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Managing Urban Security: City Walls and Urban *Metis*

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This article locates the contemporary security climate of the city of Los Angeles within a historical trajectory of modes of securitization. While some of the analysis treats the material and technological aspects of cities in general, and Los Angeles in particular, much of my emphasis, articulated in readings of both literary and film versions of police procedurals, is on discursive barriers. Ultimately, I suggest that, materially and discursively, urban America features class and ethnic fault lines that serve as the primary bases of security management.

Keywords urban • security • Los Angeles • police procedurals • cinema

Introduction: Genre and the City

THIS ARTICLE LOCATES THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY CLIMATE of the city of Los Angeles within a historical trajectory of modes of securitization. While some of the analysis treats the material and technological aspects of cities in general, and Los Angeles in particular, much of my emphasis, articulated in readings of both literary and film versions of police procedurals, is on discursive barriers. Ultimately, I suggest that, materially and discursively, urban America features class and ethnic fault lines that serve as the primary bases of security management. My methodological approach is best understood as genre analysis. Central to my treatment of the security features of contemporary Los Angeles is the way the city becomes legible through what Tom Conley (2007) refers to as a 'cinematic cartography'. Cinema, as Conley conceives it, offers a set of moving images to articulate venues as 'mobile cartographies', topographies that are manifested in the form of two geographies: a geography of 'affect' as it is deployed as degrees of attention and distraction, and a set of mental geographies or diverse ways in which the city is cognitively mapped by various

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agents. What is important, as I note in my treatment of a film situated in Los Angeles, is the way cinema, with its cross-cutting between alternative spaces and modes of action, is an ideal genre for showing the way spaces and agents are interconnected. While a film analysis is the main aspect of the present inquiry, my method-as-genre analysis is articulated at the outset through a brief analysis of a crime story. My approach to the literary text also emphasizes space. It is inspired in part by the way literary theorists have treated texts as spatial maps that reveal the zones and structures of human connectivity within the city. For example, as Franco Moretti, who focuses on the literary geography of 19th-century novels, points out, 'the "fashionable" or "silver fork" novels' of the mid-1840s (Moretti, 1999: 79) were attempts to make London legible, especially in terms of the way 'each space determines its own kind of actions' (Moretti, 1999: 84). He also shows how the novels of Charles Dickens reveal London as an 'archipelago of autonomous "villages"' (Moretti, 1999: 130), and that Balzac's offer a Paris that can be read as a 'mosaic of worlds'(Moretti, 1999: 87), a '*poli*-centric map' that effects the distribution of effective agency in that city.

As is the case with the literatures analyzed in Moretti's investigation, in order to render the legibility of the object of my analysis – the city of Los Angeles – I select agents whose perspectives and movements map the features of the city with which I am concerned: its aspects of securitization. Those agents function within the genre known as the 'police procedural', which centers around a character, the police detective, whose crime-solving activity articulates the city as a problem of knowledge. As Walter Benjamin (1997: 42–44) famously noted – and as has been often noted since – detective fiction, in its various genre incarnations, maps city space as investigations unfold. The city is rendered legible and more knowable as the reader follows the detective's implementation, as the case is pursued, of two forms of knowledge – forensic and *metis* (or practical reasoning). As I will be emphasizing as the analysis of this article proceeds, the police detective serves as an effective 'aesthetic subject' whose ways of knowing the city map the city's functional spaces. My approach to the aesthetic subject is inspired by an analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Contempt*. Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit (2004: 21–22) suggest that Godard's focus in that film – a drama in which a couple become estranged when the wife's feelings turn from love to contempt – is not on 'the psychic origins of contempt' but on its 'effects on the world', which are conveyed by 'what contempt does to cinematic space … how it affect[s] the visual field within which Goddard works and especially the range and kinds of movement allowed for in that space'.

Bersani & Dutoit's aesthetic subject applies well to police procedural literary texts as well, for whatever may be the psychic aspects of the characters of a particular story, what they lend to a political apprehension of the city derives from the ways in which their affective experiences and cognitive

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mappings generate the text's narrative spaces. Moreover, as is the case with cinema, literature as a form allows for the discursive interactions of the text's characters. It is a form, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) famously observes, that is quintessentially dialogic. It produces critical political insights because, as a multi-voiced genre, its forces are centrifugal. Its form-generated ideational tendency is to pull away from a verbal-ideological center.

Because what I am calling 'urban *metis*' is a key feature of the police detective-as-aesthetic-subject, I want to indicate the heritage of the concept at the outset. The character trait *metis* (belonging, for example, to Homer's Odysseus) was developed originally in Greek mythology. It refers to cunning or resourceful intelligence, 'an informed prudence' (Detienne & Vernant, 1978: 11). It should be noted, moreover, that *metis*, in its contemporary urban realization, frequently functions on both sides of the crime drama in police procedurals. For example, in the literary text on which I am focusing, James Ellroy's (1994) Los Angeles story 'High Darktown', which maps much of the city's racial-spatial order, the two registers of urban *metis* are displayed when detective Lee Blanchard, in pursuit of liquor-store holdup men, forces a young black woman, Cora, who has been running with one of the perpetrators, to accompany him to help him find the other one. At one point, Blanchard resorts to typical police tactics, saying to Cora: 'questions and answers. Tell me what I want to know and you walk; fuck with me and I find dope in your purse and tell the DA you've been selling it to white nursery-school kids' (Ellroy, 1994: 109).

