

tropolis," Mumford writes, "all the dimensions of violence had suddenly enlarged. As these forces developed, the metropolis became more and more a device for increasing the varieties of violent expression, and every citizen became a connoisseur in the arts of death."

In the explosive postwar American city of the film noir, violence becomes a delirious, everyday reality—a circus of horrors, from the child pushed onto a subway track by a drug addict to the crowded business office sprayed with gunfire by a disgruntled former spouse/employee/client—determined in no small part by the tremendous congestion of buildings, people, and vehicles. The realities of congestion are stupefying, but the possibilities—legally speaking—would be hilarious if they weren't so terrifying. For example, in 1949, under the zoning ordinances of the day, with no building over six hundred feet in height, the permitted, "acceptable" capacity of the residential districts of New York, according to the New York City Housing Authority, could have been 77,000,000 people, while the commercial districts could have provided for a working population of 344,000,000! (The so-called capacities today are even higher.) The social violence is connected symbiotically with the structural violence implicit in the ferocious ebb and flow—the internal tension—of the city's physical state.

In the postwar city, the pace of construction, demolition, and rebuilding is incredible. Whole neighborhoods rise, fall, and rise again at dizzying speed. Unlike the ancient or medieval city, the modern American city is one in which the chief architectural forms are based on abstract units of space, like the cubic foot. With few structural rearrangements, the hotel, department store, apartment house, and office building are *fully* convertible, one into the other. After 1945, this formula for urban chaos—barely a pretense of "city-planning" anymore—reaches a crisis point. Buildings are no longer designed for long-term use, but with the sole view of being wrecked and replaced by an even higher and more profitable structure, sometimes within a single generation. Add to this the destructive effects of those ineffectual zoning ordinances and the de facto nature of corrupt real estate maneuverings by the political and commercial class and you have a situation which can only deteriorate at an ever increasing pace. The menacing, consuming, internal chaos of the noir city be-

comes further reinforced by the institutionalized chaos of the physical city: a ravaged landscape, in other words, which in itself becomes a psychological burden.

"Nothing lasts"—one of noir's primary tenets—applies literally to the physical city, where mutability (and moral elasticity) rules, and nothing is fixed in time or space for long. Not the elements of the man-made landscape or the people who inhabit it, who come and go, devour and are in turn devoured by one another. Or by their surroundings, which come alive like the walls of a cave and, in an instant of terror, are revealed to be the guts of a beast. In the postwar era, all that perishes does so at many times the rate it once did. The noir city, forming and reforming itself endlessly, like a substance under a microscope, is inevitably on a road to dissolution, the knowledge of which ticks at every moment in the hearts of its inhabitants.

Much of film noir is concerned with people cut off not just from Nature, and from their own natures, but from one another and from any vital knowledge of the environment they themselves have created. Film noir represents "human solitude in a world of steel," according to Borde and Chaumeton. In this city of steel, electronic means of communication and high-powered vehicles often seem to keep people apart—to thwart, deflect, or pervert direct communication and straightforward movement. The postwar city-dweller is often so mobile, mentally, physically, and sensorially—that is, he enjoys the illusion of such mobility—that the inexorable fact of his being hemmed in, or paralyzed in some way, becomes all the more horrific when it comes clear to him.

In addition, all electronic forms—the telephone, radio, and television—have decentralized cities and made the so-called human scale obsolete. These devices heighten the already intense individual isolation and spiritual amputation of the noir city. The continual motion of cities, in machines of transportation and communication, in electronic impulses and cascades of words, is the foundation for much of the moral commotion in film noir. The rapid jumps in technologies of transportation and communication since 1945 have been a crucial factor in the intensified sense of alienation in the city, and in the noir films it is constantly reflected in the faster *pace*—of people and information—in the postwar life that they present. There is a clear correlation between technical and electronic "progress" and personal

alienation and angst. A fear not so much that machines will replace us, but that they will fragment us, piece by piece, down to zero. For among the immutable laws in the physics of the noir universe, we will surely find the law of diminishing returns.

