Darkly Perfect World
DARKLY PERFECT WORLD

COLONIAL ADVENTURE, POSTMODERNISM, AND AMERICAN NOIR

STANLEY ORR
For Cheryl, Hazel, and the Fellers
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Unlike a noir protagonist, I had a great deal of help in completing this project.

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In 1995, First Brands Corp., the manufacturer of GLAD® bags and plastic wrap, introduced a trash bag with built-in “Quick-Tie™ Flaps”: doubling as fastener and handle, the innovative flaps allow consumers to dispense with inconvenient twist ties. As part of its multimillion dollar investment in the tieless bag, First Brands hired the Chicago-based Leo Burnett Agency which in turn embarked upon a “Ties Are Out, Flaps Are In” publicity campaign. Working with famed portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz and legendary actor Robert Mitchum, the Burnett Agency came up with an unusual image with which to market the new bag.1 Appearing in magazines such as Better Homes and Gardens, this uncropped two-page color photograph features trench-coated Robert Mitchum standing in a rain-swept alley, fixing the camera with his impassive gaze. In the background to Mitchum’s right, we see a pile of bagged garbage. Mitchum isn’t wearing a tie, and the caption to our left, printed over another photograph of a garbage bag, reads “Ties Are Out. Flaps Are In.” The ad seems to suggest that until the day that “a real rain will come and wash all the scum off the streets,” as Travis Bickle (Robert de Niro) hopes in Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976), GLAD makes it a little easier for the consumer to manage the detritus of the modern wasteland. However successful at publicizing the tieless bag, Leibovitz’s photograph also tells us a number of things about the status of the noir ethos at the end of the twentieth century. An optimist might celebrate the apotheosis of noir: no longer banished to the margins of mainstream culture, the noir hero embodied by Mitchum has
joined the ranks of the classical detective and the cowboy in western cultural iconography. The purist, on the other hand, may inversely see “Ties are out” as an instance of unqualified commodification, the final concession of an aesthetic and philosophical position that long enjoyed an agnostic relationship with the mass-cultural mainstream. The noir ethos that once delivered relentless jeremiads within and against the culture industries of pulp fiction and the Hollywood studio system has been recruited to sell garbage bags as well as Victoria’s Secret lingerie and auto insurance, to mention just a few commercial applications. But whether we applaud or derogate the mass-cultural assimilation of noir, we cannot deny that this distinctive vision of self and world has for over a century performed a powerful and manifold cultural work.

In *Darkly Perfect World* I assess this work by charting a trajectory of noir from immediate pretexts in the late nineteenth-century through twentieth- and twenty-first century transformations. I offer a critique of noir epistemology and discuss at length a series of texts that represent the postmodernist reception of hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir. We begin with a location of literary and cinematic noir within the context of western colonialism. My central contention is that noir entertains a recuperative relationship with its primary “host genres.” Whereas the dialogue between late-Victorian fictions of mystery and adventure reveals an identity crisis immediately exacerbated by the colonial encounter, noir arrives at its subject through a constructive strategy of “authenticating alienation”—a radical polarization of western self and colonial other. For the noir imagination, “ties are out” in that its subject comes into being not through networks of relationship but rather in sharp contrast to the darkening modern metropolis. The majority of this study, however, is devoted to what Linda Hutcheon terms “postmodernist parody”—novelists and cineastes who recast noir, variously subverting and revising its fundamental discursive formations. Though by no means exhaustive, *Darkly Perfect World* treats a broad spectrum of primary fictional and cinematic texts, offering a flexible paradigm for reading noir into the twenty-first century.

Before embarking on any journey “down these mean streets,” we must run a gauntlet all but peculiar to the study of noir. On one side, there are the dictates of scholarship which demand a rigorous situation of the very term “noir.” As James Naremore has pointed out, early theorists were unclear about the appellation in the 1940s and ’50s, and the ambiguity persists. Rather like a noir protagonist, the scholar falls into a Sisyphean task of identifying this elusive and unwieldy cultural phenomenon. Naremore offers what is perhaps the most sensible response when he suggests that the “baggy concept” of noir “functions rather like big words such as romantic
or classic”: “An ideological concept with a history all its own, it can be used to describe a period, a movement, or a recurrent style. Like all critical terminology, it tends to be reductive, and it sometimes works on behalf of unstated agendas. For these reasons and because the meaning changes over time, it ought to be examined as a discursive construct. It nevertheless has heuristic value, mobilizing specific themes that are worth further consideration” (6). In a similarly provisional spirit, I would maintain that terms such as noir remain useful as long as they are subject to critique and revision. Slavoj Žižek suggests one of the most enabling labels for noir contending that the phenomenon is not a genre, as such, but rather a “logic” which pervades other genres:

From the very beginning *film noir* was not limited to hard-boiled detective stories: reverberations of *film noir* motifs are easily discernable in comedies (*Arsenic and Old Lace*), in westerns (*Pursued*), in political (*All the King’s Men*) and social dramas (*Weekend’s End*), etcetera. Do we have here the secondary impact of something that originally constitutes a genre of its own (the *noir* crime universe), or is the crime film only one of the possible fields of application of the *noir* logic, that is, ‘*noir*’ a predicate that entertains towards the crime universe the same relationship as towards a comedy or western, a kind of logical operator introducing the same anamorphic distortion in every genre it is applied to, so that the fact that it found its strongest application in the crime film is ultimately a historical contingency? . . . My thesis is that the ‘proper,’ detective *film noir* as it were *arrives at its truth*—in Hegelese: realizes its notion only by way of its fusion with another genre . . . (200; emphasis in original)5

Whatever its shortcomings,6 Žižek’s transgeneric theory is compelling because it allows us to understand the dialogues that arise between noir and its “host-genres.” As Žižek points out, the detective story is the most prominent host-genre for noir; and while the other genres that Žižek mentions are quite relevant, the list excludes a prominent generic intertext that has largely escaped critical attention: the colonial adventure story? Indeed, noir represents a continuation and recuperation of the colonial discourses immanent in both the late-Victorian adventure and detective genres.

In *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, Martin Green argues for adventure tales as “the energizing myth of British imperialism [. . .] the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and, in the form of dreams, they charged England’s will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule” (3). Green here suggests the first phase in a conventional three-stage scheme of generic transformation.
In texts ranging from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611) through Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to the Victorian boys’ books of G. A. Henty, the British imperial adventure formula turns upon a routine of travel, conquest, and return. As Patrick Brantlinger has it, “the ‘benighted’ regions of the world, occupied by mere natives, offer brilliantly charismatic realms of adventure for white heroes, usually free from the complexities of relations with white women. Afterward, however, like Ulysses the heroes sail home, bank their treasures or invest their profits . . . and settle into patriarchal, domestic routines” (12). Following Green, Brantlinger implies the oppositions essential to imperial adventure—white/black, dark/light—unproblematically aligned with issues of race, morality, and spirituality.

But such categories become somewhat more problematic in what Brantlinger terms the “dusk” of imperial adventure. Throughout this second phase, which corresponds to the late-Victorian waning of British imperial confidence, there arises a species of adventure tale gripped by anxieties of metropolitan decay and colonial dissolution: “After the mid-Victorian years the British found it increasingly difficult to think of themselves as inevitably progressive; they began worrying instead about the degeneration of their institutions, their culture, their racial ‘stock.’” The central themes Brantlinger discerns in “imperial Gothic” may be applied to late-Victorian adventure as a whole: “individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure in the modern world” (230). This is the world of Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Louis Becke, and Joseph Conrad: a universe in which the evangelical project of adventure has devolved into crass commercialism and in which the European adventurers themselves devolve into savagery through miscegenation and hyperbolic violence. Brantlinger concludes with this terminal point of adventure, identifying Conrad’s vision as the “darkness” which ensues after the “dusk” of the genre. Following Chinua Achebe, however, Brantlinger finds Conrad’s indictment of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* superficial and ambivalent: “He paints Kurtz and Africa with the same tar-brush. His version of evil—the form taken by Kurtz’s Satanic behavior—is going native. Evil, in short, is African in Conrad’s story; if it is also European, that is because some white men in the heart of darkness behave like Africans” (262).

Foregrounding Anglo-Australian literature, Robert Dixon elaborates Brantlinger’s scheme of the diurnal exhaustion of the adventure story. According to Dixon, the imperial adventure story, “an archive of all that seemed already known about race, gender, nation, and empire” (200), bottoms in the “ripping yarns” of Stevenson and Australian writer/adventurer
Louis Becke. Formally dispersed into novella and short story, *fin-de-siècle* stories such as Stevenson’s “The Beach of Falesá” (1892–93), alongside Becke’s *By Reef and Palm* (1894) and *The Ebbing of the Tide* (1896), “strip the discourse of adventure of any semblance of moral justification, exposing its sordid economy of ‘trade’ and its connection with masculine violence” (180). For Dixon, however, Brantlinger underestimates the masculine adventure’s potential for renewal: “At the very moment when adventure stories seemed to express the decline of the imperial ideal and a revision of its code of aggressive, militant manliness, they also sought to overcome that *fin-de-siècle* mood, not by rejecting masculine adventure, but by investment in a process of regeneration through violence.” Dixon then turns to Becke’s *The Pearl Divers of Roncador Reef* (1908), in which a group of entrepreneurs “go to the realm of adventure, the Pacific, find loot, and use semilegal violence to destroy a villain who personifies the dangerous form of manliness they themselves require for renewal” (190–91). He sees a refreshed adventure form carry on the twentieth century through popular writers such as Ion Idriess and Frank Clune, who, throughout the 1940s and ’50s, represent a third, “regenerative” phase of the adventure formula.