While Blanchard displays the 'practical wisdom' of the brutal policing methods of Los Angeles, Cora displays the survival skills of a young black woman who must function within diverse parts of the city's ethnoscape. For example, at one point she asks Blanchard, 'Why you do this shitty kind of work?', and then responds to his invitation to explain it herself. Knowing that he was once a professional boxer, she nails him perfectly:

> One, you yourself figured your boxin' days would be over when you was thirty, so you got yourself a nice civil service pension job; two, the bigwig cops loves to have ball players and fighters around to suck up to them – so's you get the first crack at the cushy 'signments. Three, you likes to hit people, and *po*-lice work be full of that; four, your ID card said Warrants Division, and I knows that warrants cops all serves process and does repos on the side, so I knows you pickin' up lots of extra change. Five … (Ellroy, 1994: 111–112).

At this point, Blanchard holds up his hands in mock surrender!

Later, when Cora offers him *her* bio as well as a mapping of what High Darktown (an upper-middle-class black section of Los Angeles) is about, he asks how she knows all this. She responds, 'I am from High. *High* Darktown sweet.' To which he responds, 'Then why do you hold on to that Aunt Jemima accent?' She laughs and says, 'And I thought I sounded like Lena Horne. Here's why sweetcakes. Black woman with a law degree they call "nigger".

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Black girl with three-inch heels and a shiv in her purse they call "baby." You dig?' (Ellroy, 1994: 116). The conversation between Blanchard and Cora is incidental to the story's plot. However, the plot pales in comparison with what we learn from this and other conversations – how diverse social types in Los Angeles manage a city with sharp, racially inflected administrative, economic, and discursive fault lines.

The Contemporary Security Context in Historical Perspective

The cultural and political context for the main text I examine in this article, Michael Schumacher's (1993) *Falling Down*, a film situated in Los Angeles, also addresses a set of issues that are associated with contemporary urban fault lines. Those lines or boundaries have functioned within a highly securitized modernity whose identity divisions are highly surveilled and policed. To set the historical context for what the film expresses about the micropolitics of the city venue, I turn first to some effects of the intensified securitization and militarization of contemporary urban America and locate it in a brief genealogy of practices of securitization. The effects of the fear-arousing rhetoric and the flurry of post-9/11 policy initiatives aimed at the security of the US city are registered on urban design (among many other places). At an official level, the 'new American "securescape"' involves design initiatives that favor 'massive building setbacks, surface parking and controlled pedestrian access to key sights'. These design imperatives clash with the orientation of the 'New Urbanists', who 'seek narrower streets, hidden parking and enhanced pedestrian access' (Dudley, 2007). Among the subjectivity-creating political effects of the development of the new 'securescape' is its construction of the pedestrian body as a threat rather than a civic participant. Certainly, the securescape-oriented design initiative has powerful resonances with an earlier mode of urban securitization, Haussmann's 'works' of broadened boulevards that replaced the narrow-streeted enclaves of Paris, with the 'aim of … securing the city against civil war' (Benjamin, 1997: 174).

The contemporary peculiarities of the scope and orientation of the design shift inherent in the intensification of an official security's focus on cities becomes apparent if we consider the changing historical modalities of urban security. For example, during the Renaissance, the map of urban Europe was a militarized cartography. Each large city was constructed as a fortress to protect its inhabitants against marauding armies. The city-as-fortress version of urban security was so pervasive, dominant, and well funded that many notable Renaissance artists – among them Francesco di Giorgio, Leonardo

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da Vinci, and Albrecht Dürer – were patronized to devote some of their talent to the design of urban fortifications (Pollak, 1991: xiv). Over the centuries, the external walls came down, in part because historically a mosaic of nation-states became Europe's primary geopolitical reality. States monopolized violence between and among peoples by disarming their populations, prescribing the removal of city walls and other aspects of urban autonomy, and taking over responsibility for their defense. However, in recent decades, urban walls have been going up again, not around cities but within them. The threatening bodies are increasingly perceived to exist *within* the city.

Doubtless, São Paulo, Brazil, is the most exemplary case. In Teresa Caldeira's words, it's a 'city of walls', a domain of urban apartheid in which the privileged classes have effected a privatized security-oriented architecture and security management (tall buildings with high walls and private security guards) that wall them off from the underclass. Effectively, as she points out, São Paulo's materialization of security management disrespects citizen rights by closing off spaces of public interaction and diminishing the person–state relationship as it alters the traditional model of security. As she puts it, 'the privatization of security challenges the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force, which has been considered a defining characteristic of modern nation-states' (Caldeira, 2000: 2). She discerns a similar, if less radical, pattern in Los Angeles, which still retains 'open and non-privatized areas of relatively intense public use, in which something like a crowd can congregate'. But, she adds, even these areas 'seem to be mainly of two nonmodern types', where, for example, 'one is the increasingly segregated and socially homogenized space in which people of only one social group circulate (Latino parks and Beverly Hills luxury shopping areas, for example)' (Caldeira, 2000: 327). Similarly, Edward Soja (1995) renders the civic center area of Los Angeles as what he calls a 'centropolis'. It is effectively a citadel (a central fortified area) in which the architecture articulates a bunkered mentality with a surveillant enactment of official power-knowledge.