Since the Second World War, it is more the ethos of automation, rather than the industrial reality, that has contributed to the noir vision of the city as one vast, unified machine for creating wealth and delivering services—a hell in which, socially, politically, and economically, human and machine cogs are forever interlocked. The terrifying, mechanized city—the city as a beast with mechanical guts and a human nervous system—is a recurrent noir motif. One such example of this appears in the 1958 film *Party Girl*, directed by Nicholas Ray. Its hero, Tommy Fallon, is a cripple whose leg was chewed up by a drawbridge, in an accident, when he was twelve years old. When, later, he shows his lover the bridge and describes it as the place at which his life took a turning point, we see it as an actual, physical component of the city's machinery that has maimed him. Afterward, Fallon becomes bookish and attends law school. Hungry to acquire wealth and power as quickly as possible to compensate for his disability, he becomes the legal counsel to the city's corrupt political machine—a mouthpiece for crooked cops, punks, and killers. It is this second "machine" that truly cripples Fallon, chewing him up morally and spiritually. In this film the city, in both its physical body and its body political, is unambiguously presented as a destroyer of men, a furnace for human souls.

The fact that the Second World War was the most mechanized—and brutal—in history provided an inflammatory wellspring for these fears about the city as destroyer; today, such fears are fanned by the automation of warfare—guided missiles, "smart" bombs, computer-directed ballistic missiles—and the terror it inflicts upon urban civilians. What was only a nightmare a century ago—a world in which technology would spin clear of moral checks and balances and of the spiritual underpinnings of human society—is now reality. Following a self-destructive arc, the wheels of steel that power the modern city and its great human dynamos of ambition, fear, passion, greed, and lust must metamorphose into infernal, ultimately apocalyptic, wheels of fire as the metropolis devolves into necropolis.

From the first, we see an ongoing fascination in film noir with

electronic devices, many of them developed during the war but only coming into their own—for legitimate or unscrupulous purposes—in the postwar city. A galaxy of new machines and luxury accoutrements became crucial items in the lives of the noir population. These included enormously improved office equipment, home-movie cameras, hi-fi phonographs, and inexpensive tape recorders. Electric shavers, tanning lamps, blow-dryers, and hair-curlers suddenly brought the beauty salon into the home. Other, more potent, electronic devices in the hands of both criminals and the police altered the urban landscape in ways that could be *heard* and *felt* rather than seen. Eavesdropping devices, phone taps, and zoom-lenses appear in *Laura, T-Men, White Heat*, and other films, finding their apotheosis in *711 Ocean Drive* (1950), in which the hero is a renegade telephone whiz, a master of technology eventually done in when the complexities of his own inventiveness boomerang on him.

The telephone whiz's immediate predecessor in film noir is the criminal in *He Walked By Night*, Roy Martin, who meets his end in the same fashion as Harry Lime, gunned down in the drainage tunnel system of Los Angeles which he has made into his private warren. Until he makes the mistake of shooting a policeman in a moment of panic, Martin has committed a string of unsolved robberies with impunity, victimizing electronics outfits whose machinery he modifies to his own purposes or resells to unsuspecting dealers. Martin is a war vet; when the cop he kills asks him for identification, such as a military discharge, Martin replies, "Sure, here's my discharge," and whips out a revolver, blazing away. He's also a former police lab technician, so he brings the technology of both of those worlds to his criminal activities. He is a nocturnal loner and a mechanical genius, as well, and with his full menu of postwar gadgetry, he is soon menacing the entire city. The film begins with a map of Los Angeles filling the screen, followed by a montage that introduces us to the various branches of the city's police department, accompanied by a full-throated documentary narration (it is this film upon which the *Dragnet* radio and television series were based). Finally, as in *White Heat* (a film in which the scientific wizard, played as in *711 Ocean Drive* by Edmund O'Brien, toils on the side of the law), released seven months later, we are propelled along through *He Walked By Night* wondering what sort of device—and each seems

more lethal than the last—Martin will cook up next. In the end, the film becomes a kind of Atomic Age parable, which we see played out in other films preoccupied with mad bombers and saboteurs, and echoed, interestingly enough, in the present day, post-Cold War city where the single madman or fanatic with an explosive device has replaced the Soviet nuclear arsenal as a catalyst of mass fear. In keeping with this apocalyptic motif, we see the final credits of *He Walked By Night* roll over that map of Los Angeles which began the film, except now it is limned in flames that are licking inward, toward its center.