Late-Victorian adventure stories reflect and reinscribe profound anxieties within the western cultural imagination, doubts not only about the failure of the colonial enterprise but also about the integrity of the metropolis. It is hardly surprising that the detective story emerges throughout the nineteenth century as a counterpoint to imperial/colonial declension. Within conventional literary historiographies, the Victorian detective embodies Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism. In William Spanos’s phrase, the genre projects “the comforting certainty that an acute ‘eye,’ private or otherwise, can solve the crime with resounding finality by inferring causal relationships between clues which point to it” (150). Under the influence of Michel Foucault, discussions of the “detecting eye” turn from homologies about intellectual history to investigations of the disciplinary power of vision; as D. A. Miller suggests, “Detective fiction is . . . always implicitly punning on the detective’s brilliant super-vision and the police supervision that it embodies. His intervention marks an explicit bringing-under surveillance of the entire world of the narrative” (35). In his seminal detective fictions, Edgar Allan Poe recognizes the regulatory forces at work within a disciplinary society, but seeks to reassign panoptic power from the faceless machine of the prison to the aristocratic sleuth Chevalier Auguste Dupin.\(^8\) An emphasis on the disciplinary subtext of detective fiction also broaches colonial discourse. A species of “imperial Gothic,” Victorian detective fiction often treats “exotic invasions.” Interpreted against
the prototypical plantation fiction “The Gold Bug” (1843), which conflates detective ratiocination, aristocratic empowerment, and slavery, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) reads as a tale of metropolitan corruption: a weak and irresponsible colonial adventurer introduces an exotic and savage menace into the heart of Europe and the mayhem that ensues is curbed only by the noblesse oblige intervention of the detective. Common throughout the Victorian detective stories of Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, such Orientalism dominates the fictions of Arthur Conan Doyle: many Sherlock Holmes stories, among them the inaugural novellas *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890), emphasize threats of colonial enervation and invasion. As Laura Otis points out, Holmes’s “calling consists largely of detecting foreign blackmailers, thieves, tyrants, intelligence agents, counterfeiters, women, drugs, and diseases that have worked their way into British society” (91).

Victorian adventure and detection therefore entertain a contrapuntal relationship; what the “defective” colonial adventurer and the metropolitan sleuth have in common, however, is a permeability, an atavism, realized or potential, which calls into question the binary categories of imperial Self and colonial Other. Against the ideal of “inner directed” imperialists, such fictions present the colonial enterprise as a threat not only to life but to identity itself. Just as Dupin corrects the Maltese sailor in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and Sherlock Holmes apprehends the likes of Jonathan Small in *The Sign of Four*, the detective genre as a whole very generally works to suggest some possibility of containing “defective” colonials and transgressive indigenes alike. But the sleuth capable of accomplishing this police-work is also a strangely permeable figure. The staid and portly Dr. Watson, Otis contends, embodies an empire “in decline, under siege, and dubious in its capacity to reproduce and renew itself” (99). Holmes is even more suspicious as he wanders incognito throughout colonial and “endocolonial” worlds and is, moreover, addicted to a “seven-percent solution” of cocaine that stimulates the intellect between cases. For Christopher Keep and Don Randall, this eccentric habit gives rise to “an implicit homology between the punctured body of the great detective and the body politic of England itself”: “Just as the nation struggles with a foreign conspiracy that has been released into its blood stream by the events of [the Indian Mutiny of] 1857, so too Holmes is represented as dangerously ‘occupied’ by a drug with distinct Orientalist overtones, one which threatens his physical health as surely as the Mutiny threatened the health of the empire” (207). The colonial adventurer who “crosses the beach” is often tinctured with indigenous tattoos; Holmes likewise becomes “all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture marks” (5). Contrary to the rational/empirical Holmes
metonymically associated with the magnifying glass is the Holmes of the syringe: an addicted and perforated figure no less compromised than the defective colonial.

As Leibovitz’s portrait of Robert Mitchum attests, the noir protagonist is most often associated not with the magnifying glass, but rather the trenchcoat, a garment that symbolizes the hard-boiled detective’s alienated disposition. For John Cawelti, “the hard-boiled detective is a traditional man of virtue in an amoral and corrupt world. His toughness and cynicism form a protective coloration forming the essence of his character, which is honorable and noble” (Adventure, Mystery, and Romance 152). Read in terms of colonial discourse, however, the noir ethos appears not so much a modernist exposure of the classical detective story as a recuperative response to the defective tendencies that literally “mark” both the late-Victorian detective and adventurer. Unlike these porous subjects, the noir protagonist enjoys a discrete identity: the hermetic trenchcoat coheres as much as it protects. In Gunfighter Nation, Richard Slotkin describes the hard-boiled detective as a rejuvenated figure, “a recrudescence of the frontier hero [and] an agent of regenerative violence through whom we imaginatively recover the ideological values, if not the material reality, of the mythic Frontier” (228). The cornerstone of this study is the notion that the noir subject is not only regenerated through violence, but also authenticated through alienation. Whether triumphant or defeated, the noir protagonist follows the late imperial adventurer in that he owns nothing of the confidence and integration of his Victorian predecessors. And yet this sense of estrangement enables a recuperated, alienated subjectivity. I derive the phrase “authenticating alienation” from Terry Eagleton, who argues that postmodernism dismisses even the degree-zero realities of modernity: “[T]he very concept of alienation must secretly posit a dream of authenticity which postmodernism finds quite unintelligible. Those flattened surfaces and hollowed interiors are not ‘alienated’ because there is no longer any subject to be alienated and nothing to be alienated from, ‘authenticity’ having been less rejected than merely forgotten” (132). In “The Ecstasy of Communication” (1987), Jean Baudrillard similarly clarifies alienation as a means of self-fashioning when he writes, “Certainly, this private universe was alienating to the extent that it separated you from others—or from the world, where it was invested as a protective enclosure, an imaginary protector, a defense system. But it also reaped the symbolic benefits of alienation, which is that the Other exists, and that otherness can fool you for the better or the worse” (130). In a bold response to its Victorian pretexts, the noir ethos transforms a metrocolonial identity crisis into an unlikely guarantor of identity: savage otherness creates a “protective
enclosure” of alienated, authenticated subjectivity. Like the plastic garbage-bag, the hard-boiled detective’s trenchcoat may ultimately retain as much as it excludes.

The first chapters of Darkly Perfect World address ways in which noir alienation “fools us for better or worse”: I investigate a series of noir writers and filmmakers who recuperate the tradition of late-Victorian adventure by exploiting cultural memories of California as a fantastic and dangerous colonial frontier. While Dashiell Hammett evokes the ripping yarns of Louis Becke, steering exotic adventure into the urban jungle of his San Francisco detective stories, Raymond Chandler recalls in The Big Sleep (1939) a nonfiction adventure pretext: Benjamin Truman’s 1874 promotional tract Semi-tropical California. In contrast to Truman’s utopian Los Angeles, which yields to Angloamerican colonization, Chandler’s L.A. is a wasteland that consumes adventurers such as General Sternwood and Rusty Regan. The section concludes with a treatment of the centrality of adventure motifs within “canonical” film noir. Drawing upon films by Josef von Sternberg, Orson Welles, Billy Wilder, and Rudolph Maté, I argue that film noir rehearses and yet ironically reverses the metrocolonial voyage, maintaining throughout the constructive strategy of authenticating alienation.

Given its centrality to the modernist imagination, it’s no wonder that noir figures prominently in discussions of postmodernist culture. Generally speaking, critics have found in post-1970s “neo-noir” a nihilistic corruption of noir’s aesthetic and philosophical authenticity. While mid-century noir shares what Jameson terms “the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia with a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval” (19), neo-noir betrays a nostalgia for the alienated polarities of modernism itself. Alain Silver distinguishes in the “‘Neo-Noir’ period,” effective since the 1970s, a moment in which many directors “recreate the noir mood, whether in remakes or in new narratives, . . . cognizant of a heritage and intent on their own interpretation on it.” David Mamet captures the neo-noir spirit in his remarks on House of Games (1987), suggesting, “I am very well acquainted with the genre in print and on film, and I love it. I tried to be true.” What accounts for this durable loyalty to noir, and for the appearance neo-noir films such as Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974), Body Heat (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), Stormy Monday (Mike Figgis, 1988), The Hot Spot (Dennis Hopper, 1990), Red Rock West (John Dahl, 1993), and Palmetto (Volker Schlöndorf, 1998)? How explain Carly Simon’s album Film Noir (2007) or Ayala Moriel’s 2007 fragrance of the same name? Erik Dussere observes that even as midcentury noirs accomplished a deliberate rejection of commercial culture, the harsh realism of these movies has
become a sign of authenticity, a “marker of seriousness”: “Through street-wise attitude, moral ambiguity, and existential reflections on crime and death, they posit for themselves a world that is less prettied-up than other popular film and ostensibly less commodified” (16–17). But resistance to commercial fantasy ironically renders noir attractive to the very culture industries that it seems to reject. Perhaps the driving force behind late capitalism’s subsumption of noir is what Baudrillard describes as the “panic-stricken production of the real” that accompanies postmodernism:

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; second-hand truth, objectivity, and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. . . .