The analyses of Caldeira and Soja point to the modern city as increasingly a site of class and ethnic warfare, a warfare that has produced the contemporary cities of walls, realized architecturally, discursively, economically, and normatively. If we maintain the standard conception of war, we see the modern city as an entity that has evolved from a militarized and securitized enclave to a primarily economy-oriented zone. Within this narrative, cities have become, in Charles Tilly's (1990: 51) terms, 'containers' within the global circulation of capital, leaving the job of managing coercion and defense to states. However, when 'war' is understood in broader terms than what is covered in the discourses of interstate violence – for example, when one includes interethnic violence and the violent policing of marginalized impoverished and/or ethnic enclaves – cities are major, and indeed increasingly the primary, venues for official policies of surveillance, coercion, and

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security, as well as being sites of resistant tactics by those seeking to survive such policies.

With respect to the contemporary USA, for example, Robert Crooks makes the compelling case that the state violence that once took place on the USA's western frontier has shifted to urban frontiers – in his terms, a 'transformation of the frontier from a moving western boundary into a relatively fixed partitioning of urban space … a racial frontier' (Crooks, 1995: 71). Characterizing contemporary securitization and internal war more broadly, Gilles Deleuze (2006: 138) remarks,

> The new fascism is not the politics and the economy of war. It is the global agreement on security, on the maintenance of 'peace' just as terrifying as war. All our petty fears will be organized in concert, all our petty anxieties will be harnessed to make micro-fascists of us; we will be called upon to stifle every little thing, every suspicious face, every dissonant voice, in our streets, in our neighborhoods, in our local theaters.

The framing of such a broader view of war and the partitioning that has accompanied it become especially evident when we recognize the way the techno-geography of security has changed over the centuries. As Paul Virilio (1998) notes, the security of the modern city is located more within communication nodes than in physical barriers (which, as I have noted, continue to function) – for example, central banks, airport customs, and computerized databases in local police and FBI departments. Certainly, contemporary security policy affirms Virilio's insights. There is a stark difference between the concrete security architecture of the Cold War period (epitomized by the Berlin Wall) and the electronic surveillance strategies involved in the 'war on terror'. Within the latter's dematerialized regime of security barriers, the computer firewall is at least as much a barrier as the architectural wall, a reality well captured in Henning Mankell's (2003) crime novel *Firewall*. However, apart from the technological changes that have respatialized urban security, and apart from the increasing deployment of military-effected warfare within cities (as crime-fighting policies are increasingly combined with tactics deployed to pursue illegal immigrants and potential allies of terrorists), are the non-official dematerialized walls, the perceptual fault lines that divide cities into antagonistic social segments. In most urban formations, the *socius* reflects a state of tension ranging from forms of mutual hostility to violent encounter.

There is perhaps no better exemplar of such a state of urban antagonism than the social formation of Los Angeles, well captured in a series of films ranging from Michael Schumacher's already noted 1993 film *Falling Down* to Paul Haggis's (2004) *Crash*, which not only provides a narrative of antagonism but also mobilizes a variety of images to articulate Los Angeles's fraught social and ethnic divisions. While much of the antagonism shown in Schumacher's *Falling Down* is conveyed through dialogue, in Haggis's film, images do more of the work. Haggis's characters see each other not only through their

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preconceived stereotypes, which they express verbally, but also through the mediation of glass – car windshields, store windows, and so on. The film maps both the ethnic partitioning of urban space and the perceptual practices that attend the separations. It activates both the perceptual and the discursive encounters that the urban fault lines engender.

Although I do not have space here for an elaborate treatment of the way Los Angeles emerges in *Crash*, I want to note that the overall climate of ethnic aversion displayed in that film is fractionated. Just as, weatherwise, some cities are a collection of micro-climates (for example, those in the Bay Area of Northern California), *Crash* effectively renders Los Angeles as a series of micro-biopolitical climates – a set of ethnic antagonisms that vary as one moves from neighborhood to neighborhood and witnesses alternative interethnic hostilities. That vernacular micro-biopolitics operates within a post-9/11 official macropolitics, which Michael Dillon (2008: 312) aptly refers to as the 'biopoliticization of security'. The post-9/11 security problem is afflicted by contingency because, with no clear enemy at the gates, the surveilled and carcerally controlled bodies are located in a radically contingent 'biosphere', a distribution of ethnic and or immigrant bodies whose emerging political orientations are 'incalculable, non algorithmic, and outside [anyone's] capacity to predict' (Dillon, 2008: 312). In reaction to such a situation, much of security policy has become increasing pre-emptive – mounting a series of excessive policing initiatives such as wire-tapping, the collection of banking and library-loan data, and so on. As a result, cities like contemporary Los Angeles contain a transversality between the official level biopoliticization of security, in which particular kinds of bodies are officially targeted, and a vernacular micro-biopolitics, in which antagonistic perceptions and conflicts are interethnic, intergenerational, and along citizen–immigrant lines (among others).