Also notable in film noir are the crucial uses to which the dictaphone recorder is put in *Double Indemnity* and *Phantom Lady*, the microfilm machine in *Pickup on South Street*, and the early fax-machine prototype in *Call Northside 777* which becomes the principal "character" in the film's climax (the camera almost never leaves it), transmitting between two cities an enlarged portion of a newspaper photo in order to save an innocent man from a life sentence in the penitentiary. And there are all the (then) novel surveillance devices employed in the films with Cold War plots, such as *Walk East on Beacon* (1952). Also, the ingenious technology used by bogus mediums and bunco artists—and even a few genuine clairvoyants—in films like *Nightmare Alley*, *The Spiritalist*, and *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, all released within months of one another in 1947 and 1948 and concerned, not with communists and A-bomb blueprints, but with the far more ancient and mysterious lures of the occult and of those secrets which might lie beyond the grave.

Just as the development of the incandescent lightbulb by Thomas Edison in 1879 led to the introduction of the night shift in urban factories, and to the 24-hour-a-day city, the mass-produced electronic gadgets of the postwar era made urban man an information gatherer, a spiritual and mental nomad in his own home. (The pace at which those gadgets have evolved is truly dizzying: consider only that the technological capacities of the 11" × 9" laptop computer before me as I write this just two decades ago could only have been replicated by a mass of computers that would have filled a good-sized room.) The theme of the wanderer, the loner, the nightbird, the urban American isolated with and by his machines as the member (or piece) of an ever-fragmenting society, is very much a noir theme.

And no wonder that by 1995 in films like *The Net* we begin to see one variety of noir loner appearing, not on street corners or in bars, but in front of computers in darkened rooms, solitary hackers surfing through cyberspace.

Which brings us to the telephone, which from the 1940s on really is the ultimate noir machine. It's personal, and impersonal. It potentially connects everyone, and anyone, in the city, from loved ones to utter strangers, from the doctor and the policeman to the thief and the psychopath. As Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, the telephone has rendered certain notions of "distance" obsolete in metropolitan areas. In itself, the urban telephone system is an invisible labyrinth: of voices, disembodied emotions, projections, manipulations, and deflections, of connections and cross-connections as intimate—or impersonal—as one desires; and it is also a tangible labyrinth of lines, cables, and wires, above and below the city streets. Telephones can be used to make confessions or probe for facts, to inform or misinform, to persuade or be persuaded, to intimidate. Film noir is filled with telephones of all kinds: pay phones, office phones, bedside phones, restaurant and nightclub phones that are brought to one's table. Not surprisingly, telephones are often connected in the films to questions of privacy and secrets; they are emblematic of the *mystique* of communication in a world which is clamorous with sound and at the same time, at its deepest levels, eerily silent.

The American city owes its abstract grid layout to the railroad. The automobile went on to scramble the shape of the industrial town, mixing up its separated functions and wreaking havoc in a dozen ways. And airplanes, by so speeding up travel, made urban space as such almost irrelevant. But long before all of this, early in the nineteenth century, the city was already undergoing rapidfire transformations. The novelist Thomas Pynchon has written of Philadelphia at that time: "The city was becoming a kind of high-output machine, materials and labor going in, goods and services coming out, traffic inside flowing briskly about a grid of regular city blocks. The urban mazework of London, leading into ambiguities and indeed evils, was here all rectified, orthogonal. (Charles Dickens, visiting in 1842, remarked, 'After walking about in it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street.')" As the physicist James Treffl points out, "Cities now grow

in rings, with all the land at a given distance from the city center being used before land farther out is built up." Such growth was incremental "when individuals controlled their own travel by walking," but today the rate of "urban sprawl" has been increased exponentially. Or, as Treffl puts it, "There is no question that the modern suburb owes its existence and its organization to the internal combustion engine."

The automobile's effect on the postwar city is inestimable. It has transformed the city more profoundly—and negatively—in a more compressed period of time, than any other previous factor. To cite, for starters, a single ironical aside with regard to the automobile, the American city, and the notion of "progress": in 1907, horsedrawn vehicles in New York City moved at an average speed of 11.5 mph; today automobiles crawl at an average daytime rate of 6 mph—on good days! In Los Angeles, where mass transit has been allowed to atrophy, citizens since the Second World War have been encouraged to use private cars as much as possible, resulting in a city that has become a clogged mass of sprawling suburbs and helter-skelter expressways. Two-thirds of central L.A. is now occupied by freeways, parking lots, and garages. (Edging ever closer to Gertrude Stein's wry description of her hometown of Oakland: "There is no there there.")

