

The Films of Fritz Lang

Allegories of Vision and Modernity

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Publishing

2000

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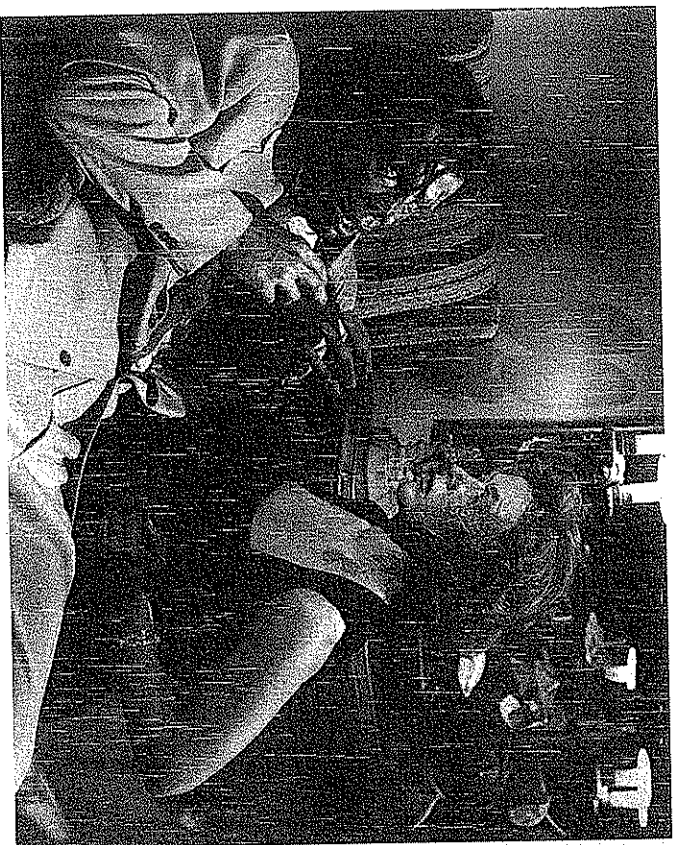
The Big Heat

Circuits of Corruption

Being on the telephone will come to mean, therefore, that contact is never constant, nor the break clean.

Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book*¹

The Blue Gardenia wades waist deep in the pre-fabricated wish-fulfilment environments of the 50s, almost as if it were a 90s retro parody: the Polynesian restaurant which gives the film its title; Nat 'King' Cole crooning the similarly named theme song in tones as smooth as velvet, decked out like a cabana boy; the 'little black book' of alphabetised, untrammelled sexual favours accessible if you simply let your fingers do the walking; the bachelor's pad with stereo and mirrored fireplace; the frictionless, free-flowing freeway system. But like the best 50s American film-makers, Lang does not celebrate this lush, comfort-designed, smooth ride, but rather casts grit in its path, exposing the rough edges of the relations between the sexes, the violence implicit in the new male culture, and the obvious lack of comfort



in the places where most people live and work, the crowded flat where the girls have a strict schedule for the use of the bathroom, or the high-pressured impersonality of both switchboard and newspaper office.

The Big Heat also moves through this contradictory environment whose smooth surfaces mask the fissure between the good life for the few and the cramped and hectic worlds of the mass of people: the gangster bar, The Retreat, brightly lit and hard-edged with the 'James Meehan Trio' playing, hardly the seedy locale of a 30s or 40s gangster film; Vince Stone's apartment with built-in bar, and modern furnishings; Lagana's mansion with an imposing portrait of his mother on the wall; but, also, the empty shell of a middle-class home; hotel rooms so anonymous it is hard to tell them apart; the chain-link fence and twisted metal of the automobile junkyard.

The Big Heat stands as Lang's finest American film of the 50s and one of the crowning films of his career. It completes a development towards a seemingly classical style, in the sense that the film appears to be constructed with a pure economy of storytelling in mind, with few of the experiments Lang tried in the 30s and 40s, with almost no image that stands out for its compositional beauty, no editing that seems to play tricks with traditional continuity, no overt directorial flourishes of any kind. But in many ways Lang's nearly telegraphic clarity of narrative technique leaves him time to develop the subterranean relations between images and sounds which have always been a part of his style, but which, especially since *House by the River*, have functioned on a powerful but almost subliminal level. Lang's style in the 50s began to resemble camouflage: the films strive to resemble the very environment they critique. Lang's classicism cloaks a distance and irony which penetrated to the cold rage for order that underlies the emotional expressivity of 50s culture.

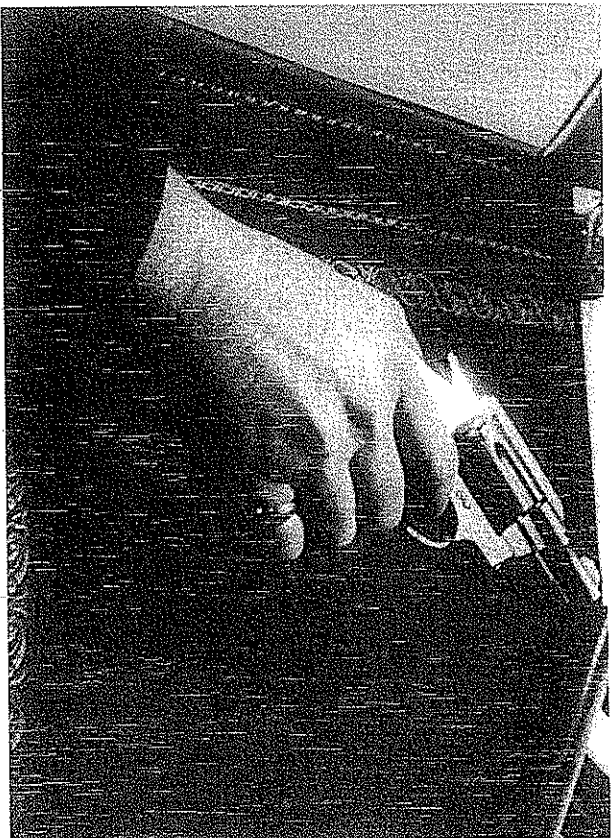
Thus a tension between plaid surface and hidden corruption structures *The Big Heat*, and the drama deals with a struggle between those forces which try to keep the lid on, and those which want to force the hidden violence out into the open. In most 50s films this melodramatic pattern of righteous violence overcoming evil repression is paralleled by an emotional drama of self-realisation and self-expression, usually represented by a love affair. Think of *On the Waterfront* (Kazan), *On Dangerous Ground* (Ray), *The Big Knife* (Aldrich), or even *Underworld USA* (Fuller). Although many things in the script of *The Big Heat* and its source novel by William F. McGivern point in this direction and remain operative in Lang's film, his directorial approach does not accent Detective Dave Bannion's emotional breakthrough. Instead, this drama of surface and depth focuses mainly on social structures and roles, the system of corrupt order and the violence it takes to expose it. *The Big Heat* stands as Lang's most powerful and complex exposé story, partly because of the ambiguity of the exposé's relation to Bannion's emotional life, and its unflinching unfolding of the breach between genders already sketched in *The Blue Gardenia*.

The opening few minutes of *The Big Heat* present a Liebnizian monad of the whole film. As Colin McArthur points out, the film's major characters are all introduced (although the protagonist, Dave Bannion, only enters in the first shot of the second sequence),² the plot's central enigma is set in motion (will Tom Duncan's suicide note ever be delivered?), the tone of genre violence and the theme of cover-up indelibly sketched, and a geography of the interlocking spaces of power in the modern city laid out with the telephone system tracing the hierarchies of power. The breakdown into shots always follows the centre of narrative interest, and even more than in *The Blue Gardenia*, Lang uses the precise camera movements in and out which the small mobile camera mount known as the crab dolly (introduced in *The Blue Gardenia*) allows. Janet Bergstrom quotes a German newspaper article

covering the shooting of *The Blue Gardenia* in which Lang describes his camera movement as 'the constant companion of the actor; it becomes a sharp observer of the events, capturing a drama more intensely as it draws quickly nearer when something decisive is done or said. ... The camera in motion, therefore, becomes an important and "living" participant in the film.'³ These camera movements do not distract from the action, but they most certainly dissect and analyse it, an essential part of Lang's new classical style.