However, even cities with a markedly homogeneous ethnic population contain such perceptual and discursive walls. A remark in *Firewall* by the main character of Mankell's (2003: 397) crime novel, police inspector Kurt Wallander, addresses these walls as they are in evidence in a small Swedish city:

> Sometimes he thought about it for a long time late at night. During the past thirty years, a society had been emerging that he did not fully recognize. In his work he was constantly confronted with the results of brutal forces that ruthlessly flung people to the outer margins. The walls surrounding these outcasts were dauntingly high: drugs, unemployment, social indifference.

Schumacher's film *Falling Down*, located in contemporary Los Angeles, with its multi-ethnic population, manifests a more elaborate set of discursive walls. While there is a variety of ways to treat the shapes and effects of those walls in Los Angeles, in this film analysis my conceptual persona is that of police detective Martin Prendergast (Robert Duvall), one of two main characters in *Falling Down.* I turn to this character because police detectives in both novelistic and cinematic police procedurals enact an important complement

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to their department's use of forensic science. Their pursuit of perpetrators is facilitated by an urban-inflected social *metis* that leads them to articulate and map the micropolitical dynamics of city life, while at the same time evincing discoveries that reveal what Fredric Jameson (1995) calls a 'geopolitical unconscious', a larger global world that, while mostly unacknowledged, affects the dynamics within the smaller worlds of cities.

Schumacher's *Falling Down*

> Wednesday, in downtown L.A., the Westwood section. Ahead, one of those giant shopping malls surrounded by a wall that you bounced off like a rubber ball – unless you had a credit card on you and passed through the electronic hoop.
>
> Philip K. Dick (1978: 10)

> *Walls*. Admirable, the discipline to which they are subject in this city. The better ones, in the center wear the livery and are in the pay of the ruling class. They are covered with gaudy patterns and have sold their whole length many hundreds of times to the latest brand of aperitif, to department stores, to 'Chocolat Menier,' or to Dolores del Rio. In the poorer neighborhoods they are politically mobilized, and post their spacious red letters as the forerunners of red guards in front of dockyards and arsenals.
>
> Walter Benjamin (1978: 135)

As the Philip K. Dick epigraph suggests, electronic walls are a significant part of the cityscape of Los Angeles. And, as Walter Benjamin points out, in a city with marked inequality, some walls speak of privileged levels of consumption while others of political responses to oppression. In this respect, *Falling Down*'s Los Angeles is exemplary. The difference between an impoverished Third World and a privileged First World exists *within* Los Angeles, with its long-term residents from Third World countries as well as with the presence of recent legal and illegal immigrants. However, differences in economic well-being constitute only one kind of fault line in Los Angeles. As *Falling Down* attests in its opening scenes, the physical barriers separating the ethnic groups that represent the cultural and economic diversity of Los Angeles are complemented by discursive boundaries that operate as much within as between ethnic and occupational assemblages.

Falling Down begins on Los Angeles's signature venue, the commuting freeway. The viewer sees William Foster (Michael Douglas), a.k.a. D-Fens (the name on his car license plate), who is sitting in his car in the midst of a traffic jam, looking sweaty and frustrated as he brushes away a persistent fly and finds that neither his radio nor his automatic windows are functioning. There are frequent cuts to what Foster sees. As in some of the Los Angeles scenes in Haggis's *Crash*, the rest of those on the freeway are seen through the windows of the trapped vehicles. At this point, no verbal conversations take

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place across vehicles, but a wide variety of discursive positions are revealed in the form of iconic symbols and bumper-sticker statements. There's a US flag on a bus, and bumper stickers ranging from religious cliché ('He died for our sins') to hostile parody ('How am I driving? Call 1-800 Eat Shit.'). As Nigel Thrift (2004: 47) points out, 'driving is a rich, indeed driven, stew of emotions', but 'the repertoire of reciprocal communication that a car allows is highly attenuated'.

As Foster's frustration mounts – shown through close-ups of his sweating face and increasingly frantic head movements – what he sees in the other vehicles begins to look, from his point of view, as though they are signs meant for him. The camera, which zooms in on various signs (for example, a grinning stuffed Garfield the Cartoon Cat affixed inside a car window), emphasizes a reality screened through Foster's impatience and (as it turns out) warped perspective, inasmuch as he is on his old route between his work for a defense contractor and his home but no longer has either. Foster has been laid off from his job and divorced from his wife, Elizabeth (Barbara Hershey). On this particular journey (as he often repeats throughout the film), he thinks he's headed 'home'; he's trying to get to his daughter's birthday party, even though his ex-wife has filed a restraining order to keep him away from his former home. No longer able to tolerate his inability to move, Foster grabs his briefcase, abandons his car in traffic, and climbs over the freeway fence. His leave-taking is accompanied by honking horns and a shout from the guy in the car behind him, 'Hey, where do you think you're going?', to which he's heard to reply, 'Home!'

