was in fact undergoing significant price increases in the late 1970s, a trend that expanded considerably through the 1980s (Armstrong et al. 12).

We learn at the start that Quinn's activity as a writer "brought in enough money for him to live modestly in a small New York apartment" (Auster 3); he occupies a precarious economic stratum between the wealth of Stillman Jr., signified by his large Upper East Side residence, and the *déclassé* Stillman Sr., scion of a well-to-do Boston family who once owned a large place on Riverside Drive, but who is now relegated to the relative squalor of gentrifying Bloomingdale. Stillman Sr. is in fact Quinn's future, as his mental de-anchoring parallels his spatial and economic displacement (despite both men's intellectual qualifications). This change is foreshadowed in Quinn's own carefully documented walk, an itinerary that reminds us of the looming transformations awaiting Manhattan real estate in the 1980s—Union Square, Chinatown, the Lower East Side, East Village—as well as the human costs of those transformations. Quinn's notebook suggests a further

²⁰ For a useful overview see Deutsche (12-32). For images of gentrification in Quinn's Upper West Side neighborhood, see Hana Alberts's "Illuminating New York City's Gentrification, One Story at a Time" and Philana Patterson's "Looking Back: On UWS, from Sleazy to Staid."

parallel to Stillman's in terms of content: he carries on Stillman's project in spirit by documenting the brokenness of New York, not its inanimate objects but its human debris (129-32). This elegiac section initiates Quinn's own slide into madness and homelessness in that Quinn moves from recording his vision of Manhattan's outcasts to becoming one himself in his stakeout of Stillman Jr.'s apartment. But his transformation from vision to experience, tellingly, also exposes the uncaring and unresponsive community that takes no interest in its victims: "Remarkable as it seems, no one ever noticed Quinn. It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (139). His self perception as "falling" (139) with no one to catch him literalizes the missing social safety net in which, in Quinn's own self portrayal, "he had turned into a bum"; he "marveled at how quickly these changes had taken place in him" (143). Quinn ends up performing an under-investigated theme of the book by becoming homeless; the literal disappearance of the *oikos* parallels the murky narrative locus of transmission, the dissolution of clear agency. Quinn becomes the very subject of his walks, mapped now by institutions tracking the vicissitudes of social decay, as he observes the human disaster of pauperization and mental illness on the streets of Reagan's America.

Conclusion

The Gestalt notions of geographical and behavioral domains, applied to detective fiction, enable a critical appraisal of the kinds of knowledge yielded by different forms of representation. These incongruities are one means to differentiate my primary examples, though broader generalizations about the subgenres are limited. Nonetheless, between Carr (and a number of his Golden Age peers) and Hammett we note the possibility of dialectical tension: the plan functions as a form of detached visual mastery which contrasts with hard-boiled knowledge premised upon hapticity and presence: the survey of place confronts the occupation of space. Moreover, the visual reduction of the plan, upon critical examination, draws attention to the normally unremarked ground upon which a limited range of objects and relations are bracketed and invested with value. One consequence is that class conflict is obscured, though also potentially recuperated, through the functionalization of space and the foregrounding of ownership and the "rightful" transmission of wealth. Carr's tennis court invokes a place (rather than a space) that could be established almost anywhere: the codes defining its structure obfuscate specific agency since the rules subtending the game are regarded as necessary—the

dubious claim that one must observe the rules if one wishes to play at all (Dove 14ff.). Auster's maps exhibit notable differences, both in the real "ground" of Manhattan's street grid and in the behavioral traces of Stillman's inscription of its surface, a distinction that calls to mind de Certeau's "totalizing stage" offering a "tableau of a 'state' of geographical knowledge" as opposed to the "tour describers" which "have disappeared" (121). But we also witness the act of production—the detective's representation of a specific historical moment. We observe the self-conscious conjunction of the Golden Age visual reduction and the hard-boiled loss of mastery (in meaning production) whose synthetic moment is the situating of the detective in a real space-time nexus with tangible social and political consequences. This dialectical engagement yields two pathways, what Frederic Jameson in *Marxism and Form* distinguishes as Hegelian and Marxist versions of the dialectic. In the latter, "the thinker comes to understand the way in which his own determinate thought processes, and indeed the very forms of the problems from which he sets forth, limit the results of his thinking." In the former, "the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position" (340).