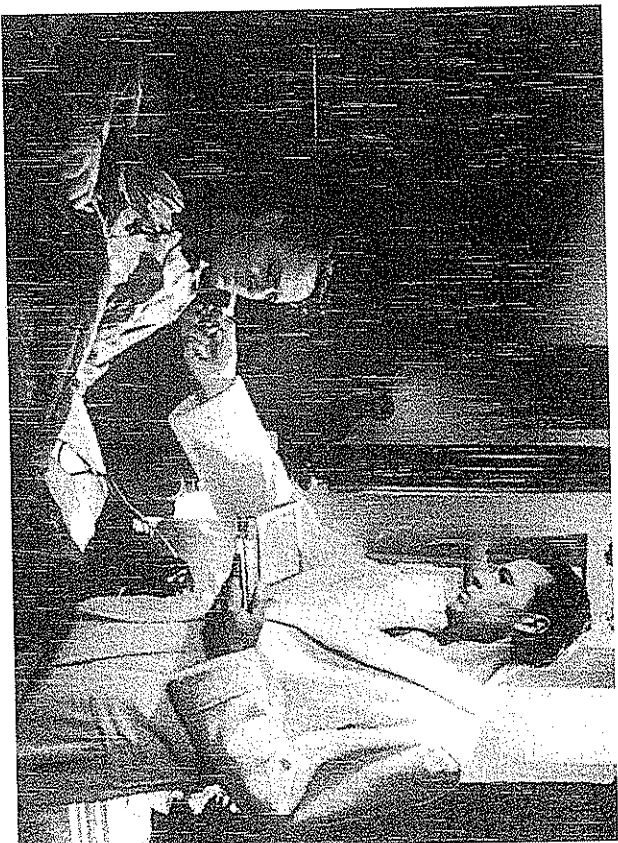
The film opens with a high-angle medium close-up of a desk top on which a gun rests; a hand enters the frame and picks up the revolver, then the camera pulls back and reveals a badge and an envelope addressed to the district attorney. We hear the revolver fire and the man's head falls onto the desk. Lang opens the film without an establishing shot, accenting the emblematic play of objects. The narrative economy of the sequence derives partly from its near abstraction, its almost inhuman presentation of an act of violence and self-destruction. Gun, badge and letter dominate this scene, the human figure is nearly eclipsed. Lang could not set up the inciting incident of the film, or its dominant stylistic concerns with greater clarity than in this single shot. Who is this man, what do these objects mean, where are we? All these questions are quickly cued by the dramatic opening to the film.

The second shot cuts back from the medium close-up of the collapsed suicide to reveal a location, a well-appointed domestic interior, dominated by a staircase, the desk in the foreground. The man's wife, still in her nightgown, comes downstairs, drawn by the noise. Lang cuts in to medium shot as she pauses on the landing, posed next to a large grandfather clock showing the time to be three o'clock. The camera tracks towards her husband's slumped-over body, as if presenting her point of view from the stairs, but then she enters the shot as if following the camera's lead, appearing as a dark silent silhouette against the brightly lit desk. A somewhat low-angle medium close-up gives her delayed reaction shot, and we realise her silence was not



the product of shock; she observes the off screen scene coldly, her head turning as she surveys the desk. The following close-up, a carefully arranged composition of the significant objects – gun grasped by the dead man's hand, badge and addressed envelope – reveals it is the envelope that attracted her interest. Apparently unfazed by her husband's suicide, she reaches for the envelope as the camera pulls back to medium shot, opens it and reads the letter, expressing irritation. She crosses to the telephone. The sound of a passing car draws her attention to the window, and she closes the blinds before she lifts up the receiver and dials, asking to speak to Mike Lagana. After a pause, she says harshly, 'I know it's late, wake him up! Tell him it's Tom Duncan's widow.'

We cut to a muscular young man in a bathrobe standing before a middle-aged gangster lying in bed whom the next shot reveals swathed in satin sheets and silk pyjamas, his claw-like hand outstretched, telling him there's a call 'on the private line'. After repeating 'Widow?' Lagana takes the phone, tells her he appreciates her call, that they will certainly get together, and that now she should call the police. Handing the receiver back to the young man, who gives him a cigarette and lights it, Lagana tells him to call Vince Stone. The young man makes the call, then tells Lagana, 'His girl says he's playing cards.' Lagana takes the receiver and, as the camera moves in on him, explains, 'This is not a social call, Debbie. Tell Vince I want him right away.' We cut to hit man Vince Stone's apartment where no-one is asleep, as his girlfriend, Debbie, sprawled seductively on a divan, replies that she loves to call Vince to the phone for Lagana, she 'likes to see him jump'. She calls out to Vince, whom Lang shows playing cards in the other room with the commissioner of police, in a sing-song voice: 'Oh Vince, it's HIM!', pantomiming an elaborate salaan. Vince leaps from his chair, runs into the living room of a fancy, modern, well-lit apartment, takes the phone and tells Debbie to see if anyone in the other room wants a drink and to shut the door. Debbie steps over the couch, complaining that she doesn't know about the politicians in the next room, but she's so bored she



needs a drink, pausing in the doorway to admire herself in a mirror. Vince explains finally to Lagana, 'I didn't know it was the private line ringing or I would have answered myself.' He assures his boss he 'will see to it'.

In the first four minutes of the film, phone calls link three different levels of a corrupt society, emphasising the relay of information by having intermediaries first answer the phone and then call their superiors. The chain of voices relaying commands evokes a realm where 'private' lines mean dirty business, and the sexuality of underlings expresses their superior's power and their own subservience. Lang's view of the systematic nature of the modern arrangement of power recalls his earlier German films. A violent action, the suicide, unleashes a flurry of communication that traces the lines of command as the gangster and his minions scurry to control the damage. In effect this sequence combines elements of the opening of *Mabuse* and the police procedures of *M*, a communication between the levels of power which reveals systematic procedures as in *M*, absorbing an act of violence into a carefully managed design, as in *Mabuse*. Here, however, the police play poker with the gangsters and establish a path of corruption that snakes through the city on private lines, rather than discussing public policy over the phone.

This opening picks up the theme of the astray message present in Lang's film from the beginning of his career, the jamming of communication systems so that a message cannot be delivered to its addressee. The purpose of these opening phone calls is certainly to convey information (Bertha Duncan tells Lagana about her husband's suicide and his attempt to inform the district attorney of the bribery system he was involved in; Lagana contacts his hit man to arrange the pay-off which will keep Bertha Duncan from turning her husband's letter over to the district attorney). But the real purpose behind the calls is to block the suicide note's attempt at communication and confession. The letter of public confession becomes repressed as a new message system sets up a detour through the private lines.

It is precisely this blocking of communication that supplies the motive for the film's plot, which can only be resolved when, after Bertha Duncan's death, the letter finally surfaces. If the opening telephone calls successfully block the final message of a dead man, at least for most of the film, the tension caused by Detective Bannion's investigation can also be charted through a series of phone calls, all of which interrupt the seeming tranquillity of his family life. The first call comes during dinner from Tom Duncan's former girlfriend Lucy Chapman who claims there must be more to his death. After speaking to Bannion, Chapman is killed. When Bannion follows up the possible connection he is reprimanded by the chief of police who says he has been 'getting calls from above' complaining about Bannion's investigation. Bannion's visit to an underworld hang-out leads to the bartender immediately calling Lagana to inform him of Bannion's continued investigation. Bannion's wife receives a threatening and obscene phone call at home, and shortly afterward she is killed by a car bomb intended for him. Bannion tries to track down her killers through tracing phone calls to the mechanic who placed the bomb, and by placing calls to them at the underworld bar. In the last seconds of the film, after the gangsters have been defeated and Bannion has been returned to his job as detective, he immediately receives a phone call sending him out on another case.

The image of Vince Stone reassuring his boss over the phone that the suicide letter can be suppressed ends the first sequence of the film. Lang uses an overlap-dissolve to bring us into the second sequence and a visual shock to bridge the transition, transferring from the apparatus of hearing to devices of vision. Vince's image dissolves into a medium shot of a police photographer, his camera aimed below the

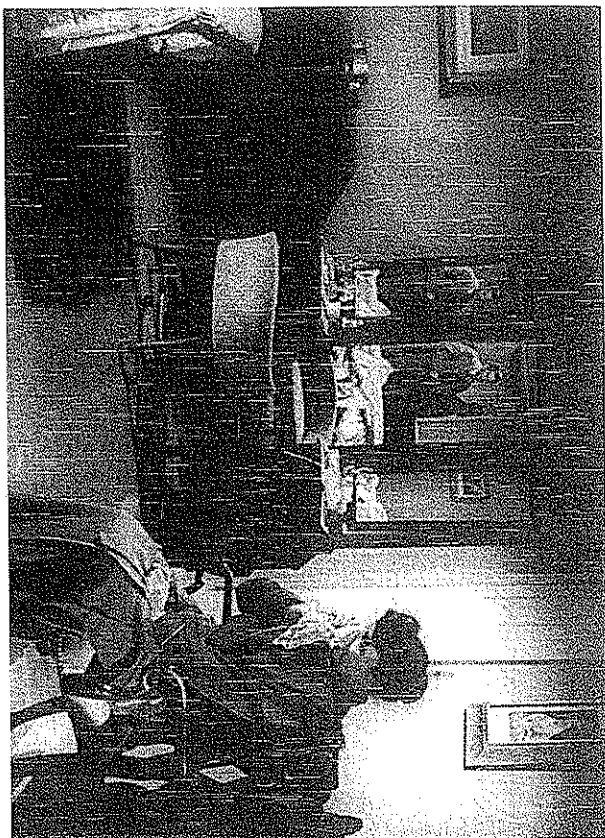
frame. Vince's image has just faded out, when the huge flash of the camera pops and an optical effect bleeds the image to total whiteness for several frames. Lang's camera pulls back revealing Tom Duncan slumped over his desk and a long shot of the now bright living room, filled with cops. The camera then tracks to the right to reveal Dave Bannion, the hero of the film, looking sleepy and rumpled as a cop apologises to him for having to rouse him out of bed. A forensic cop enters the frame and explains it's a suicide, no question. The camera pivots to the left as Bannion crosses to his partner, Burke, and affirms that no note was found. He moves towards the staircase in the background to go upstairs and speak to the widow.