At this point, the temporary society of the freeway becomes a microcosm of Los Angeles's fragmented society as a whole, which not only harbors a wide variety of discursive styles and perspectives but also displays a yawning gap between word and reality. When a motorcycle highway patrolman pulls up to assess the situation, Detective Martin Prendergast gets out of his car to help move Foster's car out of the way. When the patrolman asks Prendergast to get back in his car, Prendergast shows his badge and insists on helping, even as the patrolman says he'll call a tow truck. When Prendergast says he'll help push it out of the way, the patrolman makes an irrelevant speech about how dangerous the highway is. As the camera pans the stalled vehicles in the traffic jam, the patrolman says, 'We got a lot of glass and steel rushing by us at high speeds.' The two are joined by another driver who, after hearing Prendergast's statement about his work, 'Downtown Robbery', says, 'I'm in linoleum myself' and proceeds to remark that he loves the TV show 'Cops'.

The misaligned conversational event around Foster's (hereafter D-Fens) abandoned car is merely the first instance of a collision of discursive fragments, which derive from what Jean-François Lyotard (1988) calls alternative 'phrase regimes'. The clash of phrases references the discursive agonistics that attest to modernity's fragmented social spheres. Accordingly, Schumacher's

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Falling Down makes it evident that Los Angeles lacks the social cohesion to permit a definite article that refers to 'the society'. Pursuant to the pervasive discursive dislocation of the opening scene on the Los Angeles freeway is a marked territorial dislocation, which becomes evident when D-Fens exits from his usual, restricted cartography, leaving the high ground of the highway and descending to the low ground of the inner city.

Although the film's drama is focused on the disruption of D-Fens's usual cartography, *Falling Down* also effectively references the relationships between the local and the global. Elana Zilberg (1998: 186) captures some aspects of that relationship:

> *Falling Down* begins with a potentially powerful exploration of a particular phenomenology of late capitalism, its changed 'structures of feeling,' – and one level at which the economic and social transformations of regional integration are being felt by the downsized worker.

She goes on to lament the film's failure to pursue a critical treatment of capitalism's victims, charging it with a 'defensive reterritorialization' that obviates insights into a 'globalized geographic imaginary' and a politically acute recognition of the pervasive displacement occasioned by the 'third worlding of America'.

Although the film narrative is focused on two personal odysseys – that of D-Fens, who is headed 'home', and that of Detective Prendergast, who continually defers his homecoming (the one-day duration of the film is supposed to be Prendergast's last day on the job before his retirement) – the film's sequence of images delivers much of the geopolitical imaginary and impacted Third World immiseration toward which Zilberg's analysis points. That imagery surrounds the process through which the two mobile bodies, both with troubled relationships to their homes, are destined to meet. However, the two bodies in *Falling Down* can be seen to articulate a critical politics of the territorial and biosecurity partitioning of a contemporary urban scene when they are defined less by their particular psychic situations and more as the 'aesthetic subjects' noted earlier, that is, by their spatio-temporal coordinates as they enact their chosen missions – one involved in an attempt to recover his domestic situation and the other avoiding his.

Following a cut to a scene depicting his ex-wife at home, preparing for their daughter's party, the next scene shows D-Fens's first significant encounter in the inner city, the viewer's first introduction to how a white middle-class Angelino's social and occupational apartheid has made Los Angeles's inner city *terra incognita* for him (and doubtless others like him). His pseudonym, D-Fens, which originally derives from his former defense-industry employment, also implies his vain attempt to hold onto an anachronistic, depluralizing perspective on contemporary city space – to defend himself against an unfamiliar reality. His first experience of a city reality that is recalcitrant to his expectations takes place in a small convenience store. Wanting to call his

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ex-wife about his intended appearance at their daughter's birthday party, he rushes into a Korean-run convenience store to get change for a payphone. Told that he must buy something to get the change, he learns that paying for a can of soda with a dollar bill will not leave him enough change for the payphone. This sets off a racist tirade on his part and, before the confrontation is over, he has trashed the store with a baseball bat. The battering of the store with an icon of 'the American pastime' is accompanied by D-Fens's intolerance for an ethnic difference with which he has little experience. Among other things, he expresses outrage that the Korean pronounces the word 'five' without the 'v': 'I don't understand the word fie. There's a v in five. No 'v's in China,' he says. The response is, 'Not Chinese, I'm Korean.'

That difference is too subtle for D-Fens, just as the spectrum of Asian American ethnicities is too subtle for D-Fens's double, Detective Martin Prendergast, whose Japanese American colleague has to inform him that the Korean grocer who has come in to report the damage to his store is no more understandable to him than he is to Prendergast: 'I'm Japanese, in case you never bothered to notice.' While Prendergast is experiencing a variety of barriers to effective connections with his colleagues, D-Fens's adventures in the city are becoming increasingly violent. The cuts back and forth between the spaces of the city and the spaces of the investigation reveal the variety of social types that constitutes the reality of the city. As D-Fens's movements map a city that is both territorially and discursively partitioned, Prendergast's investigatory itinerary evinces a map of a policing subculture that is similarly divided.