As reality itself becomes exposed as simulacrum, noir occurs to the postmodern cultural imagination as a “sign of reality,” “an escalation of the true, of lived experience.” This is the world of the “nostalgia film” described by Fredric Jameson in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991). For Jameson, neo-noirs such as Chinatown and Body Heat exemplify the “mesmerizing new aesthetic mode” of postmodernism. In their “conveying of ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion,” these neo-noirs promise a return to the real; but they paradoxically contribute to “the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way.” In his remake of Billy Wilder’s Double Indemnity (1944), argues Jameson, Kasdan participates in “the insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode”: “Everything in the film . . . conspires to blur its official contemporaneity and make it possible for the viewer to receive the narrative as though it were set in some eternal thirties, beyond real historical time” (19–21). Nor is this commodification of the noir past confined to the ’70s and ’80s; castigating Joel and Ethan Coen’s Miller’s Crossing (1990), Lee Tamahori’s Mulholland Falls (1996), and Curtis Hanson’s LA Confidential (1997), Naremore observes, “A good deal of postmodernist noir involves a conservative, ahistorical regression to the pop culture of the 1950s, or to a glamorous world before that, where people dressed well and smoked cigarettes.” Taken together, these critics help us to discern in neo-noir (especially the period films) not an appeal for wholeness and unity, but rather a nostalgia for the real itself. Although
hard-boiled fiction and film noir may have posited an alienated world, this very alienation becomes a haven against the liquidation of self and world into commodified signs.

If nostalgia films represent a mass cultural assimilation of modernist noir, then avant-garde reiterations of film noir have also been received as a dangerous disengagement with reality. David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986) furnishes a chief example of this phenomenon. For Norman Denzin, Lynch’s innovative juxtapositions of genres and orders of representation are undercut by its political quietism: “postmodern individuals want films like *Blue Velvet,*” he concludes, “for in them they can have their sex, their myths, their violence, and their politics, all at the same time” (472). Indeed, *Blue Velvet* recurs throughout discussions of postmodernism as sign of the movement’s potential for nihilism. In *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir* (1999), Foster Hirsch reads the film as an exemplum of postmodernist corruption of the noir ethos. Heralded by French New Wave filmmakers who playfully approach noir in films like Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Samurai* (1967)—which Hirsch terms “cool in excelsis” (98)—“*Blue Velvet* is noir conceived as pictures at an exhibition. . . . Lynch’s primary interest is in making a spectacle out of bizarre behavior” (177). These receptions of *Blue Velvet* set the tone for commentaries on more recent films noirs. In an early critique of *Pulp Fiction* (1995), for example, Tom Whalen contends that Tarantino leaves us only with “the flattened corpses of the Aristotelian virtues of complexity, dimensionality, and truth”:

> I’m not sure what *Pulp Fiction* is about except for its own artificiality. Its flashiness masks Tarantino’s disinterest in (or ignorance of) how the camera and compositions can be made to mean, unlike most of the films he references. The violence of the film for me isn’t found in having a mostly sympathetic character’s head blown off, but in the director’s turning this into a (approximately) twenty-minute comedy routine on how to dispose of the body and clean the blood out of the car. In the postmodernist world of *Pulp Fiction*, violence takes the place of feeling; its radical juxtapositions (of the artificial to the real, of event to response) have the effect of short-circuiting sense and effect—it flatlines us. (2–4)

Naremore finds such films part of a larger “noir mediascape”; with particular attention to *Lost Highway* (1997), he acknowledges Lynch’s artistry, but finds this director’s intertextual play limited and limiting: “For all its horror, sexiness, and formal brilliance *Lost Highway* ultimately resembles all the other retro noirs and nostalgia films of the late twentieth century: it remains frozen in a kind of cinématheque and is just another movie about
movies” (275). Literally “drawn” from the graphic novel, *Sin City* (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2004) is perhaps the most flamboyant contribution to this strain of postmodern noir. For reviewer Morton Marcus, the innovative crime movie, alongside Rodriguez’s *El Mariachi* (1992) and *Desperado* (1995), lapses into the regressive “style without meaning, style for its own sake”; the director’s “box office success,” laments Marcus, “points to the decadence and waste that has come to characterize this country in its social, economic and political life, and in its foreign policy as well—a decadence and waste Rodriguez’s films exemplify.” Such language echoes throughout the reviews of Rian Johnson’s debut *Brick* (2005), which transposes midcentury hardboiled conventions into the setting of an Orange County high school. While Stephen Holden deems *Brick* “a flashy cinematic stunt,” Kristi Mitsuda tempers her praise of the film by suggesting that it skirts “a narcissistic exercise in generic cross-pollination conducted purely for its own sake.”

It is not my intention to contest the broad critical reception of directors such as Lynch, Tarantino, and Rodriguez, but rather to narrate a heretofore unrecognized postmodernist reception and revision of noir. Even as noir elaborates itself in the 1940s and ’50s, there arises a postmodernist aesthetic that appropriates, undermines, and ultimately transforms the noir vision of authenticating alienation. Following critics such as Woody Haut and Paula Rabinowitz, I describe the ways in which marginalized novelists reverse the alienated polarities of noir. After a prefatory reading of Chandler’s *The Blue Dahlia* (George Marshall, 1946), I discuss three texts which variously critique, appropriate, and transform the noir returning veteran’s formula: Chester Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), Dorothy B. Hughes’s *In A Lonely Place* (1946), and John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957). These books reassign authenticating alienation to marginalized figures conventionally “othered” under high noir.

The subversions implicit in these revisionist texts become more apparent under what Linda Hutcheon articulates as “postmodernist parody.” For Hutcheon, the neo-Marxist jeremiad of Eagleton and Jameson is itself inimical to activism in that it fails to recognize the subversive potential of postmodernism: “While the postmodern has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political action, it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique. To adapt Barthes’s general notion of the ‘doxa’ as public opinion or the ‘Voice of Nature’ and consensus . . . , postmodernism works to ‘de-doxify’ our cultural representations and their undeniable political import.” Hutcheon’s theories about postmodernist parody enable us to discern a historiography of noir that negotiates a path between nostalgia and pastiche. Chapter
5 accordingly treats “anti-noir” thematics in four postmodernist novels: Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Paul Auster’s *Ghosts* (1986), and K.W. Jeter’s *Noir* (1998). In the figure of Oedipa Mass, Pynchon dramatizes a collapse of the noir subject maintained through authenticating alienation. Reed’s and Auster’s respective novels, on the other hand, recall specific pretexts: while *Mumbo Jumbo* “signifies” on Elia Kazan’s *Panic in the Streets* (1950), *Ghosts* alludes to Jacques Tourneur’s *Out of the Past* (1947) and other 1940s films, exposing noir as what Michel Foucault terms a “technology of the self.” I conclude this chapter with a commentary on K. W. Jeter’s science-fiction novel *Noir*. One of the most aggressive and deliberate fictional commentaries on noir extant, this book gathers the developments of literary and cinematic postmodernism to envision the “darkly perfect world” of film noir as a cybernetic retreat from the erasures of postmodernism. Though distinctive, each text under consideration relentlessly exposes the constructive mechanisms of hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir. Whereas high-noir normalizes self and world by positing an heroically alienated imperial subject, postmodernist parodies of noir collapse the distinction between Self and Other, leaving the protagonist in a terrifying epistemological crisis, and often, as in Jeter’s novel, nostalgic for the alienated polarities of noir.

As suggested above, many critics decry what they see as a paralyzing negation in postmodernism. In the final chapters of this study, I read a series of contemporary films that revise the noir subject so vehemently attacked through postmodernist parody. Chapter 6 concerns the interplay within noir between the familiar figures of the existential quester and the confidence man: while the former posits an authentic subject beyond the freplay of language, the latter conjures the specter of unchecked signification. Midcentury noir texts, such as William Lindsay Gresham’s novel *Nightmare Alley* (1946), limit the deconstructive implications of the confidence man by converting this character into a variation on the existential quester. In many contemporary crime films, however, the confidence man is recast as a bricoleur who embodies the process of signification and who eclipses the modernist figure of the noir protagonist. I trace the emergence of the confidence-man-as-bricoleur in five films: Martin Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* (1991), Bryan Singer’s *The Usual Suspects* (1995), David Fincher’s *Seven* (1995), and Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000). In each instance, some “bibliomancer” deftly manipulates noir conventions as well as broader western discourses such as Realism and Orientalism. *Memento*, however, represents the apotheosis of this revisionist movement within noir—the reintegration of the existential quester and the postmodernist bricoleur. Noir therefore reveals itself at the end of the twentieth century
not so much a reflection of grim reality as an ideologically charged technology for the generation of reality itself.