As Gerard Leblanc and Brigitte Devismes argue in their thorough and insightful analysis of the film and its documents (original scenario, shooting script, Lang's sketches, studio memos, etc.), this scene shows Bannion's naive faith in the evidence immediately presented to his sight; the limits of Bannion's vision are reflected in this opening flash that briefly erases the image from the screen.⁴ Like the flashes from the newspaper photographers in *The Blue Gardenia*, the camera represents the glare of a public seeing. Lang subtly indicates that this seeing is profoundly compromised because it photographs a false scene as a fact (the suppressing of the letter falsifying the *mise-en-scène* of Duncan's suicide), and literally with the flash which momentarily blinds the viewer. Further, as Leblanc and Devismes also point out, the overlap-dissolve briefly superimposes Vince Stone over the police photographer, so that it seems Stone snaps the picture. In *The Big Heat* Lang continues to use overlap-dissolves as a subliminal way to express central metaphors.

The following shot takes us to the bedroom of Bertha Duncan, seconds before Bannion knocks on her door. Lang immediately confronts us with another device of vision, a three-faced mirror before which Bertha sits at her vanity table. The doubling of her images does not hint at dreams, as in previous Lang films, but at duplicity and deception. Bertha is, as Lang noted in the margin of his script, 'arranging her face'.⁵ She dabs her eyes with a cloth, apparently to supply the tears lacking as she confronted her husband's death. She hears Bannion's knock, and, as the camera pulls back, crosses to a chair, arranging her pose and her robe, and in a tremulous voice asks him to come in. As Lang's marginal note in the script emphasises, we see Bannion's entrance reflected in the mirror.⁶ As the mirror was the place where Bertha prepared her illusion, Bannion enters the room under her power; he will only see what she wants him to see, his vision has been curtailed. Bertha sobs, struts across the room, explains her husband was in poor health, and Bannion, shot in close-up, seems moved and convinced by her performance. He leaves satisfied.

The first two sequences culminate in the newspaper inset that follows: a small article that explains Duncan's suicide was due to his health problems. The official story plasters over the corruption, the details of which we still don't know. The next shot shows Bannion reading the paper as the camera pulls back and reveals his modest living/dining room and his wife Katie (Jocelyn Brando, Marlon's sister who unfortunately always looks to me like her brother in drag) setting dinner on the table. The series of well-appointed interiors that opened the film – Duncan's, Lagana's, Stone's – contrast with this image of lower-middle-class felicity, a modest calm stability founded on the fact that Detective Bannion has not looked too deeply or seen too far. Bannion maintains the sort of domestic tranquillity that the 50s saw as ideal, a home in an archetypal suburban development, by not only limiting his vision but drawing clearly defined lines between his family and scum or trash.

This dividing line moves in two directions. The first comes in complete contrast to both his home life and the performance of the grieving widow he so admired



in Bertha Duncan's bedroom, as he responds to his first phone call and meets bar girl Lucy Chapman at the underworld hang-out, a brightly lit, modernly designed nightclub called *The Retreat*.⁷ Chapman begins by denying the truth of the newspaper account. She continues to deconstruct other elements of the story as Bannion has understood it, especially the ideal nature of the Duncans' marriage which Bertha had described, indicating she and Duncan were lovers and he was about to divorce his wife and marry her. Bannion refuses to believe her. He leaves Lucy contemptuously as she questions the sanctity of marriage and class differences ('the only difference between me and Bertha Duncan is that I work at being a B-girl, and she has a wedding ring and a marriage certificate'), accusing her of planning blackmail, and telling her she could talk herself into a lot of trouble. Which she does.

The drawing of this line, below him, with contempt for the lifestyle of a B-girl who compares herself to a cop's widow, causes Bannion no immediate problems. But his anger soon afterward becomes directed at the crime boss Lagana, following the second phone call to his house (this time an anonymous caller who uses obscene language when his wife answers the phone). This call leads directly to the murder of Bannion's wife, his resignation from the police force and his decision to shake up the system he was originally willing to dwell within.

If the opening glimpse of Lagana's bedroom radiates illicit luxury, the grandeur of an upper-class lifestyle greets Bannion as he pulls up to Lagana's mansion. Bannion is stopped on his way into the house by a beat cop, one of ten cops a day assigned to protect Lagana and his family. Bannion refuses to be stopped by the butler as he passes through the pillared portico into the Lagana mansion. As he waits in the hallway, a dance party for Lagana's teenage daughter is in full swing behind him, with a live band and servants patrolling with drinks on silver trays. Lagana ushers him into his library where a framed portrait of the other end of the Lagana lineage, his recently deceased mother, beams down on their discussion.

When Bannion begins to question Lagana about Lucy Chapman's murder the gangster objects strenuously, 'I have an office for that sort of thing. This is my home and I don't like dirt tracked into it.' Bannion responds with what can only be called an argument about class, contrasting his home with Lagana's, 'We don't talk about those things in this house, do we? No, it's too elegant, too respectable. Nice kids – party – picture of Mama up there on the wall. No, it's no place for a stinking cop! ... I'm going to tell you something. You know you couldn't plant enough flowers around here to kill the smell. Cops have homes too, only sometimes there isn't enough money to pay the rent, because a cop gets hounded off the force by your thievin' cockroaches for trying to do an honest job. What's the matter, you think I live, under a rock or something? Your creeps have no compunction about phoning my house!'

The genre logic of this scene, carefully crafted in Sydney Boehm's screenplay, sets up the dynamics of the plot and of Bannion's character. Bannion now emerges as an archetypal 50s action hero who reaches the point where he can no longer repress his anger. In this scene Bannion, so far presented as an honest, but none-too-perceptive, cop and loving family man, breaks protocol and confronts the gangster boss, venting anger rather than searching for information, following a 50s (and to some extent late 40s) belief that anger equals authenticity. Crucially, his anger takes physical form when he punches out Lagana's bodyguard. The hero delivers both emotional rhetoric and a devastating right to the chin.

The tension Bannion's transformation sets up – not only with his job and his superiors, but with his domestic tranquillity – drives the film from this point on. Lucy Chapman and the bar represented the antithesis of his suburban home and family: as she says, no wedding ring, no marriage certificate, and, as the bartender says after she is murdered, 'not much more than a suitcase full of nothing between [her] and the gutter'. Lagana, on the other hand, represents family and home, only grown to gargantuan proportions, a man whose success can give his family everything they want and who, like Bannion, wants to protect the sanctity of his home from the dirt that gets tracked in. Like so many 50s heroes, Bannion becomes allied with the outcasts of society, the marginal and abject, in his fight against Lagana. He will have to invade the imposing domestic spaces shown in the film's first sequence, Bertha Duncan's house, Lagana's mansion, Vince Stone's apartment, in order to bring down the 'big heat' – the pressure which will reveal the stink behind the flowers. In doing so he also destroys his own domestic space, and releases a critique of the dominant culture whose destructive force is difficult to get back into the bottle.

The Construction of Authority

... the social gest[us] is the gest[us] relevant to society, the gest[us] that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances.

Bertolt Brecht, 'On Gestic Music'⁸

The French publisher Armand Colin has done film studies a great service by publishing a thorough study of *The Big Heat*, *Le Double scénario chez Fritz Lang* including shooting script, the original scenario, and Lang's floor plan diagrams of the sets outlining camera position, and actors' movement, along with a careful comparison

to the film as it exists, done by Gerard Leblanc and Brigitte Devismes. Documents like these reveal the production process of *The Big Heat*, supplying an account of the various forces which entered into its creation. A line-by-line comparison between the original scenario by Sydney Boehm, finished before Lang was hired to direct, and the final shooting script (including many notes in Lang's handwriting) provides a way of determining Lang's contribution to this process through the changes he made. Careful examination of the diagrams Lang devised for camera set-ups and the blocking of action, as well as the final film, allows a thorough description and analysis of Lang's *mise-en-scène*, the way in which he visualised and interpreted the script.⁹

Colin McArthur argues in his BFI monograph on *The Big Heat* that this sort of investigation of the production process of films, 'solid, empirical historical work', is precisely what *auteur* studies need to overcome their limitations.¹⁰ The materials exist to do this thoroughly for nearly all of Lang's films (especially the American ones) and I hope that my critical monograph will encourage this undertaking. Increasingly sophisticated views of artistic texts have realised that no text exists in isolation. A discussion of process of production and reception history opens the textual system to the dynamics of social history. I have included in my analysis some discussion of the production context and critical reception. However, this monograph primarily deals with the images and sounds coming from the screen. I avoid hermetically sealing these texts from the context in which they are produced and understood. But I do not claim to offer a full history of either their production or reception, which would take a number of tomes larger than this one. Neither production nor reception can be banished from the way a film affects us, nor can they be excluded from each other (producers envision the process of reception and hope to control it; critics understand films on the basis of cues given by producers as to genre and style). But I would like to emphasise that empirically founded studies of production and reception still require organising and theoretical assumptions, still demand an act of reading and interpretation.