The estrangement of both characters – D-Fens from his traditional employment, home and thus commuting habitus, and Prendergast from his home and employment as well (as his retirement looms at the end of the day, and his paranoiac wife, Amanda [Tuesday Weld], keeps trying to summon him home early) – gives the viewers the critical perspectives that the actions of marginalized persons can provide. And, crucially, as each character struggles to manage his trying day, each fraught with a variety of both material and discursive impediments to effective movement, the film's cross-cutting between D-Fens's and Prendergast's changing venues (a feature of film form since D. W. Griffith invented it) offers insights into the ways in which the spaces and practices of policing are connected with the interactions in social space. Cinematic cross-cutting brings separated spaces into proximity and thus into a zone that reveals how each space connects with the other. D-Fens's and Prendergast's trajectories eventually meet in a dramatic showdown, with Prendergast fatally shooting D-Fens, but the urban *metis* that allows Prendergast to track D-Fens renders the film more significant about urban networks and dynamics than about law and order.

Struggling with colleagues who are obtuse to a soon-to-be-retired colleague's inferences, Prendergast strives to show how a series of points on

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the Los Angeles map follow a trajectory of sightings of a single perpetrator, who turns out to be D-Fens. D-Fens's odyssey through what have been for him the unfamiliar ethnically partitioned spaces of Los Angeles provokes a deferred investigative odyssey on the part of Prendergast, as the former heads home and the latter avoids heading home. And the cross-cutting back and forth between the two odysseys affords the viewer an appreciation of the interactions between policing and social space and its wider context, the ethnically and economically fraught partitions that constitute Los Angeles.

The juxtapositions between home space and city space are reversed for the two protagonists. When D-Fens manages to call his wife from a payphone, we see a comfortable, feminized domestic space, which contrasts dramatically with a Los Angeles public space involved in a shooting war. Shortly after D-Fens finishes the phone call, there is a drive-by shooting, which follows on from D-Fens's increasingly out-of-control, violent odyssey through the cityscape. In contrast, Prendergast's office scene is relatively pacific and comfortable for him in comparison to his home space. His wife calls repeatedly to try to get him to come home, becoming increasingly distraught and demanding. Nevertheless, the two protagonists share a dis-ease with respect to their domestic situations.

While Prendergast has a more realistic mapping of Los Angeles than D-Fens, he too has a *terra incognita*. He and his wife have lost a young daughter to 'crib death' (labeled thus by medical authorities in a misuse of terms, because the daughter was two years' old at the time), creating a psychic wound that haunts their conversations without achieving explicit reference. She refers to a nameless anxiety the first time she begs him to come home. That he too has buried the issue is revealed by an office prank. When he retrieves his desk-drawer belongings after his colleagues have filled it up with the sand from a cat's litter box, we see that among what is buried is a picture of his deceased daughter (we have seen a similar picture in the proximity of his wife while she's on the phone). Thus, like D-Fens – although in a different way – Prendergast has lost a daughter. In both cases, the loss turns out to be irretrievable. Their mirroring is affirmed when D-Fens stops in at a swap shop and buys a snow globe to take to his daughter, and later we see another snow globe among Prendergast's possessions. Both globes contain references not only to the respective daughters but also to the characters' home scenes in general. Prendergast's has a London scene, which he contemplates as he sings 'London Bridge Is Falling Down' to Amanda over the phone to calm her down, while D-Fens's contains a rocking horse, something that we see also in a pay-for-a-ride version on Venice Beach Pier when D-Fens finally confronts his ex-wife and daughter.

However, apart from their shared psychic home disturbance-related distress, which ultimately aids Prendergast's understanding of what is driving D-Fens and renders the two twins on different sides of the law, are the ways

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in which the unfolding encounters of both men reveal a city whose partitioning makes it virtually impossible for people on different sides of various boundaries to come to terms with each other. The Korean grocer cannot represent his injury in Prendergast's police station because it is not exactly a robbery or any other event that is figurable to the police as a crime that can be registered by one or another of the policing specialties in the station. And, as D-Fens's odyssey becomes increasingly violent, Prendergast, who is the only one figuring out what is happening, is constantly excluded from participating because of the way role-partitioning dominates the policing discourse and renders inter-office communication almost always ineffectual. The police station thus seems to serve as a microcosm of Los Angeles's public space, in which D-Fens's attempts at intelligible encounters fail and ultimately provoke him into increasing violence.

Discursive partitions are also evident when the police go on the road to engage citizen complaints. After D-Fens calls home, threatening to show up at his daughter's birthday party in violation of a restraining order, his ex-wife calls the police, seeking protection. Her attempt to get action is just as frustrating as the experience of the Korean grocer whose store D-Fens has trashed. She cannot affirm a specific episode of physical violence, only her fears of D-Fens's failure to let go of his past domesticity. As a result, the police will not intervene. However, the most telling discursive disjuncture takes place shortly after D-Fens leaves the highway and makes his way up to a small hilltop in an impoverished Latino section of the city. There, two young Latino men confront him, charging him with trespassing on private property and demanding his briefcase as a penalty. When D-Fens says that he 'didn't see any signs', they point to the writing on the rocks and ask, 'What do you call that?' When D-Fens responds with 'graffiti', they say, 'That's not fucking graffiti! That's a sign.… No fucking trespassing.'