The concluding chapter of the study suggests what is in some ways an even more substantial departure. Grounding the discussion in theorists of postmodern identity such as Calvin O. Schrag, I encounter films noirs which posit a subject derived not through authenticating alienation, but rather through openly acknowledged networks of relationships. I initially return to the 1940s and ’50s, treating two directors who distinguished themselves from the comparatively reductive, constructive vision of their contemporaries. In Stray Dog (1949), Akira Kurosawa problematizes the noir strategy of authenticating alienation by constructing plots that probe the complexities of relational identity. Kurosawa was joined by his American colleague Samuel Fuller, whose films House of Bamboo (1955), China Gate (1957), and The Crimson Kimono (1959) work within the western formula of adventure noir to destabilize its racist polarization of Self and Other. More recent film makers of noir are indebted to Kurosawa and Fuller as they pervasively reconstruct the noir subject. While Carl Franklin’s One False Move (1992), Quentin Tarantino’s Reservoir Dogs (1992), and Mike Newell’s Donnie Brasco (1997) continue the argument for the inevitability of the relational self, films such as Bad Lieutenant (Abel Ferrara, 1992), Things to Do in Denver When You’re Dead (Gary Fleder, 1995), and Hard Eight (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1996) adopt diverse noir formulae in order to move away from authenticating alienation and toward a more frankly constructed human subjectivity. In each case a familiar noir protagonist journeys from hard-boiled alienation to open relationship with the Other. As the heroic isolato becomes an inextricably “connected guy” (to borrow a phrase from Donnie Brasco), a dramatic ideological revision is accomplished: racist/imperialist construction, relentless deconstruction, and ludic signification give way to what Schrag terms “the self in community.” Whether genre, movement, cycle, or style, noir has coalesced into a site of contest between contending voices and ideologies. Though by no means exhaustive, this study offers a flexible paradigm for reading noir from its late-Victorian roots through twenty-first century permutations and transformations. My hope is that the reader will not only find here interesting reading, but also resources for understanding future encounters with noir’s “darkly perfect world.”
CONCLUSION

CONNECTED GUYS

THE RECONSTRUCTED SUBJECT OF 1990s FILM NOIR

When I introduce you, I’m gonna say, “This is a friend of mine.”
That means you’re a “connected guy.”
—Benjamin “Lefty” Ruggiero (Al Pacino), Donnie Brasco (Mike Newell, 1997)

Lefty’s telling utterance in Donnie Brasco captures not only the peculiar relationship that develops between himself and Donnie (Johnny Depp), but also an important strand of postmodernist film noir. Even as many 1990s films foreground the dialectic between modernist noir quester and postmodernist con-man, another series “reconstructs” noir subjectivity, positing a self derived neither through authenticating alienation nor ludic signification, but rather through openly acknowledged networks of relationships. While the advent of the confidence man may be read as part of what Schrag terms “the continuing project of deconstructing the Cartesian doctrine of the sovereign subject,” the crime films treated in this conclusive chapter reimagine identity so as to

make possible the advential or supervenient presence of the other—the other not simply as other-for-me but as staking an ontological claim on my own subjectivity. The otherness of the other needs to be granted its intrinsic integrity, so that in seeing the face of the other and hearing the voice of the other I am responding to an exterior gaze and an exterior voice rather than carrying on a conversation with my alter ego. . . . I encounter the entwined discourse and action of the other and respond to it, and in this encounter and responding I effect a self-constitution, a constitution of myself, in the dynamic economy of being-with-others. (84)
Schrag acknowledges that this mode of identity has been “infected with the dehumanizing threats of racism and colonialism” (81). As we have seen, noir emerges from late-Victorian adventure to locate in others an adjunct to the subjectivity of the protagonist. Throughout the 1990s, however, noir has taken a different turn, evoking high-noir pretexts in order to celebrate “the dynamic economy of being-with-others.” While Carl Franklin’s One False Move, Quentin Tarantino’s Reservoir Dogs, and Mike Newell’s Donnie Brasco explore the inevitability of relational identity, Bad Lieutenant, Things to Do in Denver When You’re Dead, and Hard Eight adopt diverse noir formulae in order to move away from authenticating alienation for a more frankly constructed human subjectivity: the hero migrates from hard-boiled alienation and insulation to open relationship with others.

**HOWEVER EXCEPTIONAL,** the “self in community” has occasionally shown itself throughout the alienated universe of film noir. “Buddy cop” noirs provide the most obvious break from noir isolation; while films such as Private Hell 36 (as its title implies) and Seven dramatize the estrangement of two partners, the buddy cop formula generally distributes focalization between two protagonists who must cooperate toward a common goal. Under the direction of Akira Kurosawa and Sam Fuller, respectively, the detective pair moves beyond a celebration of teamwork to assume profound psychological and philosophical resonance. We might recall Kurosawa’s Stray Dog (Nora Inu, 1946), a thriller set in post-WWII Tokyo. When eager rookie Det. Murakami (Toshiro Mifune) loses his Colt service automatic to a pickpocket, he must undertake a manhunt that will expunge his personal shame and save the public from a serial killer, a deranged war veteran named Yusa (Isao Kimura). The film could easily gravitate toward a conventional hard-boiled detective story in which Murakami pursues a lonely quest for the missing handgun. But even as Stray Dog evokes the anomie of postwar Japan, the film engages in a complex treatment of relational identity. As James Goodwin explains, Kurosawa adapted Stray Dog from his own unpublished novel inspired by Georges Simenon’s police procedurals; but in contrast to the detached Maigret, Murakami experiences a deep identification with his quarry (63). He accomplishes this on one hand by exploiting the hard-boiled quest itself as a vehicle for exploration of subject-object relations. Harking back to the roots of the detective story, Murakami immerses himself in Yusa’s psyche, reading his letters, interviewing his girlfriend, and in effect becoming a displaced veteran like the killer himself. Indeed, Murakami openly expresses his empathy for Yusa’s alienation. The sense of relational subjectivity likewise emerges through Murakami’s collaboration with a senior partner, Detective Sato
(Takashi Shimura). Patient and sympathetic, this seasoned policeman offers a counterpoint to Murakami’s dangerous rashness and autonomy as well as his identification with the killer Yusa. In a tender sequence, Sato brings Murakami home to his family and we see here a vision of the world-weary detective as a figure derived from various coexistent networks and spheres. *Stray Dog* reaches its climax when Yusa wounds Sato, leaving Murakami to face the killer on his own. As the opponents struggle in a muddy field, their clothing becomes indistinguishable; affinities between the two are heightened by a crane-shot that aligns detective and criminal. With this film, Kurosawa offered the first buddy-cop film noir; the movie would be followed by productions such as *Dragnet*, which similarly integrated the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction into the police procedural. *Stray Dog* is yet more distinctive, however, in its presentation of an alternative to the authenticating alienation of the noir ethos at large. Unlike his American counterparts, and indeed, unlike the hard-boiled ronin that Kurosawa himself adapted from Hammett in *Yojimbo* (1961), Murakami and Sato read as noir heroes who understand themselves not merely through agonistic confrontation, but rather in terms of relationships and communities.

Kurosawa would continue to contribute to the noir canon with *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *High and Low* (1963); these pictures elaborate the auteur’s vision of relational identity. He was joined in the 1950s, however, by another cineaste whose films challenged the alienated subjectivity of noir. As Grant Tracey argues, “Fuller’s tabloid cinema” departs from noir existentialism by “providing a moral framework to his scenes. . . . Fuller often collides narrative modes and combines gritty story telling with a desire to move us beyond story . . . to larger discursive issues” (160, 173). Whether working within the Western genre in *Run of the Arrow* (1957), the war film in *The Steel Helmet* (1951) and *China Gate* (1957), or film noir in *House of Bamboo* (1955), Sam Fuller consistently elides heroic individualism in order to explore the complexities of relational identity. In these films, protagonists such as *China Gate’s* Sergeant Brock (Gene Barry) are tough, sometimes racist loners incapable of extricating themselves from involvement with comrades and lovers. This tendency is nowhere more clear than in the early buddy cop endeavor *The Crimson Kimono*. Like Murakami in *Stray Dog*, Joe Kojaku (James Shigeta) and Charlie Bancroft (Glenn Corbett) are veterans (this time of the Korean War) who continue their military camaraderie as Los Angeles police detectives. This picture of democratic amity is disrupted, however, when the buddies investigate the murder of stripper Sugar Torch (Gloria Pall). Enlisting artist Chris Downes (Victoria Shaw), both detectives fall for the young woman; to
Charlie’s chagrin, Chris prefers Joe. In this interesting mystery, pursuit of the killer is compounded by the tensions of the interethnic love-triangle: despite Charlie’s protestations, Joe assumes that his partner’s resentment is motivated by racism rather than simple jealousy. He breaks off his courtship of Chris and plans to leave the force. Fuller resolves the film’s multiple conflicts in a characteristically melodramatic climax—Joe and Charlie nab Sugar’s murderer, herself a jealous lover, amidst a Nisei festival in Little Tokyo. Surrounded by juxtaposed images of Japanese-American assimilation and cultural difference, Joe overcomes his feelings of alienation and seals his relationship with Chris in the embrace of a classical Hollywood ending. As Tracey observes, “This is the larger theme in the film (Kojaku’s liminality and his troubled relationship with Charlie) and perhaps suggests . . . the need for greater real integration in our society (separate is not equal)” (168). Fuller therefore rejects conventional hard-boiled alienation—the white detective’s confrontation with an endo-colonial urban jungle—and its progressive counterpart: Kojaku’s absolute marginalization within a racist American society. He instead establishes a narrative fraught with noir thematics of alienation and then dramatizes the protagonists’ struggle to maintain a relationship against the anomic forces of the modern metropolis.