A careful consideration of the production history of a film, especially a Hollywood film, seems to work against a critical approach that sees the director as the enunciator of the film, what McArthur calls the 'Romantic notion of the director as "onlie begetter"'.¹¹ As I have tried to indicate both in my introduction and through my readings, the concept of Lang as enunciator of his films is a confictual and not a biological one, in which Lang interacts with both collaborators and larger cultural forms such as genre, period style and ideology. In other words, I would maintain that the director as enunciator need not be thought of as a Judaeo-Christian creator *ex nihilo*, but as an Aristotelian demi-urge who works with pre-existent material, and the nature of that material will always function as one of the causes of the creation. But while this helps explain some of the empirical aspects of Lang as director, working with material he is given and transforming it (or not), I would like to emphasise again the lesson Lang teaches us about enunciation. Not only is it an agonistic process involving a struggle, but also a hubristic one, in which any claim to total authorship invites its own destruction. The Fritz Lang that these films deliver to us, when viewed as an aggregate and carefully read, is a creature formed by the texts and their readings, as much as a creator; a signature forged through a conversation which seeks to bridge a historical gap between director and critic.

The original scenario for *The Big Heat*, written before Lang was hired, already contained the series of phone calls that opens the film. The author of the device is therefore Sydney Boehm, rather than Lang. But once Lang filmed the sequence, it became part of the Lang corpus and its significance in that context is different than

it would be in the corpus of another director. Similarly, Leblanc and Devismes point out that the filming of Tom Duncan's opening suicide was discussed by producer Robert Arthur in a memo to Lang after Jeff Shurlock advised him that a suicide in full view of the camera, such as Boehm's original scenario described, would be considered too violent for the Production Code Administration. Filming it as an off-screen action would be a preferable approach. Leblanc and Devismes call this section of their analysis, 'When the producer directs'.¹² The document clearly shows the sort of palimpsest a Hollywood film becomes, with suggestions, contributions and pressures exerted from a number of sources, and one could title it just as well, 'when the censor directs', or, given McArthur's further contextualisation of this concern in terms of contemporary complaints from foreign governments about the increased violence in American films, 'when international politics direct' or even 'when economics direct'. Reminding viewers that no-one writes in a vacuum and that cinema, as a major economic investment, is always subject to a host of pressures is important. But the term 'director' becomes silly as we move in this direction.

Every film is a palimpsest and the film historian must unravel its contributing threads. But the best such production history that I have encountered, Peter Baxter's study of *Blonde Venus*, *Just Watch: Sternberg, Paramount and America* reveals that, after the history of the diverse competing forces that contribute to the palimpsest have been sorted out, there remains the work itself, which takes on a significance of its own. As Baxter says of his study:

It conceives of a text as on the one hand a discrete, symbolic object, exhibiting its own coherence – material, formal and semantic – along with its own internal contradictions, and on the other as an event in the discursive process of mass entertainment, itself a primary constituent of American social being in the twentieth century.¹⁴

Thus *Blonde Venus* as it exists is, in my opinion, a much more interesting text than any of its possible versions represented by earlier scripts. Paradoxically (but only if taken literally; logically, if we bear in mind the complex dialectical and historical process of constructing an author), *Blonde Venus*, with all the different forces contributing to it, stands as a more revealing and complex Sternberg film, than his original treatment would seem to promise. This is not necessarily true, of course (I think Lang's treatment of *You and Me* may have been a better film if realised as he originally envisioned it). And it is partly true only because we are considering an actual film, fully realised in sound and images rather than a sparse treatment. But only a naive understanding of authorship would claim that only complete control within a sort of social vacuum yields an authorial text, or, conversely, that a complex network of collaborators and social pressures automatically rules out authorship.

With Lang, of course, the issue of control is to some extent empirically ascertainable, and his struggle to maintain it plays a key role in the dialectic of his authorship. Material is transformed critically by bringing it into the orbit of Lang's corpus, as the telephone calls in the opening of *The Big Heat* demonstrate. This does not deny other's (such as Boehm's) contributions, but it does define their significance within a critical reading of Lang's corpus. The filming of the opening suicide, however, raises a different sort of question when put in the context of Lang's career. In *Metropolis*, within the sequence where the false Maria drives the upper-class young men of Metropolis crazy (cut from the American release print, but replaced in the Munich restoration and the Moroder release version), Lang films a suicide in

almost the exact same way, in terms of off screen space. Coincidence? Possibly. But in fact, Arthur's memo to Lang after summarising his conversation with Shurlock, actually states, 'therefore in my opinion we should film the suicide as we have discussed' (my emphasis).¹⁵ In other words, there is no reason not to assume that Lang himself suggested the framing as a way to deal with the problem of graphic violence, as he had solved it before.

The examination of Lang's diagrams for the actual shooting and staging of scenes offers an analytical view of his process, indicating what he held to be at stake in his control of the small details of action and angle of view, precisely those areas of film-making over which he exerted what seemed to many of his collaborators (some cinematographers and many actors) an obsessional and tyrannical control. This can be shown in the sequence that follows Bannion's second visit to Bertha Duncan, after his conversation with Lucy Chapman. In spite of his contemptuous treatment of Chapman, one fact – the Duncan's vacation home at Lakeside, another sign of upper-class luxury – has raised Bannion's suspicions. After his return trip to the Duncan house, Bannion is called into the office of his immediate superior, Lieutenant Wilks. Lang's diagram of the scene plots four different camera angles, scene and the camera movements which are used in this eight shot scene. In addition, it marks out the pathway that Wilks will take walking around his desk as he speaks to Bannion who remains seated throughout the scene. A smaller sketch of this movement is also drawn in the margin of the shooting script, although Leblanc and Devismes point out both diagrams somewhat simplify Wilks' actual path.¹⁶

Devismes and Leblanc begin their analysis of this scene with the observation that Lang avoids the more conventional shot/reverse shot approach that might be chosen for this encounter between Bannion and his superior, in which Wilks will dress down Bannion for continuing to investigate Duncan's suicide.¹⁷ Lang uses four camera positions: a wide two shot of the office showing both Bannion and Wilks (a shot which moves around a bit, drawing closer at first, and circling the action in the latter part of the scene); a medium close-up of Bannion; a three-quarter shot of Wilks; and then a final two shot filmed from behind Wilks. However, the claim that Lang avoids a shot/reverse shot pattern does not really hold up under close examination (the authors seem to be labouring under the misconception that shot/reverse shot always involves point of view shots, which is only one – less frequent – possibility). The four camera positions represent two pairs of reverse angles, as the cut from Bannion sitting to Wilks standing makes clear, a cut which is, contrary to Leblanc and Devismes' claim that the characters do not look at each other, based on an exchange of glances. The final shot, taken from the fourth position, reverses the angle of the preceding two shot, which has moved from an initial view perpendicular to the back wall, to an angled view of the wall with a window behind Wilks' desk. Presumably what Leblanc and Devismes mean is that we do not have a succession of similarly framed alternations between medium close-ups of Wilks seated at his desk and Bannion across from him, edited with the give and take of the dialogue, which would be an extremely static way of shooting the scene, probably more like television coverage than most filmmaking in the 50s.

Lang's approach is not that unusual, but nonetheless expressive. The decision to make Wilks and Bannion appear in different-sized framings reflects the common Hollywood practice of stressing one character within a scene (often, as here, the protagonist and most sympathetic character, but sometimes simply the most forceful) by giving him or her a closer framing (what cinematographer Gordon Willis calls 'relative screen size'). Thus Bannion gets two medium close-ups in this scene,

while the closest we get to the more ambiguous Wilks is one three-quarter shot, Lang's more original and complex contribution to the scene comes with the actual blocking. Wilks' nearly constant movement, circling around his desk. Leblanc and Devismes point out that this movement encircles Bannion, as if Wilks were laying a trap for him, and that he moves from an apparently friendly confidence at the beginning of the scene to clear opposition.¹⁸

Wilks is certainly dancing around Bannion and the crux of this meeting – that he is ordering Bannion to stop his investigation, and Lang's choreography expresses this. But there is more here. First off, as McArthur points out, Wilks is an oddly composite character in the film, a literal condensation of two polar characters in McGovern's original novel, Inspector Cranston, 'the single unblemished figure in the upper echelons of the police department' and the Wilks of the novel, who is 'totally corrupt'. The film's Wilks is 'a highly ambiguous figure, semi-corrupt although ultimately straight'.¹⁹ Lang brilliantly (and in a manner I am tempted to call Brechtian) constructs the ambiguity of this character before us, not through an exploration of an ambivalent interior or tension-ridden psychology, but in terms of exterior social behaviour.