By the end of the encounter, D-Fens decides to hold onto his briefcase, using it to beat the two Latinos, who flee while D-Fens descends to continue his urban odyssey. At this point, there is a cut to Prendergast's desk, where he is being relieved of his gun as part of his decommissioning as a police detective. The briefcase and gun are iconic anachronisms for the two characters, each of whom have or are about to have no use for them. However, while D-Fens finally abandons his briefcase by giving it to a beggar (who also has little use for it because, as it turns out, it only contained D-Fens's spartan lunch), both characters end up with guns. The Latinos hunt D-Fens in the street, attempt a drive-by shooting when they spot him, and end up in a deadly crash. D-Fens recovers their guns and subsequently employs them to intimidate people in a wide variety of Los Angeles venues: a Whammy Burger outlet where he initially demands breakfast during the lunch period; a golf course that caters to well-off, septuagenarian retirees; and a wealthy estate. Although Prendergast no longer has his gun, he grabs that of his colleague detective Torres after

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she is wounded by D-Fens, ultimately using it to kill D-Fens at the climax on Venice Beach Pier.

While the drama involved in the film's cross-cutting between the two trajectories of movement is about heading home, the impediments to movement that both characters confront articulate the dynamics of Los Angeles's zones of security. At the end of the film, the odyssey of heading home for D-Fens ends in his death, while for Prendergast it ends in his decision to remain on the job, keeping him mostly away from his emotionally fraught home. However, the process of getting there, in both cases, is more critically revealing than the outcomes. On his way home, D-Fens's movement is deflected by barriers around construction sites, barriers to communication in retail stores, fences around a golf course and an estate, and a lack of cultural competence in managing the public transportation system. The impediments to Prendergast's movement reveal the partitioning of policing practices. Only one of his colleagues, Detective Torres, who has an unstated and unconsummated erotic connection with Prendergast, heeds his inferences and assists in his investigation. The urban *metis* that Prendergast exercises to close in on the perpetrator is continuously opposed by the partitioning of policing. If policing is aimed at securing anything in Los Angeles, it is not for protecting the public against criminal danger. Rather, it is deployed to protect a hierarchical economy against challenges. At a key moment in D-Fens's odyssey through the city, a man is shown picketing a branch bank from which seemingly well-heeled customers are exiting. His sign states, 'No Longer Economically Viable.' Shortly after he is first shown with his sign, he is accosted by a couple of police officers and hustled into a squad car. D-Fens watches the episode, seemingly registering something happening to someone who shares his situation.

When the paths of the two main characters finally cross, as Prendergast holds a gun on D-Fens, we hear a resigned D-Fens say, 'I'm a bad guy? How could this have happened?' He sees himself as someone who has done everything he was told to do. Along with the viewers, he has had a dose of an urban reality at variance with the ideals and platitudes through which he and others like him have hitherto screened Los Angeles's life-world. Among other things, the weapons manufacturer where he had been employed produces insecurity around the world and offers no security to its employees. Moreover, as a sign of the spillover effects of the manufacture of dangerous weapons, the urban insecurity shown in the film – as high-powered weapons find their way into D-Fens's hands after having been held by members of a street gang and a neo-Nazi store owner – turns out to be a function of war weapons that are available for civilians to be used to enact a variety of grievances, ethnic, ideological, and so on. And, given the discursive walls within the city, mediation of such grievances is almost impossible. Prendergast is left to continue his policing in an urban world whose barriers have become almost impenetrable.

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Conclusion: Some Analytic Reflections

If one takes a simplistic view of the discursive barriers that partition global cities, the analytic temptation is to invoke the problem of rational communication. However, there is another way analytically to figure the discursive fragmentation of the contemporary city. As we watch D-Fens's odyssey through Los Angeles's spaces and note the complex urban landscape that is recalcitrant to his expectations and coping abilities – while being radically disjunctive with what he is able to verbalize – we are able to recognize that Los Angeles is excessive to the regulative ideals within traditional political and social discourses. And, as we watch the ways in which Los Angeles policing, supposedly entrusted with public safety, is largely unresponsive to complaints that do not coincide with its idiosyncratic departmental partitions and are unintelligible within policing's relative discursive impoverishment, we are encouraged to recognize the excess of security needs over the resources deployed for protection. Both D-Fens and the police department are mired in what Toni Morrison (1993) calls 'dead language', an 'unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis … policing languages of mastery'. What is produced by such language, according to Morrison, are 'false memories of stability, harmony among the public'.

We are also treated to a productive irony. A police detective who is unable to come to explicit terms with his personal problems – a lack of shared discourse with his wife about a family tragedy and an inability to address a problematic intimacy with a female colleague – is the one who is able to enact an effective urban *metis* and is thus able to abort another family tragedy, the likelihood that D-Fens would enact a murder-suicide scenario. Prendergast cuts through police department partitioning impediments, as well as through the physical and discursive barriers of the city, in large part because he understands D-Fens. He understands him not because he shares his way of interpreting urban reality but because he is similarly affected by his position in urban life, caught as he is between a troubled home and a workplace at which his presence is no longer welcome. Prendergast's relationship with his double is thus effected through the ways in which their ended or ending careers and troubled home sites make them vulnerable to signs and ready to act in unexpected ways.