“Buddy noir” films persist throughout the ensuing decades as an occasional alternative to the authenticating alienation of conventional noir. In *Hickey and Boggs* (1972), for example, Robert Culp recasts his television partnership with Bill Cosby for a profound meditation on the hard-boiled detective formula. Hired as ignorant stalking-horses, the eponymous PI’s become embroiled in a competition between militant Latinos and mobsters searching for a cache of stolen money. The plot becomes increasingly apocalyptic as Hickey and Boggs confront everything from bodybuilders to air assaults, an index into the manifold global threats of the Vietnam era. The action-packed plot is punctuated by the detectives’ self-conscious commentaries on their calling: while Boggs maintains his existential heroism, Hickey remarks, “there’s nothing left of this profession; it’s all over. It’s not about anything.” Labeling the film an example of the “post-noir,” Elizabeth Ward finds in these outgunned anti-heroes “a severe statement about the place of men in the world that is as dismal as any from the classic period of film noir. Both of these men are adrift, alienated from their environment and their families, clearly out of any mainstream lifestyle. They are superfluous figures wandering through the urban landscape” (239). But unlike contemporary neo-noir films, such as Arthur Penn’s *Night Moves* (1975), which also intensify the alienated milieu of the classic period, *Hickey and Boggs* preserves a sense of dialogic engagement between
subjects. The same may be said of Wayne Wang’s avant-garde film *Chan Is Missing* (1982), in which two San Francisco cabbies—Jo (Wood Moy) and Steve (Marc Hayashi)—search Chinatown for Chan Hung, a Chinese immigrant who has apparently absconded with four thousand dollars. The black-and-white mystery on one hand reads as a homage to *The Lady From Shanghai* and other San Francisco noirs. With manifold allusions to detective fictions ranging from Earl Derr Biggers’s Charlie Chan mysteries to *The Rockford Files* and *Magnum PI*, Wang alerts viewers to its revisionist program. As with Fuller’s *The Crimson Kimono*, *Chan Is Missing* conjures and sidesteps the high-noir polarization of white isolato against urban jungle; its detective heroes are the Chinese-Americans objectified in Hammett and Welles. In the end, Jo and Steve end up with more questions than answers: “I’ve already given up on finding Chan Hung,” Jo laments in his voice-over narrative, “But what bothers me is that I no longer know who Chan Hung really is.” However concerned with the divisive potential of the American urban experience, *Chan Is Missing* also foregrounds the strong relationships between various characters. At the conclusion of the narrative, we have every indication that Jo and Steve will proceed with their joint venture of starting their cab company and will continue their good natured dialogues about issues ranging from the contradictions of Asian-American experience to which horse to bet on in the trifecta.

**DURING THE 1990s**, however, many filmmakers found in noir a vehicle for explorations of relational identity. Carl Franklin inaugurated his own career and this revisionist sequence of films with *One False Move*, a buddy cop picture that dramatizes the inevitability of the self-in-community. Reversing the Western trajectory of the road movie, Franklin presents an interracial trio of criminals fleeing Los Angeles into the deep South. After a shocking mass murder, ex-cons Wade “Pluto” Franklin (Michael Beach) and Ray Malcolm (Billy Bob Thornton) head for Houston in order to sell stolen drugs; Ray’s mulatta girlfriend Lila “Fantasia” Walker (Cynda Williams) takes a bus for her hometown of Star City, Arkansas to visit her mother and son. Murdering a Texas trooper who recognizes them, Pluto and Ray likewise proceed to Star City. They are expected by another multiracial party—L.A. detectives Dud Cole (Jim Metzler) and John McFeely (Earl Billings) along with local Police Chief Dale “Hurricane” Dixon (Bill Paxton). As he eagerly assists with the investigation, Dale reveals his desire to move west and join the LAPD, much to the amusement of Cole and McFeely. The two plotlines are united not only by the crime and detection formula but also by Dale’s hidden connection with Lila; years ago,
Hurricane raped and impregnated the seventeen-year-old girl, propelling her into a life of crime.

Roundly praised, Carl Franklin's debut film has received considerable scholarly attention. Proclaiming Franklin's crime films "postmodern noirs with a difference," Justus J. Nieland locates *One False Move* within the African American hard-boiled tradition inaugurated by Chester Himes. Charles Scruggs finds in the film a deconstruction of the opposition between urban hell and pastoral Eden. The initial polarization of L.A. and the "hortus conclusus" of Star City decays as we find that femme fatale Lila/Fantasia has been created in the "unweeded garden" of Southern racism and violence (327–30). Both critics broadly agree that the film's tandem multiracial trios present an impressive meditation upon relational identity. While Pluto is disturbed by Fantasia's liaison with his white partner, the unabashedly racist Dixon has fathered a child with a black woman. The L.A. detectives, on the other hand, interact with Hurricane through stereotypes about urban and rural life. If conventional noir protagonists often define themselves via confrontation with racial otherness (recall Phillip Marlowe's phantasm of black rape), then Chief Dixon must face his inextricable relationship with the Other. *One False Move* concludes with a shoot-out that leaves Pluto, Ray, and Fantasia dead and Dixon critically injured. But this physical and psychic debilitation renders him open to connection with his mixed-race son Byron (Roger Anthony Bell). In this respect, *One False Move* recalls the conclusion of Fuller's *China Gate*, the first American film about the Vietnam War, in which hard-boiled legionnaire Sgt. Brock must recognize his Amerasian son. However abbreviated and open-ended, Dixon’s journey toward the self-in-community anticipates ensuing 1990s films noirs that would see authenticating alienation give way to "being with others."

More needs to be said about Franklin's revisions of noir ideology; his faithful adaptation of Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) not only explicitly responds to the racism of midcentury noir, but in doing so reimagines the oppositional subjectivity of the tough-guy private detective. Easy Rawlins (Denzel Washington) may experience the alienation of African Americans living in a racist society, but he also understands himself as a part of the larger mosaic of his South Central L.A. community (a thematic underscored by the film's poignant conclusive shot). While Franklin amplifies thematics inherent in the buddy cop film noir, Quentin Tarantino and Mike Newell respectively adopt the "undercover" formula, reversing the trajectory of this subgenre. High noir films such as *White Heat* and *Appointment with Danger* (Lewis Allen, 1951) turn upon the protagonist's struggle to preserve an impenetrable subjective core against the threats
of discovery and/or corruption. Walsh, for example, presents in Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) a monstrous gangster with whom no “real” relationship is possible: infiltrator Vic Pardo/Hank Fallon (Edmond O’Brien) emerges as a heroic isolate capable of conserving an essential self against Jarrett’s criminal milieu. In Reservoir Dogs, Tarantino deploys undercover noir toward very different ends. Police detective Freddy Newendyke (Tim Roth) infiltrates a gang of thieves planning a jewel heist. From its outset, however, Reservoir Dogs veers away from the alienation endemic to undercover work and focuses instead upon the deconstructive concerns associated with postmodernism. We find embedded within the film’s opening sequence (breakfast at Uncle Billy’s Pancake House) an extended colloquium about topics ranging from possible interpretations of Madonna’s 1984 hit “Like A Virgin” to the ethics of tipping; its common denominator is a preoccupation with contextual meanings: “They’re servin’ ya food,” declaims Mr. White, “you should tip ’em. But no, society says tip these guys over here, but not those guys over there. That’s bullshit.” Attention to hermeneutics persists into the criminal plot itself, centrally informing the film’s vision of human identity. Aside from Joe Cabot (Lawrence Tierney) and his son Nice Guy Eddie (Chris Penn), each of the thieves is known by a color-coded name assigned by Joe. As with the opening sequence, the assignment of names becomes a disquisition on meaning: “You get four guys fighting over who’s gonna be Mr. Black. Since nobody knows anybody else, nobody wants to back down. So forget it, I pick. Be thankful you’re not Mr. Yellow.” Tierney had of course played the heavy in The Devil Thumbs a Ride (Felix E. Feist, 1947) and Born to Kill (Robert Wise, 1947). Although he dedicates Reservoir Dogs to Tierney, among others, Tarantino here charges the archetypal noir tough with limiting the freeplay of language and identity, a task that will prove tragically futile as “intertextual” subjects develop beyond the boss’s control.

The most pressing of these threats is of course Freddy/Mr. Orange, the covert policeman whose cover represents a study in rhetorical manipulation. Under the tutelage of Holdaway (Randy Brooks), who insists, “An undercover cop has got to be Marlon Brando... naturalistic as hell,” Freddy learns the value of realism in establishing a fictional self:

It’s the details that sell your story. Now this story takes place in this men’s room. So you gotta know the details about this men’s room. You gotta know they got a blower instead of a towel to dry your hands. You gotta know the stalls ain’t got no doors. You gotta know whether they got liquid or powdered soap, whether they got hot water or not, ’cause if you do your job when you tell your story, everybody should believe it. And if you tell your
story to somebody who’s actually taken a piss in this men’s room, and you get one detail they remember right, they’ll swear by you.