In the opening of the scene Wilks, jacket off, shirt sleeves rolled up, is washing his hands. Although a Pontius Pilate reference may be operating here,²⁰ Lang primarily presents this as an everyday action, as he had similarly shown Lohmann washing up in his office in *M* (the design of the lavatories in the two films even seems similar). As Devismes and Leblanc point out, in the course of the scene the conversation between Wilks and Bannion moves from a friendly intimacy to a hierarchical confrontation. But rather than deception, it seems to me the change is based on two factors: first, Bannion's refusal to take the 'friendly' warning to lay off (i.e. his transition from blinkered cop to action hero), and second, Wilks' transition within the scene from a personal self to an official self. It is precisely this switch which Lang stages before our eyes and accents through his choreographing of Wilks. Like Bertha Duncan preparing her face in the mirror, only less metaphorically, Wilks prepares himself officially to order Bannion to stop. In his rolled-up shirt-sleeves Wilks tells Bannion he has been getting calls from 'upstairs' about Bannion's second visit to Bertha Duncan. Bannion asks if she complained and Wilks responds, 'some-one did'. At the beginning of the conversation Wilks attributes the pressure and the question to someone else. But as he turns towards Bannion in the three-quarter shot, buttoning his sleeves, he begins to place himself within the system he just differentiated himself from: 'I'm the one who has to explain, you don't keep an office like this very long, stepping on corns.' Lang's marginal notes at this point indicate he considered having Wilks at the mirror examining himself, making the comparison to Bertha Duncan explicit, but apparently decided not to. The action of buttoning the sleeves is subtler, and more expressive of Wilks donning his public persona, which is not a simple deception. Wilks now crosses behind his desk and takes his jacket off a hanger. He tells Bannion he is simply asking him, 'not even ordering', to stop bothering Mrs. Duncan. As Wilks puts on his jacket, Bannion indicates that Lucy Chapman's murder may be connected to Duncan's suicide. Wilks rounds the table, leans against it as he listens to Bannion, then circles him to the other end of the desk, tapping him on the shoulder, and advising him that Chapman's murder is outside their jurisdiction. He now rounds the desk and, for the first time, sits behind it – now fully and properly dressed – across from Bannion as he tells Bannion again to stop pestering Mrs. Duncan. Lang cuts to the angle from behind Wilks as Bannion rises and asks 'You still asking me?' The reverse angle shows Wilks



fully ensconced in the position of authority behind his desk as he says, 'No more. I'm telling.' As Bannion leaves the office in angry silence, Lang returns to the shot from behind Wilks' back. Progressively, his donning the suit and assuming his position behind the desk has allowed him to identify with, rather than differentiate himself from, 'the calls from upstairs'. Now his face is removed from us altogether. Lang portrays the conflict in this character in an exterior manner through social *gestus*. Nothing in the scene draws attention to this process, except, perhaps, the things Lang avoids, such as Hitchcockian close-ups making Wilks' drama into a psychological one, or any moralistic denunciation of his hypocrisy. More important than condemning it, Lang shows us how an official takes on the persona of his job. There may be no better example of Lang's termite approach, observing the crucial 50s social tension between self and public presentation.

While the theme of *The Big Heat*, the exposure of hidden corruption, corresponds to the basic logic of melodrama as Peter Brooks finds it in the works of Balzac – the exposure of signs of evil and the restoration of the signs of virtue through the exertion of pressure or violence,²¹ Lang's dramaturgy avoids the methods of melodramatic portrayal. This is why I find Leblanc and Devismes' more melodramatic reading of Wilks' circling movement as the laying of a trap, inadequate. Evil has no single representative in this film, and overt actions like Bannion barging into Lagan's mansion yield nothing but trouble. The image of the phone system persists throughout the film to express the almost incorporeal spread of corruption through the city. The dissolve from Bertha Duncan watching Bannion leave from her window after he has questioned her about Lucy Chapman to a police office teletype printing out the discovery of Lucy's body on a county highway, not only expresses a cause and effect relation (Bertha obviously phones Lagan to let them know Lucy is making trouble), but also a mechanical impersonality and displacement of violent action into the circuits of communication, a Langian reduction of a character to information. The systematic nature of the mob's control of the city makes it a perfect example of the modern Destiny-machine. The interlocking nature of this pervasive corruption is also imaged in Bannion's second meeting with Wilks following his invasion of Lagan's home. As Leblanc and Devismes point out, this scene begins with another significant overlap-dissolve – from the close-up of Lagan which ends the previous scene to Wilks already in the process of chewing out Bannion for his visit to Lagan. Wilks speaks, but Lagan has been imprinted over the scene; Wilks only mouths Lagan's words, responding again to what he calls 'the squeeze from upstairs'. When a mob car bomb intended for Bannion blows up his wife Katie instead, Bannion's meeting with Police Commissioner Higgins (with Wilks in attendance) shows him moving up the echelons of corruption. Once again the conversation centres on phone calls, as Bannion cuts through Higgins' hypocritical condolences

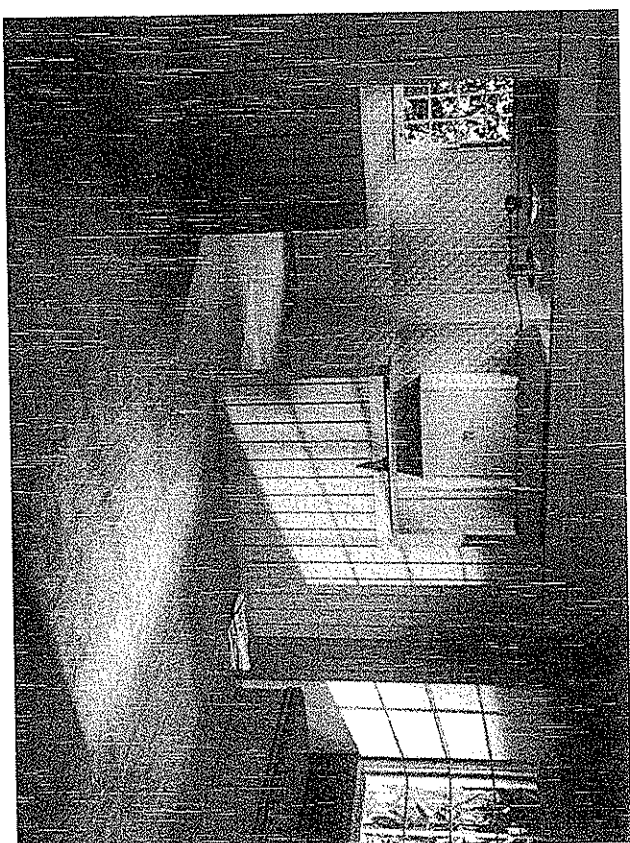
for his wife's death and plans for a phony investigation of her murder, by telling Wilks to 'trot on down to your office and wait for him [Higgins] to call your orders. Oh, he'll phone you, just as soon as he gets his orders from Mike Lagan.' This infuriates Higgins and makes him demand Bannion's suspension, to which Bannion responds by throwing his police badge onto Higgins' desk 'permanently'. But when Higgins asks for his gun as well, Bannion responds that the gun is his, bought and paid for. With this recurring 50s expression of disgust for corrupt systems (think of Cooper throwing his sheriff's badge in the dirt at the end of *High Noon*), Bannion asserts the sort of independence and individuality which Lang's films never cease questioning. In a corrupt city dominated by a system that operates as a Destiny-machine, what effect can Bannion's personal revenge actually have?

Rogue Cop

'This light guided me. More surely than the light of noon-day. To the place where he (well, I knew who) was awaiting me – a place where none appeared' [...] 'To a place where none appeared', Bannion repeated. 'Maybe there wasn't anyone there, Father. Maybe there was never anyone waiting for us after the darkness of the night. That's a rather comical idea, don't you think?'

William P. McGivern, *The Big Heat*²²

Bannion's resignation from the police force is followed by the emptying out of his former home. Lang shows this house in the process of being stripped bare, shot from a slightly high angle which captures its stark, almost geometrical, emptiness. If



the scenes of Bannion's earlier domestic bliss strike some critics as unconvincing.²³ These images reveal the emptiness that (at least potentially) underlay that tranquility, exemplifying Lang's x-ray vision, seeing through to the emptiness at the heart of things, death in life. The images, especially Bannion's point of view shot glancing towards the kitchen before he goes out the door, recall Joe's horror when he returns to his empty apartment towards the end of *Fury* and whimpers, 'Katherine, don't leave me.' Katie Bannion has left for ever, as Lang put it, 'blown to smithereens.'²⁴ Lang uncovers the hollow core of the dream of the suburban home, the centre of 50s ideology.

Lang films in the 50s put homes in an uncertain light. Mae Doyle returns home at the opening of *Clash by Night*, and when she is welcomed back, she responds (in one of Hayes' lines worthy of Ode's), 'Home is where you go when you run out of places.' When Casey Mayo asks Norah Larkin if she is an LA girl, she responds automatically, 'No, I live in Los Angeles, but it's not my home, a comment her domestic life would certainly seem to affirm. In *Moonfleet*, young John Mohune returns to his family estate to find it overgrown and partly in ruins, and in *Human Desire* Jeff admits lots of soldiers in Korea were happy to get away from home. Frieda Grate exaggerates when she claims that Lang does not portray houses in which people dwell, but rather the imposing facades of public buildings,²⁵ since the American films particularly are filled with homes; but, in fact, these homes (from the social trilogy on) are always precarious, threatened with emptiness, houses from which one is turned out, more often than sheltered within.

But if Bannion's home life is now effaced, the memory of it plays a structuring role for his character throughout the rest of the film. He undertakes a work of mourning, as well as revenge, for his dead wife and the 50s ideal she represented. Bannion's ties to the realm of the dead differentiate him from Lang's hubristic enunciator characters. While Bannion does take the law into his own hands, he displays little of the egotism of Lang's master criminals, or even his criminal artists. Bannion reacts mechanically, a function of the Destiny-machine rather than its master. His attempt to identify one of his wife's killers by having his brother-in-law phone The Retreat at 9:30 exactly and ask for the name he has been given (a detail Lang added to the script),²⁶ shows his desire to synchronise the phone with the clock and use the rationality of the system as part of his methodical investigation. But there is no scene that shows an emotional passion beneath this methodical behaviour. Bannion's ego and his desire (other than for revenge) seem to have perished with his home life. Even his obsession is remarkably unemotional and inexpressive. He in many ways resembles a dead man walking, and perhaps recalls Kriemhild more than any other Lang character.