If the nature of events within the plan's borders, or occasionally, the border itself is disputed (e.g., the Queen and Crispin examples), such tension tends to remain within the scope of the Hegelian version—cognizance of represented or constructed space arises from a supra-spatial or supra-historical position. The Classical detective generally enjoys this vantage, both in terms of outsider status (a stranger to the group who is above suspicion) and in the past tense narrative which implies a grasp of totality, including the solution, which is also customary for hard-boiled tales. The sketch plan is a special case, however, in that it evades the limits implied by subjectivity and perspective; it is therefore not subjected to much critical scrutiny outside its purported aim of suggesting a solution. Such representations encourage reflection, but the enclosure remains given and lacks overtly ideological overtones. This represented space remains unproblematic when analysis is confined to the manipulable elements within the behavioral field. For this reason, the Golden Age text could be read, as it commonly is, as a restorative narrative in which behavioral normalcy is reestablished after the malefactor has been identified and expelled or punished.²¹ In fact, what remains are the conditions

²¹ True of the Classical, Golden Age, hard-boiled, and police procedural—but not of the postmodern or metaphysical tale. Serialization is blocked in stories like Borges's "Death and the

from which malfeasance arose, namely, distinct class relations and the fetishizing of objects (Mandel 135). A more penetrating social analysis must interrogate representation in its historical unfolding vis-à-vis the reader's situated consciousness. For Jameson, "this type of self-consciousness, which phenomenology defined as the *epoché* or putting between parentheses, receives its own dialectical evaluation through its place in the historical process" (*Marxism* 341). Although the social vision offered by the Golden Age plan entails forms of power, we would overstate the case by suggesting this to be unconscious. Self-parody of generic conventions is evident, especially in authors like Carr and Anthony Berkeley, but also the well-known ambivalence held by Doyle, Christie, and Sayers towards their detectives which, if conducted simplistically, caricatures social analysis.

The dialectical confrontation of visually represented space in the plan and the hapticity of the hard-boiled ultimately brings us back to agency. In the first instance, we are offered a relation that purports to reduce a social field which is then mastered by the detective, even though it exists separately from his or her actual vision (or vision in general given its impossible vantage); in the second, such mastery is evasive (the Op's visual disorientation, dubious investigative incentives, or inability to offer a coherent denouement). Auster's synthesis retains the formal qualities whereby meaning is supposed to simply be—the map is the map, the letters inscribed by Stillman's walks are evidence—but undercuts such visual mastery in the loss of faith in reference points by which meaning is authenticated. The totalizing vision imposed "from above" is, at best, productive fantasy instead of productive thinking, and at worst, the imposition of value linked to hegemonic control. This reading remains within the scope of Jameson's Hegelian dialectic in that the construction of meaning is neither the unrecognized "self-evidence" of the plan, nor its rejection as a gesture of false powerlessness. Rather, Quinn's agency is more deeply problematic, pointing towards the Marxist dialectic that may be glimpsed in the social commentary offered by the novel (rather than limiting the work to a crisis of meaning, linguistic or otherwise). The greatness of the novel for me lies in its glimmer of social conscience, which entails the disappearance of the detective, the cloudy process of an impossible textual transmission, and the essentially performative nature of the detective's self-critique in acknowledging himself to be (potentially) expressive of power (the power to determine discourse and its limits) but also the victim of that power whose own point of reference

Compass" and *City of Glass* by the death or disappearance of the detective, or by a fade into inconsequentiality, as in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* or much of Robbe-Grillet.

succumbs to a tragic *vision* of American disintegration within a materially limited space-time nexus.

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About the Author

Yan Zi-Ling is Associate Professor in the Department of English at National University of Tainan, where he teaches Western literature and cultural studies. His current research focus is Anglo-American detective fiction; recent publications include *Economic Investigations in Twentieth-Century Detective Fiction* and “‘The Millstone of His Own Likeness’: Photography as Disclosure, Concealment, and Correspondence in Detective Fiction” (*Sun Yat-Sen Journal of the Humanities*).

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