Written to authenticate Freddy’s criminal credibility, the drug-sniffing dog anecdote relies upon concrete details (the insignificant notation of Barthes’s reality effect) as a means of anchoring its verisimilitude. In Reservoir Dogs, fictive selves and realities eclipse the referential universe of classic noir. Given Tarantino’s constructivist vision, we might be tempted to align his inaugural film with the confidence man noirs of the 1990s; like Singer’s Verbal Kint, both Freddy and Joe operate primarily through textual manipulation rather than logistical brilliance or simple force of will. And yet Tarantino directs his undercover noir away from deconstruction and into a dramatization of the relational self. While Joe’s “crew” consists of dynamic, unstable subjects, Mr. Orange and Mr. White (Harvey Keitel) establish a bond so deep that Mr. White ultimately turns against old friends in defense of his new buddy: “Joe, trust me on this, you’ve made a mistake. He’s a good kid. I understand you’re hot, you’re super-fuckin pissed. We’re all real emotional. But you’re barking up the wrong tree. I know this man, and he wouldn’t do that.” Although the anguished White shoots Freddy at the end of the film, their relationship reads as a revision of both the autonomous self of high noir and the ludic subject that we discern in many postmodern noirs. The undercover cop Freddy is neither existential isolato nor protean confidence man but rather an entity dependent upon local contexts and relationships.

Mike Newell’s Donnie Brasco pursues a course quite similar to that of Reservoir Dogs. The film begins with a straightforward reworking of the undercover formula: FBI agent Joe Pistone (Johnny Depp) assumes the character of aspiring wiseguy Donnie Brasco in order to infiltrate a Mafia crew. Increasingly immersed in the underworld, Joe grows anxious, violent, and estranged from his family. As in Reservoir Dogs, the cover persona threatens to subsume the hero’s “real” self; “You’re becoming like them,” Maggie (Anne Heche) charges, as Joe begins to assume Donnie’s intimidating affect with his family and his FBI superiors. After slapping her, he replies, “I’m not becoming like them, Maggie. I am them.” Though more restrained than the loquacious Reservoir Dogs, Donnie Brasco does offer reflexive meditations that illuminate its treatment of identity. Perhaps most prominent of these is Joe’s explication of the phrase “Forget about it”:

“Forget about it” is like, uh—if you agree with someone, you know, like “Raquel Welch is one great piece of ass forget about it.” But then, if you
disagree, like “A Lincoln is better than a Cadillac? Forget about it!” you know? But then, it’s also like if something’s the greatest thing in the world, like Mingrio’s Peppers, “forget about it.” But it’s also like saying “Go to hell!” too. Like, you know, like “Hey Paulie, you got a one inch pecker?” and Paulie says “Forget about it!” Sometimes it just means forget about it.

With subtle shifts in intonation, the same phrase might hold multiple contradictory meanings. Comparable to the “Like a Virgin” roundtable in Reservoir Dogs, this quiet reflection on polysemy suggests the unstable nature of all utterance; but it also points to the ways in which Joe himself mutates with changes in context. Here again, the film’s deconstructive tendencies give way to an exploration of relational subjectivity. Just as Freddy and Larry develop a tragically close relationship in Reservoir Dogs, Donnie becomes inextricably bound to Lefty: “This job is eating me alive. . . . And if I come out, this guy, Lefty dies. They’re gonna kill him, because he vouched for me, because he stood up for me. . . . That’s the same thing as if I put the bullet in his head myself. . . .” While Donnie hopes to give Lefty an “out” before the FBI sting, Lefty resolutely stakes and ultimately forfeits his life on the basis of Donnie’s fidelity. The film leaves Donnie/Pistone dazed and traumatized by the undercover ordeal: “I spent all these years trying to be the good guy, the man in the white hat. For what? For nothing.” Both Newell and Tarantino hereby deprive the noir undercover formula of its naturalizing power. Whereas classic noir camouflages subject/object construction within the polarization of infiltrator and criminal, Reservoir Dogs and Donnie Brasco reimagine the noir subject as a “connected guy,” a figure derived through communities, whether legitimate or illicit.

One False Move, Reservoir Dogs, and Donnie Brasco sensitize us to a series of 1990s films noirs that reiterate the journey from alienated authenticity to “connected” subjectivity. A striking example of this movement occurs in Abel Ferrara’s Bad Lieutenant (1992); despite its hyperbolic violence, this controversial film is surprisingly redemptive in its treatment of relational subjectivity. Bad Lieutenant evokes the recognizable formula of the corrupt policeman, a motif that begins with Hammett’s first story, “The Road Home” (in which a New York City detective contemplates cultural and ethical defection), and flourishes in films such as Where the Sidewalk Ends (Otto Preminger, 1950), Rogue Cop (Roy Rowland, 1954), Shield for Murder (Edward Koch and Edmond O’Brien, 1954), and Pushover (Richard Quine, 1954). Like the adventurous renegades of Joseph Conrad and John Russell, the defector in these films manages some sense of regeneration by late return to honor and professionalism. But here again, subjectivity arises within a lonely drama of fall and redemption. The first movements of the film establish the excesses of the titular “bad lieuten-
ant’—he steals drugs, smokes crack, shoots heroin, and indulges in orgies with prostitutes. What’s more, he bets on the Dodgers against the Mets in the 1988 National League Championships, encouraging his colleagues to back the home-team (in order to drive up the odds). Keitel’s lieutenant sees an unlikely opportunity when a nun is raped by two Puerto Rican youths who also desecrate the altar and steal a Communion chalice—he hopes to apprehend the miscreants and earn a $50,000 reward. This hopelessly perverse grail quest takes on a frankly spiritual dimension as the lieutenant, disturbed by the nun’s forgiveness of her attackers, experiences visions of a bloody, crucified Christ. In the midst of a spiritual crisis, he apprehends the rapists, gives them $30,000 he has borrowed to pay his debts, and frees them. Moments later he is murdered by his mobster/creditors. Like Carl Franklin’s One False Move, Bad Lieutenant concludes with a moment of reconciliation between the noir antihero and the racial Other so often objectified throughout noir. On one hand, we might be tempted to cynicism, as is Foster Hirsch, who finds One False Move “another tribute to a white male who finally grows up” (Detours and Lost Highways 302). But we should also recognize the ways in which these films contribute to a general revision of noir ideology.

Thus far, we have encountered films that evoke various noir police characters—buddy cops, undercover cops, and corrupt cops. In each case, the alienated noir protagonist finds himself bound with some “Other” figure. Our final pair of texts must be recognized as revisions of specific films noirs. Though less explicitly Christian than Bad Lieutenant, Gary Fleder’s Things to Do in Denver When You’re Dead also turns upon religious themes. Jimmy the Saint (Andy Garcia) is a small businessman with underworld connections: he runs a legitimate business that enables the terminally ill to videotape advice for their loved ones. He finds his “normal” life interrupted by “The Man with the Plan” (Christopher Walken), a crime boss who recruits Jimmy for one last “action”: the intimidation of a rival for his son’s affections. When Jimmy’s unstable crew murders both lovers, the Man orders their painful execution via a method known only as “Buckwheats.” Jimmy is given forty-eight hours to either leave town or suffer an excruciating death. Forgoing escape, Jimmy uses his last hours attempting to rescue his crew. When this fails, he strives to protect his lover Dagney (Gabrielle Anwar) and his friend Lucinda (Fairuza Balk). Jimmy finally agrees to father Lucinda’s child, hoping to persist through their progeny. In a sentimental concluding shot—an imagined scene or vision of the afterlife—we see the murdered men enjoying “boat drinks,” a symbol of hard-won community. Jimmy at one point finds Dagney watching a black-
and-white movie on TV: Maté’s *D.O.A.*. On one hand a reflexive “generic” allusion, this quotation also underscores the “memorial” theme central to the film, for Fleder treats us to Maté’s close-up of the epitaph for Raymond Rakubian, thereby underscoring Jimmy’s desire to be remembered as “the Saint.” Read as a central pretext for *Things to Do in Denver When You’re Dead*, *D.O.A.* illuminates Fleder’s reprise of film noir. As we have seen, Maté’s Frank Bigelow falls into an irrational world of violent crime when he is poisoned and left with a few days to live. In an act of existential defiance, he penetrates an Armenian crime ring in Los Angeles, ultimately killing his own murderer. Fleder adopts a similar “last days” motif, but sidesteps the agonist drama of *D.O.A.* in order to project the noir hero as a “connected guy” who emerges from the intersection of spaces and communities.

Paul Thomas Anderson has remarked that his 1996 film *Hard Eight* was inspired in part by Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Bob le Flambeur* (1955); but the film also recalls and revises another midcentury noir—William Dieterle’s *Dark City* (1950). Dieterle casts Charlton Heston as bookie and professional gambler Danny Haley, who, with the help of his friends, fleeces Arthur Winnant (Dan Defore) in a card game. The distraught Winnant commits suicide and is avenged by his brother Sidney (Mike Mazurki). After his friend Barney (Ed Begley, Sr.) is murdered, Haley seeks out Winnant’s widow, hoping to get a line on Sidney. He’s so moved by the plight of Mrs. Winnant (Viveca Lindfors) that he heads for Las Vegas in order to win back the money that he had swindled from her husband. In Vegas, Haley meets his gambling chums and his torch-singer girlfriend Fran Garland (Lizabeth Scott). But he must also face the monomaniacal Sidney, who has followed the group to Sin City. This classic noir antihero tragically participates in his own isolation; embittered by a divorce, the Ivy Leaguer has adopted a lifestyle that objectifies others and refuses intimacy. This sense of alienation is particularly keen in the climactic sequence in which Sidney, registered only as a pair of murderous hands, stalks the gambler in a darkened room. Dieterle in a sense anticipates the “connected guy” of ’90s noir in that he charts Haley’s growth into redemptive relationships with Fran and his buddy Soldier (Harry Morgan); what is perhaps most memorable about the film, however, is its treatment of a self-alienated gambler whose sharp dealing has provoked the wrath of the maniacal Sidney.