The same question persists in this film that occurs in all of Lang's films involving mourning: is the one left alive capable of working through the mourning process and realising ultimately that they are, in fact, still alive? Or will they become encumbered with death and slip into melancholia, identifying more with the dead than with the living? This question, so vital to Lang in his works in Weimar Germany, surfaces with a new intensity in 50s America. Bannion's abandonment of his previous life creates a deep fissure in his character as he moves into an anonymous world of hotel rooms and nightclubs, the world of Lucy Chapman, rather than Katie Bannion. (Debbie Marsh will comment sarcastically when she enters Bannion's hotel room, 'Hey, I like this - early nothing!') But unlike a 40s private eye, Bannion does not really belong to this world, and this creates the essential tension between normality and deviance that structures so many 50s films.

In the 40s, the *film noir* most often centred on the private eye, rather than the *G-man* who had dominated the final films of the 30s gangster cycle. In the core films of the *noir* series, the private eye often gave in to the seductions of a femme fatale, as in *Out of the Past*, creating a scenario of mutual betrayal, fallen hero and no-good woman. The 50s *film noir* detective more frequently is a member of the police force, a public employee maintaining law and order, rather than a self-employed go-between sorting out sordid affairs behind the cops' backs. But in the strongest 50s *film noirs* the cop hero generates tension within the police force. He chafes against police procedure and carries out his own personal quest for justice or revenge, often becoming a 'rogue cop' (the title of another McGivern novel, also made into a film soon after *The Big Heat* and showing many similarities in theme and character - and demonstrating the difference a director makes), like Bannion, operating outside the police.

This divided hero, representing law and order but literally an outlaw, appears in some of the strongest films of the 50s, including *The Big Heat's* *doppelgänger* Joseph H. Lewis' *The Big Combo*, scripted by Philip Yordan and photographed in the darkest shades of *noir* by John Alton (and the figure also appears in the 'last' *film noir*, Welles' *Touch of Evil*).²⁷ By operating outside the law, the rogue cop affirms an ideal justice untrammelled by official corruption or incompetence, but he also risks becoming indistinguishable from the gangsters he fights (a line whose equivalent could be found in most films in the series is Debbie's caution to Bannion that if he murdered Bertha Duncan there wouldn't be much difference between him and Vince Stone). Thus the plot must resolve the cop's quest not only by defeating the gangster, but with a renunciation of violence by the cop (the climactic scenes of both *The Big Heat* and *The Big Combo* end with the gangster begging the cop to kill them, and the cop refusing). Further, while the femmes fatales in 40s *film noir* usually end up dead with nothing mitigating their own self-description, 'I'm no good' (other than the beauty of the passion they display), the rogue cop films are obsessed with redeeming a woman's virtue, often in the form of rescuing her from a romantic entanglement with the gangster (a plot device in both *Rogue Cop* and *The Big Combo*, as well as *The Big Heat*).

The image of Bannion closing the door on his shattered dream of an all-American home, dissolves to the antithesis of that dream, Debbie Marsh, singing to herself and dancing a solitary rumba as she shakes a martini in the bar of Vince Stone's apartment. While the moral contrast is evident - the hedonistic mistress of a gangster in a home bar replacing the wistful look at the now empty domestic kitchen - Lang does not stress the judgemental overtones. Instead, after these images of emptiness and death, Debbie's energy brings the film back to life. Her vitality stimulates the rest of the film, as her death will bring it to an end. Debbie, like a small number of Lang heroines (Sonja in *Spies*, Jenny in *Man Hunt*), represents Lang's most sympathetic view of women, women allowed to be both sexual and tender, partly because they exist outside the realm of matrimony.

Debbie dwells in an environment of hedonistic narcissism. She repeatedly stops and examines herself in the many mirrors around Vince's apartment. Even in Bannion's 'early nothing' hotel room she immediately gravitates to the mirror. Vince describes her 'career' as, 'six days a week she shops, on the seventh she rests.' Or, as she herself describes her 'expensive fun' to Bannion: 'clothes, travel, expensive excitement', summing it all up with the statement, 'I've been rich and I've been poor - believe me rich is better.' But beneath the obvious trappings of luxury, what is most striking about Debbie is not only her playful liveliness, but her perceptive sar-

casin. It is unclear if Vince even realises she is needing him when she says she has a new perfume which repels men and attracts mosquitoes, or burlesques his subservience to Lagana. She is even willing to needle Lagana himself, although he misses it entirely.

Debbie's life also bores her. Her spontaneity and interest in defying authority combines with her boredom to make her respond in a surprising manner when Bannion kicks Stone out of The Retreat after he burns a bar-girl's hand with his cigarette for picking up a pair of dice too quickly. After Stone's goon frightens off a college boy who objects to Vince's action, Bannion intervenes and calls the goon a thief. Lang cuts immediately to Debbie who reacts with curiosity, and continues to watch this confrontation closely, especially when Bannion stares down Stone and tells him to leave 'while he can still walk'. Debbie offers to buy Bannion a drink, an action which can only be seen as an appreciation of his defying her lover. Bannion refuses the drink, saying he would choke on 'Vince Stone's money'. Debbie's dominant reaction to Bannion seems to be curiosity, a curiosity that soon takes a sexual form when she catches up with him outside, takes his sleeve and suggests going back to his hotel room, shrugging off his insults. In the room Debbie deposits herself on the bed almost immediately and tells Bannion she is there to do 'research'. Her cleverness and sarcasm allow her to brush off Bannion's continued insults.

Colin McArthur has claimed that the story arc of *The Big Heat* follows Bannion's alienation from humanity and his gradual reintegration into the community.²⁸ Much of 50s American action cinema (and one might claim much of American cinema throughout its history) tells some variation of this story. McGivern's novel, particularly through its strong Catholic subtext and references to St. John of the Cross fashions this action as a sort of redemption, and presents Bannion as going through a successful mourning, as the penultimate lines of the novel indicate, 'Something had ended this morning he knew. Now he was starting over, not with hatred, but only sadness.'²⁹ McArthur claims that, 'in both film and novel Bannion's rehumanisation is tracked through his relationship with Debby Ward (Debbie Marsh in the film).'³⁰ This story can be found (and tracked) in the film, and would seem to be present in the original scenario. But I feel that Lang does not truly invest in this tale of redemption and reintegration into the community, and in fact, if anything, undermines and questions it. One can certainly claim a sort of moral awakening for Debbie, but at the price of disfiguration and ultimately death. Lang's film savours the bitterness of this exchange and instead of sketching a redeeming, even if unconsummated, love affair at the centre of his film, tells the much less conventional story of a love affair that does not (cannot) happen, because the hero remains in love with a dead woman, and, through her, with death itself.

Lang dissolves from a shot of Lagana on Stone's terrace overlooking the city at night, an archetypal genre image of the gangster standing before the city he dominates ('the city is yours' sign which beams down on the gangsters in *Underworld* and *Scarface*) to Bannion beginning his investigation in an automobile junkyard. The classical gangster film of the 30s was arranged on a vertical axis, charting the rise and fall of the little Caesar or public enemy. But Bannion, like many of Lang's heroes, plumbs the depths, moving down not only the social scale but into realms that embody death and decay, such as this automobile graveyard with its grotesque denizens, the huge Aitkins guzzling Coca-Cola and his crippled book-keeper, Selma Parker. But as in classical myth, it is from these depths that Bannion is granted aid, as if the dead were more audible in these desolate surroundings. Bannion must shake up the corrupt city from its abject foundations.

The 'big heat' refers to the pressure that will finally descend on the corrupt city and purify it. Bannion evokes it only once, as he makes his final visit to Bertha Duncan's house, the site of his original duping and blindness, now able to see the woman and her house for what it is. This is a scene that Lang added to Boehme's original scenario, drawing on a scene in McGivern's novel, but changing it significantly, as well.³¹ He first notes that nothing in the house has changed yet, meaning that Bertha has not yet begun to live the high life her blackmail of Lagana will bankrupt, but also that it is his vision of the house that has transformed; he now sees the exploitation on which the Duncan household is founded (and, in fact, Mrs. Duncan has added a pearl necklace to her ensemble). Bannion looks at Duncan with the contempt he previously held for Lucy Chapman, whose murder Bertha exults over, and adds that it was her husband's love affair with Lucy that made him feel uncomfortable about being paid off by Lagana. The complete moral blindness of Bannion earlier in the film is now exposed. When Bannion accuses Bertha of protecting Lagana 'for the sake of a soft plush life', she folds her arms in satisfaction and says, 'The coming years are going to be just fine, Mr. Bannion.' In frustration, Bannion not only threatens Duncan, but puts his hands around her throat with intentions of murder, intoning: 'With you gone the big heat falls, the big heat for Lagana, for Stone and for all the rest of the lice.' Bannion no longer seeks simple revenge, but a transformation of the city. His scope and imagery is apocalyptic. Resembling Kriemhild, he dreams of a world scorched and levelled by the fire of justice.