However, as I have suggested, the personalities of the characters are less critically significant than the urban milieus that their reactions disclose. In this analytic conclusion, I want to draw particular attention to two seemingly trivial urban partitions that affect their actions. One such partition is the Whammy Burger outlet's 11.30 a.m. separation between the serving of breakfast and the onset of its lunch menu, which provokes a violent reaction from D-Fens. The other is the police department's separation between per-

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sons who are designated to hear robbery complaints versus those entitled to hear assault complaints, which initially stymies the investigation of D-Fens's violent odyssey through sections of Los Angeles. In both cases, the characters – D-Fens and Prendergast, respectively – have to find words and actions that, as Jacques Rancière (2000: 115) puts it, 'exceed the function of rigid designation'. And, as Rancière points out, contrary to models that seek to build politics on the basis of communicative rationality, the condition of possibility for political subjectivity is precisely the human power to challenge 'those who claim to "speak correctly"'. Mounting an opposition to the Platonic 'logic of "the proper" – a logic that requires everyone to be in their proper place, partaking of proper affairs', Rancière sees political subjectivity as a series of events in which persons 'reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relations between words and bodies [when they effectively challenge what he refers to as] the "partition of the sensible"'.

Among Ranciere's examples of acts of political subjectification is the 'plebeian secession at Aventin', to which he makes frequent reference. That political effect was precisely a case of non-communication, as Rancière (2000: 116) points out:

> The patricians at Aventin do not understand what the plebeians say; they do not understand the noises that come out of the plebeians' mouths, so that in order to be audibly understood and visibly recognized as legitimate speaking subjects, the plebeians must not only argue their position but must also construct the scene of argumentation in such a manner that the patricians might recognize it as a world in common.

Rancière's example of politicized non-communication is applicable to the scene in *Falling Down* in which the picketer in front of a bank is holding a sign that says 'No Longer Economically Viable'. Like D-Fens, the picketer is a victim of economic vicissitudes that stem from remote forces. Since World War II, when Los Angeles developed as the urban center most affected by federal defense expenditure, its economy has been subject to both significant downturns as well as major upsurges (Schiesl, 1984). The picketer's words do not seem to arouse recognition from anyone but D-Fens. The bank remains viable, as customers enter and leave, while the picketer is hustled off by the police. His words are mere noise within the city's reigning structures of political economy and the discursive assets connected to them. Here, Rancière's (2000: 123) observations about the difference between policing and political enactment apply well:

> As conceived by 'the police,' society is a totality comprised of groups performing specific functions and occupying determined spaces [while] … [t]he political is what disturbs this order by introducing either a supplement or a lack. The essence of the political is dissensus; but dissensus is not the opposition of interests and opinions. It is a gap in the sensible: the political persists as long as there is a dissensus about the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given.

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Ultimately, although they have performed their drama on opposite sides of the law, D-Fens and Prendergast are similar political agents, the former whose odyssey through Los Angeles exposes various dimensions of dissensus and the latter whose odyssey challenges 'the police' by exercising an urban *metis* that ordinary police procedures inhibit. Together, they reveal a city whose internal defenses preempt politics in favor of a rigidly contained urban warfare.

Finally, much has been made of the way the post-9/11 'war on terror' has led to a rigorous policing of national frontiers. Although this is certainly the case, a focus on that 'war' elides other, more long-term aspects of urban violence. As Elizabeth Dauphinee & Cristina Masters (2007: vii) point out,

> the war on terror animates particular forms of political violence, while simultaneously obscuring the historical contexts in which these violences have emerged. Ascribing the violence of our current political situation to the events of September 11 and their aftermath erases the fact that many of these practices are not new.

As Schumacher's camera shows as it follows D-Fens's spatial odyssey, urban America's *internal* frontiers are heavily policed. Robert Crooks effectively summarizes what Schumacher's camera reveals. He notes that whereas formerly the western frontier was the primary zone of militarization and securitization – effectively a zone of interethnic warfare as Euro-America subdued the western ethnoscape – now the USA's ethnic partitioning has been 'refocused':

> The frontier ideology, which continued to map cultural and racial divisions [came to] denote relatively fixed lines of defense for the purity and order of European-American culture. Such lines became particularly charged in cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, where population densities and the size of minoritized communities threaten individualist ideologies.

As a result, he adds,

> the meaning of the other side of the frontier, in the shift of focus from its western to its urban manifestation, has been partly transformed: no longer enemy territory to be attacked and conquered or vacant land to be cultivated, it constitutes in mainstream European-American ideologies pockets of racial intrusion … to be policed and contained – insofar as the 'others' threaten to cross the line' (Crooks, 1995: 71).

Crooks's strategy for revealing the urban frontier echoes the one in this analysis. He follows the movements of detectives – in Crooks's case, the ones invented in the crime fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley – whose urban-inflected social *metis* maps the city's class and ethnic fault lines, the non-material walls around which much of an urban micropolitics, involving a dynamic of securitization and resistance, proceeds.

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