Though by 1929 there were more automobiles in New York City than in the whole of Europe, in the first ten years after the Second World War American cities could still accommodate their traffic comfortably, despite a phenomenal boom in automobile sales, which were necessarily depressed during the war. (Just after 1945, there was one car per family in the United States, and in 1975, one car per worker; today, there are twenty percent more cars than total licensed drivers.) In the immediate postwar years, cars were modestly priced and offered freedom of movement to everyone from the soda jerk to the financier. America's decided ambivalence about the social and financial mobility implied in that statement is another matter altogether. In film noir, that ambivalence is certainly reflected in the unceasing portrayals of criminal entrepreneurs, returning G.I.s who "want a stake," and the scheming, climbing, hungry-to-get-ahead protagonists, who are ubiquitous in the city, from the tenement stoop to the penthouse.

The automobile, in fact, manifests itself as an important component of film noir in other respects, far less subtle. For one thing, the films reflect the automobile's use as a luxury item and status symbol and an instrument of power and control. It is a prominent vehicle for the police, who appear on film in the 1940s and 1950s more often in patrol cars than on foot. For all other citizens, cars are readily available in every shape and form, from taxi to getaway sedan, van and pickup to limousine, sporty convertible to the bulky family station wagon.

Add to those millions of rooms and cells that comprise a major city not only the interiors of buses, trucks, trains, and subways, but also the highly specialized, self-contained spaces, worlds unto themselves, of automobiles. Most significantly in film noir, the automobile is yet another isolating urban device: solitary drivers, couples, whole families or even loose acquaintances are locked within a moving space, queued in traffic, their senses only fractionally connected to the surrounding city. In many films, crucial scenes occur inside cars. In *The Big Sleep* and *The Blue Dahlia*, for example, nearly all the romantic interplay—replete with sexual innuendo—between hero and heroine occurs in automobiles, which would seldom have been the case in the 1930s. The automobile turns up significantly in film noir not only within the confines of the city, but often *between* cities, usually at night. The passengers are traveling between two sets of existential or emotional situations—or two sets of trouble—often symbolized by the cities at either end of the journey. *Detour* (1945), *Gun Crazy* (1950), *The Devil Thumbs a Ride* (1948), and *The Hitchhiker* (1953) are all important—and very different—examples of such films, in which the automobile's interior can carry the same charged or claustrophobic atmosphere as the noir city itself. The automobile becomes an insulated version of the city in miniature, in transit.]

Automobiles are also used to symbolize unbridled aggressiveness in film noir, and individual power run amok. Sometimes the car becomes a lethal instrument (the noir streets are the frequent scenes of hit-and-run homicides) or a suicidal one.] In *Angel Face*, directed in 1953 by Otto Preminger, cars are a dominant image from beginning to end. The hero is an ambulance driver and washed-up race-car driver in Los Angeles. The heroine is a very fast driver. And the film

boasts one of the most bizarre and startling climaxes in American cinema: the heroine takes the wheel of her sports car and as the hero slides into the passenger seat, popping open a bottle of champagne, she purposely throws the gears into reverse and backs off a high cliff. She has been an unbalanced character throughout the film, emerging from a major nervous breakdown, but her final act takes us—and the hero—very much by surprise.

As for trains, after 1945 the railroads which helped create the big cities took a backseat to the automobile. The “rapid transit” subway systems, built at the turn of the century, extended the dimensions of the city. They created not just a literal urban underworld, but as Trefl points out, the early elevated railways (still prominent in numerous noir films) turned “the streets themselves into tunnels, darkening the lives of thousands of people. For the fact is,” he goes on, “that there can be only one upper level in any city. If that level is used for transportation, then the area under it will be dark and (usually) unpleasant. This, more than anything else, drove the move to subways.”