*Hard Eight* reworks the basic elements of *Dark City*, amplifying its thematics of relational identity. Anderson makes clear his disposition toward noir as a whole in the opening sequence of the film, which distantly invokes Edward Hopper’s 1942 painting *Nighthawks*. John Finnegan (John C. Reilly) huddles at the door of a roadside diner; the building’s
conspicuous midcentury architecture—featuring a severe downward sloping roof—underscores the drifter's declining prospects. A trenchcoated form emerges from the left as if to menace this unfortunate. While the looming presence is indeed a dangerous character, he has no such designs upon John. He introduces himself and brings the isolato into the warmth and light of the diner and the small but vital community suggested by Hopper's painting. During their short conversation, John reveals that he has in desperation gone to Las Vegas in order to win enough money to bury his mother. Over coffee and cigarettes, Sydney extends a helping hand: “John, we're sitting here. I bought you a cup of coffee, gave you a cigarette. Look at me. You wanna be a wise-ass, go outside and take a seat. If you wanna talk to me . . . well, then—Never ignore a man’s courtesy. Let’s talk about Vegas. Let’s talk about what happened to you.” The sequence closes with a tableau of coffee cups and an ashtray that assumes throughout the film a sacramental quality, suggesting the possibility of community within the alienated and tragic milieu of the Nevada casinos. It turns out that Sydney (Philip Baker Hall) is an “old hood” from Atlantic City; he murdered John's father and now seeks to undo the wrong. He shows John how to negotiate the casinos of Vegas and Reno; two years later, they're still together. Sydney ultimately engineers a romance between John and cocktail waitress-cum-prostitute Clementine (Gwyneth Paltrow). Clem emerges as a kind of accidental femme fatale—fearing commitment, she celebrates their quickie nuptials by hustling a vacationer in the casino bar. When the client won't pay, she and John hold him “hostage” in a motel room. Sydney of course intervenes to resolve the crisis and sends them on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls. At the conclusion of Hard Eight, Sydney reprises his murderous past, but only to protect his strange relationship with John. He ambushes John's sleazy friend Jimmy (Samuel L. Jackson), who threatens to reveal the dark secret of Atlantic City. Finally confessing to John, “I love you like you were my own son,” Sydney represents a thoroughgoing transformation of the vengeful and anomic world of Dark City. Although Sydney cannot escape his violent past (he significantly notices and hides a spot of Jimmy’s blood on his cuff), he is not, as D’Aries and Hirsch argue, “locked within a moral and existential prison . . . a prison without bars and without escape.” As in other late-twentieth-century films noirs, this antiheroic protagonist evolves from a condition of anomie toward a subjectivity founded in a community, however small and contingent.

D’Aries and Hirsch also suggest that Hard Eight skirts a nihilistic relativism evident in many contemporary films noirs. And yet Anderson’s Sydney, along with the other “connected guys” reviewed throughout this chapter, represents a model of identity that harbors quite as much ethical
purchase as the existentialist hero of noir. In the wake of postmodernist noirs that in various ways destabilize the subject, these films encourage us to imagine oneself as “a being among others” whose actions hold profound social and philosophical implications. Throughout the 1990s, we find the existential hero of noir overtaken by its old adversary, the confidence man who bodes a subjectivity founded in open-ended narrative. But the dialectic between the radically different selves implied by the con man and the noir isolato yields a new hybrid figure. In *Memento*, the conventional noir antihero gives way to a protagonist quite obviously and even joyously derived from “stories in the making.” While Nolan’s Leonard Shelby gravitates toward a nihilist postmodernism, we may discern a counterpoint in the “connected guys” of ’90s noir. However traumatized, figures such as Franklin’s Hurricane Dixon, Newell’s Donnie Brasco, and Anderson’s Sydney remind us that we owe ourselves to others, to the networks within and by which we derive identity. These unlikely antiheroes demonstrate the way in which noir has moved beyond both authenticating alienation and ludic postmodernism to achieve a redemptive vision of community and interdependence.
INTRODUCTION

1. See “First Brands reinvents the plastic bag; With patented Quick-Tie/TM Flaps, GLAD/R transforms the trash bag business by eliminating twist ties—An American Institution—.”

2. For more on the commercialization of noir, see Foster Hirsch, Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir (5).

3. Hutcheon introduced this term in her 1987 article “Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism.”

4. For a response to this critical debate, see Suzanne Loza, “Orientalism and Film Noir: (Un)Mapping Textual Territories and (En)Countering the Narratives.”

5. See also Raymond Durgnat, “Paint It Black: The Family Tree of the Film Noir.”

6. James Naremore finds the transgeneric account of noir inadequate because it elides the hybridity of supposedly “stable” genres (6).

7. Naremore hints at the imperial adventure context, but likewise retreats from this argument: “. . . noir offers mostly white audiences the pleasure of ‘low’ adventure, having little to do with the conquest of nature, the establishment of law and order, the march of empire” (220). See also Durgnat, “Paint It Black” 45; John Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance 76.

8. See Jon Thompson, Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism; Cheryl Edelson, “The Heterotopias in the Rue Morgue”; and Stanley Orr, “I think it was his eye!: Edgar Allan Poe, Crime Fiction, and Panopticism” (papers presented at the 11th Annual Conference on American Literature, Long Beach, CA, May, 2000).


10. Alain Silver, “Son of Noir: Neo-Film Noir and the Neo-B Picture” 331.


### CHAPTER ONE

1. See also Willett’s discussion of Hammett (40–42).

2. In her 1992 article “Hard-Boiled Ideology,” Bethany Ogdon observes that the hard-boiled detective’s freedom from family and consociational ties is underscored by the imagination of an armored body that contrasts with the “soft-boiled,” destroyed, and even de-differentiated bodies of racial and sexual others (82). Following Ogdon, Jopi Nyman argues, “The body is secondary to mind in hard-boiled fiction, but has a major function as a signifier of power” (90).


4. Becke, “A Truly Great Man,” 86. All citations of Louis Becke’s stories refer to the following anthologies: *By Reef and Palm and The Ebbing of the Tide; South Sea Super-cargo; Pacific Tales.*


6. Quoted in Slotkin 111.

7. Quoted in Slotkin 120.


9. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), David Riesman asserts that “many inner-directed individuals can remain stable even when the reinforcement of social approval is not available—as in the upright life of the stock Englishman isolated in the tropics” (24).


11. Leroy Lad Panek notes this context in *Reading Early Hammett: A Critical Study of the Fiction Prior to The Maltese Falcon*. He declares “Ber-Bulu” “an anti-adventure story . . . in which the action is . . . trivial and domestic and in which the hero is . . . a rogue who observes human silliness and sails off with an unmerited reward” (35).


14. John Walker Lindh argues, “The absence of stable identity in Hammett’s work corresponds to an epistemological uncertainty concerning the nature of being. The anthropomorphous character of objects suggests a capacity for mutability that undermines the potential for a fixed essence” (131).

15. See also Ralph Willett’s *The Naked City* 1–15. I derive the term “endo-Orientalism” from Paul Virilio, who describes in *Critical Space* “a post-industrial ENDO-COLONIALISM succeeding the EXO-COLONIALISM of the central empires of the industrial era” (59).

16. Ogdon contends that “physical punishment rituals” reinforce the hard-boiled detective’s sense of an armored physical person opposed to exoticized and “violently destroyed bodies” (79–80).

17. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 11. For a thorough commentary on these modernist thematics in hard-boiled detective fiction, see chapter 6 of Cawelti’s *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance.*
18. All citations of the Continental Op stories refer to Dashiell Hammett: Crime Stories and Other Writings.
19. For an authoritative treatment of race-politics and instrumentalism, see Martin Kevorkian’s study Color Monitors: The Black Face of Technology in America.
20. See also Ogdon 76.
21. Spurr 78.
22. In Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, John Cawelti observes, “One might interpret Poe’s invention of the detective as a means of bringing the terrifying potency of the gothic villain under the control of rationality and thereby directing it to beneficial ends” (95).
23. All citations of Sherlock Holmes stories refer to The Complete Sherlock Holmes.

CHAPTER TWO

4. Quoted in Polk 125.
6. Rowe 119.
7. See also Ogdon’s reading of this moment in “Hard-boiled Ideology” 78.
8. Following Hamilton, Skenazy, Durham, and Grella, Rzepka writes, “Like a Streetwise Natty Bumpo, [the hard-boiled detective] patrols a violent frontier between civilization and savagery, with a foot in each world” (695). See also Abbott 89.
9. Recall Ogdon’s contention that hard-boiled detective emerges “the sole normal person . . . constantly under siege.” Abbott similarly contends “Chandler and Cain were forced to confront . . . ambiguous expressions of white male urban existence—visions of bodies out of control, conflicting and even transgressive desires, [and] complicated racial dread . . .” (18).
10. See Blake Allmendinger, “All About Eden.”
11. McCann 169–70.
12. See Rzepka 700.
14. See McClintock’s Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.
15. In Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science, Ronald R. Thomas reads this moment as “an at least unconscious acknowledgment that in this cultural moment, the camera—and by implication, the detective—has been emptied of its potency . . .” (184).
16. McCann discusses Chandler’s portrayal of Canino within the context of an important but incidental “symbolic power of racial definition” (163).
17. See Hiney 50–69.
18. See also McCann 167.
19. Rzepka 707; see also Skenazy 38–39.