As I mentioned, although deriving from McGivern's novel, Bannion's visit to Duncan has been changed significantly.³² As part of McGivern's narrative of Bannion's gradual conversion away from hate and violence, it is Bannion's conscience that stops him from killing Duncan: 'Bannion's arm came down slowly until the muzzle of the gun pointed at the floor. "I don't have the right to kill you," he said in a low, raging voice.'³³ In Lang's film it is only the arrival of a pair of cops (summoned by another phone call relay – first Bertha Duncan to Lagana, then Lagana to the cops) that makes Bannion take his hands off Bertha's throat. Therefore, if Lang were developing Bannion's gradual rehumanisation, he deliberately avoids a major signpost of his moral ascent.

McArthur's main argument for the centrality of the reintegration and rehumanisation of Bannion comes from his relation to other characters, the number of people who come forth to aid him in his quest for justice: the crippled Selma Parker in the automobile junkyard; the brother-in-law's army buddies; his partner Burke, and, towards the end, Lieutenant Wilkes; and, most crucially, Debbie Marsh. Again there is no question that both the novel and the original scenario are organised around this archetypal American plot of the reintegration of a loner hero (who traditionally at some point declares he doesn't need anybody) into a broader community through mutual aid and a love affair (think of *Rio Bravo* or *Underworld USA*). In the film, as Bannion is leaving his empty house, his partner Burke articulates the democratic ideology behind this story line explicitly, telling Bannion: 'You're on a hate binge. You've decided people are all scared rabbits and you spit on them ... No man's an island, Dave. You can't set yourself against the world and get away with it.' In the original scenario similar advice is given Bannion by the priest, Father Masterson, who has been cut from the film, with Bannion responding, 'I don't need anyone, not you, not the department, no-one!'³⁴

But if the explicit verbal message of the script cannot be denied (and certainly it forms one layer of the palimpsest of the film), Lang's *mise-en-scène* points in

another direction. In the film Bannion does not utter the archetypal phrase about not needing anyone. He simply ignores Burke's homily. Lang, however, supplies a more eloquent response through the powerful images of the empty interior, the hollow space that once held Bannion's life. It is this image that ends the scene, overwhelming any spoken platitudes. Further, if friendship based on aid and especially a love affair chart the conversion of the hero in most American narratives of reintegration (think of Tolly Devlin's changing relation to Cuddles in *Underworld USA*), Bannion's interaction with those that aid him seems extraordinarily inexpressive. In every scene with someone who aids him, Bannion is polite and appreciative, but markedly unemotional and always focused on his goal. Lang's conception of Bannion's character allows no deviation from his purpose; hardly a single line of dialogue is given him as he interacts with those that help him, that does not immediately serve his investigation, as in his conversation with Selma Parker, where even his gratitude is phrased in formal, official tones.

In other words, without making this a pejorative term, Bannion *uses* the people who aid him, and has absolutely no other relation to them. Selma Parker identifies Larry Jordan as the man who arranged the car bomb that killed his wife, but, after the identification is made, she hobbles off as Bannion waves her away, and is never seen again. The sequence which for McArthur most clearly marks Bannion's reintegration, the gathering of his brother-in-law's army buddies to guard the apartment where his daughter is staying when Laguna orders the police guard called off, also maintains Bannion's emotional isolation. He first questions their competence, then, when reassured, politely thanks them. But there is no forging of comradeship. He doesn't join their poker game, or *Rio Bravo* style, start up a community sing. Likewise, when Bannion emerges from the apartment block and finds that Burke and Wilks have taken over the suspended police detail, he is again appreciative, perhaps even a bit moved by Wilks' conversion and willingness to endanger his pension by coming to his aid. But his reaction is notable for its reserve and for his continued refusal of fellowship. When Wilks asks if he wants company, Bannion firmly and laconically refuses. What we see in these scenes is not the forging of a new community, but an image familiar from Lang's Weimar thrillers – the armed mobilisation of the city, the conversion of an apartment living room into a bivouac for an army squad. Domesticity has been definitively effaced from this film and the paramilitary logic of 50s society has emerged into the open. Now the good people have guns as well as the gangsters. Ernst Junger's image of total mobilisation simply had a domestic veneer in 50s America and in Lang's film has been blown away.

Bannion's emotional reserve needs careful description. He is not an alienated psychopath seething with hatred for the human race (indeed a portrayal in that vein, such as Robert Ryan's performance in Nick Ray's *On Dangerous Ground*, could lead to the highly psychologised interior performance I am claiming Lang avoids). Bannion responds to the aid given him – Glenn Ford's kind eyes and occasional half smile showing his humanity – but minimally, and never deviates into fellowship. Rather than a neurotic, Bannion is driven by instrumental reason: every word he speaks, every action he takes is calculated to further his ends. To defeat the Destiny-machine of the city's pervasive corruption Bannion must adopt its machine-like operation. In this respect, Bannion is like Lang in the 50s, adapting his style to the system.

His relationship with Debbie Marsh, which, if conventional Hollywood patterns were followed, should provide the centre of his conversion, carefully, if subtly,

avoids emotional interaction. Thus in her first trip to his hotel room in which her motivations are obviously erotic curiosity and an immediate attraction to Bannion (as well as, as Bannion, with his ability to see the purposes underlying actions, tells her, the desire to get back at Vince Stone for leaving her at the bar), Debbie encounters a complete check. Every one of Bannion's questions, although disguised as small talk, aims at eliciting information from her, which Debbie (pretty perceptive about motives, herself) tells him she is not going to offer ('I didn't come up here to talk out of school'). Debbie's attempt to edge him toward the erotic causes an almost toxic reaction on Bannion's part (in a muted way his most expressive acting). It also turns him nasty as he insults Debbie with an even worse version of the contempt he showed Lucy Chapman: 'I wouldn't touch anything of Vince Stone's with a ten foot pole.' Lang underscores the viciousness of this remark by having it lead directly into the film's most famous scene: Vince Stone destroying Debbie's face with scalding coffee. Both men have treated her with derision.

But an initial encounter like this could simply set up the transformation into a love affair the conversion and rehumanisation plot calls for, especially after Debbie's definitive break with Stone and her redemptive suffering. But if anything, during Debbie's second trip to Bannion's hotel room after she has been burned, Bannion displays his single-minded focus even more mechanically. As Debbie comes in sobbing in pain and fear, he systematically asks her who was at the apartment, maintains his distance and offers not a single word of comfort or sympathy, his willingness to hide her at his hotel being simply pragmatic. Debbie finally explodes at this treatment and confronts him with his coldness and his responsibility in her injury ('You don't care. You don't care what happened to me. You don't care about anything or anybody. I was followed when I came here with you, – that's why I got this!'). This could constitute the emotional centre of the scene in a conventional approach, and indeed it does mark the moral centre. But Lang withholds Bannion's reaction to Debbie's comment – if he has any – filming him from the back. His politeness does kick in as he offers Debbie a drink, but Lang refuses to develop a sense of intimacy or compassion on his part.

If Bannion's third scene with Debbie shows him at his most polite, the refusal of intimacy or emotion is most clearly thematised and directly tied to his mourning and alignment with the world of death. When Debbie asks him about his wife he responds with what Debbie calls 'a police description', the Langian motif of a person reduced to information, here especially bitter since it is Bannion describing his beloved: 'Twenty-seven years old, light hair, grey eyes.' When Debbie asks for more personal details, Bannion stands up and removes himself from Debbie's proximity, standing with his back to her (and to us) at the window. Debbie apologises for bringing her up (the second time she has evoked the erotic and gotten a toxic reaction on Bannion's part). She redirects the conversation into a more comfortable groove: the progress of Bannion's investigation. For the two shot of their discussion, Lang creates one of the more unusual (although typically Langian) compositions in the film, a high-angle shot from a height a little above Bannion, with his back on the left of the frame and Debbie seated in the chair in the corner on the right. As Leblanc and Devisnes indicate, this underscores the lack of eye contact between them.³⁵ However, since the cuts between their close-ups are based on eyelines, the angle serves mainly to stress the disparity between them, allowing a two shot even though one is standing and the other sitting.

After detouring away from Katie Bannion, the centre of this conversation becomes Bertha Duncan as Bannion explains to Debbie, that Bertha is holding her

husband's suicide confession as blackmail over Lagana, and that she therefore constitutes a stone wall for Bannion who wants the contents of the letter to surface. 'If she dies the letter goes to the newspaper. I almost killed her an hour ago. I should have.' Debbie responds to this with the archetypal line, indicating that Bannion couldn't kill Bertha, that if he did, he would be like Vince Stone. However, Bannion shows no repentance for his earlier attempted murder, only a regret it was interrupted. It is Debbie who is preserving a high standard of morality, rather than Bannion. Once again Lang denies us an insight into Bannion's reaction to Debbie, this time by interrupting the scene with another phone call, informing him of the danger to his little girl, since the police guard has been removed. He rushes out, throwing a revolver on the bed, and saying perhaps his nastiest (unintentionally?) line to Debbie, 'Keep that for company'. Freudian overtones are unnecessary to make clear that the only companionship Bannion can offer her is a deadly mechanism.