In noir terms, trains and subways are also closed societies—not with one, two, or even six people, like an automobile, but with whole mini-populations. Trains and subways, too, become microcosms of the cities they are connecting, or affording internal transportation, and whose populations they are carrying. In film noir, extraordinary use is made of train interiors, and of train and subway stations as prime nerve centers of the city. Trains can figure prominently in noir narratives, or even encompass the entire narrative, as in the 1952 film *The Narrow Margin*, directed by Richard Fleischer. In utilizing the train's interior, Fleischer makes aesthetic decisions in the same way he would have had the location and interior shots been set in a big city. He makes ingenious cinematographic use of the compressed compartments, tiny lavatories, long lowlit corridors, dining lounge, observation, and baggage cars, machinist's shop, engineer's quarters, and so on. The train's windows, mirrors, doors, and closets, which are integral to the action at every turn, are handled with incredible attention to detail. Fleischer makes a complete world of the train—alternately letting us forget we're on a train and allowing us to think of nothing else—as if it is a miniature city traveling between Chicago and Los Angeles; and he bookends the film with a brief pre-

lude and an almost perfunctory postlude in the cities proper. The plot is deceptively simple: a detective is protecting a mob informer, a woman, en route to a murder trial; there is a contract out on her life and the detective is utterly in the dark as to who her potential assassin might be among the other passengers. It turns out that he is equally in the dark as to the woman's true identity. In fact, after a while, he is not even sure whom he should be protecting! The inherent claustrophobia of the story is enhanced by the overwhelming sense of physical compression, and the tight quarters in which the characters must operate: at times, it literally feels as if they have no room to think, or to digest information that is right under their noses. So what would be an oppressive environment in a city becomes a positively suffocating one onboard a train—a quintessential noir atmosphere.

Other films noirs use trains in equally self-reinforcing ways. For example, *Crack-Up* (1946), in which the title itself is a double entendre which refers both to a train wreck and the protagonist's nervous breakdown. And *Union Station* (1950), which is set almost completely in the train terminal of that name in Chicago. Here the plot revolves around the kidnapping of a blind girl off a train. Again, the film is filled with trains and train motifs; in one of the few times that the action strays from the terminal, we witness a wonderfully harrowing scene on the elevated subway line. *Union Station* concludes in a subterranean tunnel below the underground track area of the terminal, on a long-abandoned, manually propelled shuttle car. Other films noirs with notable train presences are *The Seventh Victim* (1947), *Port of New York* (1949), and *Human Desire* (1953). The latter, directed by Fritz Lang and based on Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine*, opens with a famous sequence in which we see innumerable train tracks running parallel to one another, then crossing, recrossing, and diverging several times—mimicking the lives of the ill-fated protagonists which the film is about to reveal to us—as a locomotive pulls into a huge train yard.

Trains and locomotives are a staple visual beneath the opening credits of countless films noirs. The sounds of trains, too, are a constant in the films. [The whistle, roar, and clang of a passing train, the blur of its streaking lights, or its ominous shadowy bulk often correspond to violence or conflict within rooms in nearby buildings over-

looking the tracks.] In *Party Girl*, for example, in a union hall where the film's two most violent scenes occur, passing trains, seen from an odd angle through a high window, presage the onset of violence. And in *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948), directed by Anatole Litvak, the trains with glittering lights passing on an elevated train track and a railroad bridge visible through a picture window are, literally, the only aspect of Manhattan with which the heroine, a wealthy invalid confined to her bedroom, is visually connected. The comings and goings of the trains she watches mirror the action of the narrative at crucial junctures, including, most significantly, the heroine's murder at film's end. Just as the trains, and the mechanized life of the city itself, are many steps removed from the invalid's highly circumscribed world, so too is the machinery of her murder, which she cannot stop even when she learns of it early in the film. This sort of Expressionist touch, using a significant and ongoing prop like the trains to amplify the resonance of a complex narrative, was one that Litvak was tutored in early on: as a young director, he served two apprenticeships: in Russian cinema, making Social Realist films, and at the UFA (Universum Film Aktien Gesellschaft) studios in Germany, where cinematic Expressionism was born.

After the war, the airplane and the new jet planes make all cities seem as one city, blurring boundaries of time and space. Today the air traveler in America might feel at times as if the entire country were urban. With urban points of departure and arrival, the vast countryside in between—the lakes, valleys, mountains, and forests previously *seen* by intercity train travelers—are now profoundly absent. The airplane urbanizes the American consciousness even before its passenger sets foot in a city. Still, the airport remains an entity outside the city proper and is rarely a backdrop in film noir; in fact, I can count on one hand the times I have seen it as such in the films. When the noir hero travels, he invariably gets in a car or boards a train.