20. With regard to the latter figure, McCann argues that “The Lady in the Lake suggests that Marlowe’s body is not crushed, that he remains a man, because, rather than falling amid corrupt confederates and evil women, he became part of the fellowship of decent men” (141). See also Abbott, who suggests that the tough guy “must work to present his body as an unmarked one: raceless, transparent, universal” (89).

21. See Where the Pavement Ends 104–5.

22. In The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies (1925), Marcel Mauss contends that the anomic fate of modern man arises from capitalism’s eclipse of ancient economies of gift exchange.

23. While Lennox’s observations on the quiet bar recall the older waiter’s celebration of the café in “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” an emphasis upon gifts and communal drinking may also be found in the homosocial fishing sequences of The Sun Also Rises.

24. For Abbott, the “real threat” here is “the male femme fatale” who subverts “the hermetic gender binary by which Marlowe functions . . .” (121).

CHAPTER THREE

1. For more on this debate, see Krutnik, chap. 3; Marling, chap. 6.

2. I am thinking of Said’s suggestion in Orientalism that the Orient expands in the western imagination to include everything “residing to the far east, west, south, and north of Europe” (117).

3. Borde and Chaumeton find The Shanghai Gesture redolent of “film noir qualities such as nightmarish, weird, erotic, ambivalent, and cruel” (18).

4. Krutnik 86.

5. See Kaplan, “The ‘Dark Continent’ of Film Noir” 193.


7. See Kaplan, “The ‘Dark Continent’ of Film Noir” 196

8. See also Kaplan, “The ‘Dark Continent’ of Film Noir” 198.


12. For a thorough treatment of noir misogyny, see Janey Place’s “Women in Film Noir.”


14. See Starr 92, 266.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. See Borde and Chaumeton 21, 29, 54.

2. For a broad discussion of themes of paranoia in Himes’s crime fiction, see chapter 2 of Woody Haut’s study Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War.
3. See also McCann 266.
5. The films in question are *The Fallen Sparrow* (Richard Wallace, 1943), *Ride the Pink Horse* (Robert Montgomery, 1947), and *In A Lonely Place*.
6. Woody Haut observes of *In A Lonely Place*, “Reading the author reading Dix, one enters the text by way of a voice twice removed” (130).
7. Haut suggests, “What is interesting is how Hughes has taken the pulp culture cliché of contrasting women—housewife and *femme fatale*—and turned their traditionally adversarial relationship into an alliance whose target is Dix” (128).
8. See Naremore 225; Biesen 77.
9. Quoted in Dower 63.
10. Quoted in Yogi 63.
11. With particular attention to this episode, Wheeler briefly glosses Ichiro’s “noir mantle” (122, 132).
14. See Yogi 67, 73.
15. For Stan Yogi, “Freddie’s fragmented character follows him even in death”; his fate is a “physical reminder of his shattered life” (73).
17. See Marc Vernet, “Film Noir on the Edge of Doom.”

**CHAPTER FIVE**

1. Richardson 25.
2. See Richardson 13–21.
3. In “The Death of the Author,” Barthes explains that this opposition between meaning and insignificance concurs with broader western notions of authorship and identity. Just as unsignifying notation limits meaning within the text, Barthes writes, “To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified to close writing” (53). The binary work/author in turn works to ensure the “prestige of the individual,” the “human person” (49).
4. Oliver and Trigo argue, “[T]he alienating effect to which stereotypes are put in *The Lady From Shanghai* paradoxically produces a temporarily stable reality effect” (54).
10. The Bradbury Building housed Marlowe’s office in *Marlowe* (Paul Bogart, 1969) as well as the climactic scene of *D.O.A.*
11. See, for example, Naremore 265 and Shaviro 149.
12. With respect to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we might also recall Tyrone Slothrop’s imagi-
nation of himself as “a hardboiled private eye” who is “gonna go out all alone and beat the odds, avenge my friend that They killed, get my ID back and find that piece of mystery hardware” (561).

14. Hite 73.
15. For an overview of scholarship on “Oedipa Mass” and “Pierce Inverarity,” see Grant 3–8.
17. Berresem 95.
19. Hayles 121.
20. It may be helpful to compare Oedipa’s dilemma at this point in the novel to that of Hugh Godolphin in *V*. Proliferation of clues about the elusive Vheissu call into question his investigation of this mysterious locale.
21. With respect to this passage, Watson observes, “In becoming the detective, she becomes part of the sinister force she is pursuing” (60).
22. Grant 120.
23. Hemingway 33.
24. Recall Laura Otis’s characterization of Holmes as an “imperial immune system.”
25. Auster, Interview 297.
27. Auster, Interview 303.
28. In her Derridean reading of the trilogy, Alison Russell cursorily notes the presence of “Film Noir signifiers” and argues that the novels of the trilogy “employ and deconstruct the conventional elements of the detective story, resulting in a recursive linguistic investigation of the nature, function and meaning of language” (71). These implications have been elaborated by Steven E. Alford, who suggests that Auster’s “questions of identity flow into questions about textuality, and undermine the ontologically distinct categories of author, narrator, and reader.” Citing Hutcheon, Alford concludes that Auster has “moved away from the modernist, alienated fiction of the other, exemplified in Hammett and others of the hard-boiled school, to a postmodern fiction of difference” (29). See also Oscar De Los Santos, “Auster vs. Chandler: Or, Cracking the Case of the Postmodern Mystery.”
29. Alford concludes that the narrator of *The Locked Room* is “(Auster), narrator of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, so long as we understand both the terms ‘narrator’ and ‘author’ as standing for what we might call a locus of textual space, one which nominally includes you, me, and Paul Auster author” (27).
31. See Alford.
32. Marlowe makes a similar admission in Chapter 30 of *The Big Sleep*.
34. For more on Woolrich as “a writer whose sensibility is most deeply noir,” see Hirsch, *Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* 43–46.
35. Woolrich 1.
37. See Naremore 23.
40. The character is the titular figure in Melville’s “Jimmy Rose” (1855); the allusion exemplifies the reflexive intertextuality of Auster’s novels.
41. Incidentally, with the exception of Fallen Angel (1946), all of these films were released in 1947, the year of the “narrative present” in Ghosts.
42. Ottoson 132.

CHAPTER SIX

2. Rafferty 156.
5. Reading Fritz Lang’s The Woman in the Window (1944) and Scarlet Street (1945) as “man’s melodramas,” Florence Jacobowitz argues that both melodrama and film noir “share the overriding principle of constriction and entrapment as a defining motif, whether it be in the family or within patriarchal social organizations and demands of gender ideals” (51).
10. Diski 12.
11. Leibman 168.
13. Leibman 182.
14. Rafferty 156. See also Blake Lucas, who notes Mitchum’s reptilian aspect in Cape Fear.
15. Diski 12.
16. Leibman 182.
17. Kolker 162.
20. For more on Cape Fear’s “intertextual homage,” see Kristen Thompson’s essay “Cape Fear and Trembling: Familial Dread.”
21. Letts finds Scorsese’s direction “distractingly showy”: “We see . . . visual devices which have become de rigueur in psychopath films and which are supposed to be intrinsically frightening but aren’t. Similarly there are too many references to Hitchcock—1950s technicolor skies, spooky film-noir close-ups and kitsch swiveling camera-work—none of which contributes anything at all to the forward momentum of the film.” See also Simon 57.
24. Simon 56. See also chapter 6 of Lesley Stern’s *The Scorsese Connection*.
25. Simon 60.
26. Hoberman 10. See also Diski’s piece, “The Shadow Within.”
27. Hoberman 11.
29. Letts 36.
30. Wood 152.
31. See Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 75.
32. Larsen describes the office-building as “a glossy paradigmatic site of the 90s booming economy” (40).
34. “When the bunch of criminals meet in the lineup,” writes Larsen, “Singer encourages his actors to play for comic bravado. . . . They’re like ham actors at an audition, which is more or less what a lineup amounts to, a tryout for the drama of a trial” (24).
37. Steffen Hantke, “Boundary Crossing and the Construction of Cinematic Genre: Film Noir as ‘Deferred Action.’”
38. See Hirsch 281; Dyer 46.
39. Pat Gill argues that “Mills reveals himself again and again to possess a ‘mediated’ understanding, to engage with the flattened glorified image, the visual representation, and the popular conception” (54).
40. See Dyer 24–25.
41. I am thinking here of Ross Macdonald’s famous homage to Chandler.
42. Dyer 77.
43. Neely 15.
44. Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative* 11–12.
45. See Little 82.
46. For Amrohini Sahay, *Memento* “stages the new corporate dogma of identity under globalization”: “a ‘moment-to-moment,’ contingent and pragmatic basis which needs to be revised and ’re-done’ based on new information.”

**CONCLUSION**

1. For more on this aspect of the film, see Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, “By Accident: The Tarantinian Ethics”; Mark T. Conard, “*Reservoir Dogs: Redemption in a Postmodern World*.”
2. We find this schema reiterated in other 1990s films noirs. Luc Besson’s *The Professional* (1994), for example, sees the noir fixture of “the cleaner” or assassin undergo a shift from isolation to community.
3. D’Aries and Hirsch elaborate Anderson’s debt to *Bob le Flambeur*.
5. D’Aries and Hirsch 100.


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