But however revealing, and enriching, the role these vehicles—cars, trains, planes—play in the films, it remains a surrogate role. As the critic Robert Warshaw has written, for the film noir hero “there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not only the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so important, which is the modern world.” The film noir hero, rang-

ing widely in his various cities, from New Orleans to Reno to Detroit, tends nevertheless to gravitate to very specific sorts of buildings within the city. For food and shelter, unsurprisingly, hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants best serve his needs. But when it comes to doing his business, legitimate or illicit, financial or sexual, his choices usually boil down to the office building or the casino. As the protagonist of *The Unknown Man* (1951), the prominent lawyer who lapses into crime, observes of the noir city, "This is a city teeming with pride and corruption, where crime operates out of skyscrapers and plush hotels."

The office building—especially the skyscraper—is omnipresent and significant in film noir. Every city, Mumford tells us, from ancient times to the present, has been ruled by a god, and in the noir city that god is Money and his temple is the office building. A tower of dreams, a refuge in the clouds, high above the grime and ugliness below, the office building represents power, status, and an implicit sort of perspective; from the street or sidewalk of the labyrinthine city one can see far less of one's surroundings than from the thirteenth floor of a building. On the sidewalk, however, one does see those surroundings according to the scale of one's own body, with feet rooted to the ground; from high above, as we heard when Harry Lime was scanning the Viennese crowds from a ferris wheel's apogee, the noir protagonist may find that the godlike perspective dangerously reinforces his already well-developed antisocial proclivities. The wide panorama of an upper-story perspective can imply, however subliminally, an equally wide range of intellectual vision and emotional breadth, or—most commonly—a foundation of material security and worldly power; in film noir this is a frequent delusion, which segues into despair and destruction. Surely right here we have the three Ds of the film noir universe: delusion, despair, and destruction. The fourth D, the shadow into which these other three inevitably flow, is of course death.]

The office buildings in the noir city share a number of root physical characteristics. For one thing, their enormous scale. The Chrysler Building (77 stories, reaching 1,048 feet) was completed in 1930, followed by the Empire State Building (102 stories, at 1,250 feet) a year later, but because of the Depression, the subsequent col-

lapse of the real estate market, and the virtual strangulation of the construction industry, the real age of the skyscraper had to wait until after the war. The Empire State Building was constructed (60,000 tons of steel, 60 miles of water pipe, 6,500 windows, 73 elevators) at the breakneck pace of close to a floor a day. But, as the architectural critic Paul Goldberger has written in *The Skyscraper*, the Empire State Building at first "rented so slowly that for years it was referred to as the 'Empty State Building.' But unlike some kinds of skyscrapers," he continues, "it *could* make money once it was amply rented. A study for the American Institute of Steel Construction in 1929 reported that the optimum height for a building on a midtown Manhattan site would be about 63 stories. . . . The study showed diminishing returns at greater heights, until at 132 stories it projected that profits would disappear altogether." After 1945, many buildings in the 30- to 50-story range were erected helter-skelter, not only in New York, but in every major American city. And by 1950, the era of glass skyscrapers had taken hold with a vengeance, many of them packing tremendous visual and symbolic power in the postwar cityscape, comparable to the enormous structures erected in ancient Rome to celebrate military victories around the empire.

Ironically enough, Le Corbusier's U.N. Secretariat Building, erected as a center for peace and the prevention of war, is a prime example of this sort of postwar skyscraper: 39 stories, with long east and west walls of green glass, it embodied what Goldberger calls the first "idea of a tower that would appear to be sheathed only in glass." Had Le Corbusier had his way, there would have been many more such buildings—but larger—in New York and other cities. On that first visit of his to New York in 1945, he made another celebrated comment that has echoed down over the years: "The skyscrapers of New York are too small and there are too many of them." The city Le Corbusier envisioned more closely resembled the massive—beyond all human scale—futuristic, nightmare cities of some neo-films noirs of the 1980s like *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Black Rain* (1989); a city with a hundred World Trade Centers and Sears Towers in a concentrated grid of square blocks; cold, sunless, remote, imprisoning both physically and aesthetically, and for all intents and purposes nocturnal twenty-four hours a day. Truly noir.