Systematically, then, Lang has raised the possibility of an erotic relationship building between Debbie and Bannion, based on sexual attraction, sacrifice, need, emotional expression and a higher morality. Just as systematically he has dodged it, using this emotional possibility as a foil for Bannion's single-minded focus on his revenge. Contrary to more traditional psychological drama, this contrast does not generate emotional tension between Debbie's offer of emotional sustenance and Bannion's death-ridden obsession. There will be no culmination in which Bannion breaks down and acknowledges he needs Debbie, no scene (like the one between Sandy and Tolly in *Underworld USA*) where a wiser character dresses Bannion down and shows him the value of what Debbie is offering. Lang's view remains exterior, morally observing, rather than creating empathy or psychological drama. Bannion remains a representative of what Siegfried Kracauer, in his study of the detective novel, called the '*ratio*'. In his methodical investigation and elimination of his foes, Bannion employs violence not as emotional expression but as a tool of instrumental reason.³⁶

The Big Heat Falls Alike on the Just and the Unjust

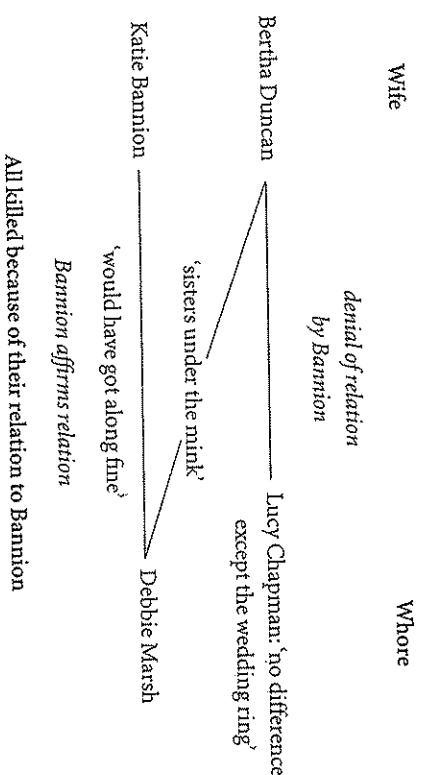
The Big Heat differs from the classical detective novels Kracauer studied in its fascination with violence. For Tzvetan Todorov, the increase in violent action, as the detective actually struggles with the criminals he pursues, separates the 'thriller' as developed by Hammett and Chandler, with its visceral dragging of violence into the centre of the plot, from the classical detective story in which the violence occurs before the narrative and the detective primarily uses his (or her) intellect to explain it.³⁷ As I have indicated, in *The Big Heat*, violence primarily takes on the melodramatic role of exerting pressure on the surface of reality into order to make it yield up the truth. This is the apocalyptic energy of the 'big heat' which, to paraphrase William Blake, will melt apparent surfaces away and display the truth which was hidden. For Bannion this revelatory violence takes the form of strangling, most clearly in the scene where he finally encounters Larry Jordan, throttles him and says, 'When I let go, start talking'. Bannion squeezes off the breath of life in order to start the flow of words, extorting information from the recalcitrant gangster. He tries the same thing with Bertha Duncan, but gets interrupted.

But there is another current of violence in this film which involves not gasping for air, but burning with fire. Exerted primarily by the gangsters and primarily against women, it moves from Lucy Chapman's off screen cigarette burns ('I saw

them', says Bannion to the coroner as he snuffs out his own cigarette, 'every single one of them'), to the flaming car Bannion pulls his wife from, to Stone putting his cigarette out on the B-girl's hand (a detail Lang added to the original scenario),³⁸ to the boiling pot of coffee Debbie receives in the face, matched, then, by the scalding she gives Vince in the climactic scene. The effect of such heat on a woman's skin remains perhaps the most indelible image from this film, particularly in its final unveiling by Debbie, who seems to delight in the horror her face inspires in Stone as she rips off her bandages. It is this image of female flesh burned and scarred that underlies the *ratio* of Bannion's investigation.

Bannion's investigation takes the initial mis-step of not taking Lucy Chapman seriously because of his preconception about the moral status of a B-girl. Bannion's earlier domestic life sharply contrasts with the bachelor culture portrayed by *The Blue Gardenia*, but he looks on unattached women with the same reification as Harry Prebble, only instead of prowling the hunting ground, he remains ensconced at home, avoiding women of dubious reputation. However, the film makes it clear that the moral standing of Lucy and Bertha Duncan is actually the inverse of their marital status: Lucy's love led to Tom Duncan's 'soul-searching'. *The Big Heat* adopts the basic dualism of the rogue cop series most clearly in its treatment of women, but the ideology which divides women along a grid of sexual morality consistently reveals itself to be dangerously fallacious. The burden of a dichotomy of wife and whore which blinds Bannion's initial reception of Lucy's information becomes visualised, almost allegorised, in Debbie's burned face, glimmers on one side, hideous on the other. But rather than recalling traditional Christian allegories of the diseased woman's body as an emblem of the dangers of lust, or, as McArthur reads it, as a sign of her dubious morals,³⁹ Debbie's face carries the imprint of male violence, a violence that she tries to get Bannion to accept his responsibility in causing, but which we never see him do. By the end of the film Bannion achieves his exposé, and seems to renounce violence as he refuses to shoot Vince Stone, but his quest is littered with the bodies of dead women. As Bannion gets up from Debbie after she dies, Lang slowly overlap-dissolves to a newspaper rising, as if from her dead body, proclaiming: 'LAGANA, HIGGINS, INDICTED! Duncan Confession Exposes Crime Syndicate'. With a nearly allegorical superimposition Lang reveals the deadly foundation of Bannion's success.

We could diagram the women involved in Bannion's exposé this way:





But what is striking about Bannion's investigation is not the women it accumulates as passive victims, but the fact that Lucy Chapman and Debbie Marsh, respectively, initiate and resolve the process for him. In spite of his instrumental logic, Bannion on his own achieves very little. It is Debbie Marsh who truly carries out his revenge (along with a bit of her own) and breaks through the stone wall of Bertha Duncan. The most thorough and perceptive critics of this film, Leblanc, Devismes and McArthur have all described the ambiguity of Bannion's relation to Debbie's shooting of Mrs. Duncan. Is this Bannion's ultimate instrumental use of the women around him, getting Debbie to commit this murder for him? Actually, McGivern's novel is most explicit about this; Debbie explains as she calls Bannion after shooting Bertha, 'She had the note, and you couldn't kill her. Well I could. It was easy.'⁴⁰ But to what extent is Bannion actually manipulating Debbie? As McArthur says of Bannion's last conversation with her in which he describes Bertha as the obstacle to defeating the gangsters, 'Bannion's remarks here are tantamount to asking Debbie to kill Bertha Duncan.'⁴¹ Leblanc and Devismes concentrate on the visual action at the end of the scene, where Bannion throws a revolver on the bed for Debbie (the one, in fact, that she will use to kill Bertha), and rushes out, leaving the hotel room door open, as if after explaining how necessary Mrs. Duncan's death is, he gives her the means and clears the way for her to do it.⁴² Similarly, the hook between scenes in which Burke and Wilks ask Bannion if he is going to Bertha Duncan's house and Debbie's arrival there merges the action of the two characters. Bannion answers, none too convincingly, 'no', followed by a dissolve to the Duncan's door bell ringing as she comes downstairs. Debbie stands at the door, but the connection between scenes makes it seem that she simply completes Bannion's (denied) intention.

But one should not minimise Debbie's own achievement in her murder of Bertha and scalding of Vince (as she says to Vince, 'The lid's off the garbage can, and I did it!'). The motif of Debbie looking at herself in mirrors in the first half of the film

conveyed her narcissism, her concern with her beauty. One could also point out that this concern has economic as much as psychological motives; Debbie is aware that her ticket to the wealth she has enjoyed has been her beauty and ability to attract a rich protector like Vince Stone (she says to Bannion in their first hotel meeting, 'Did you think I was an heiress or something before I met Vince?'). Checking her face is like reading the stock market quotes, making sure her future is secure. Thus, just before he douses it with boiling coffee, Vince watches Debbie examining herself in the mirror and says, 'That's a real pretty kisser', and she replies 'Isn't it though?' Vince's violence displays not simply psychopathic rage, but a calculated sadism, destroying Debbie's collateral in a sexist society. As she says as she is dying, 'Vince shouldn't have ruined my looks, it was a rotten thing to do.'

Debbie's duality, reflected both in her emblem, the mirror and the bifurcation of her face, takes on another twist when she visits Bertha Duncan. Lang reveals Bertha's financial downfall from her husband's death in stages (in contrast to the original scenario which speaks of her diamond ring in the first scene with Bannion),⁴³ so that Bertha's mink coat visible as she lets Debbie in the front door, has a sort of climactic effect; she is now fully dressed in her role as bloodsucker. Debbie enters wearing her mink coat (and Gloria Grahame's ability to make it swish is one of the few arguments against animal rights activists). Since her scalding, Debbie has avoided mirrors and here the blocking – the two women moving towards the camera abreast, then turning and facing each other directly – invokes mirroring. Debbie articulates the *doppelgänger* effect when she explains to Bertha, in one of the film's best lines, 'We're sisters under the mink.' But if Bertha is Debbie's double, she rejects, the calculating bloodsucker who doesn't care where the money comes from. Thus as Bertha goes to make another death-dealing phone call (telling Vince Stone to come pick Debbie up), Debbie uses Bannion's revolver to drill her at the same desk where her husband died. Bertha flops under the desk onto the floor, as Debbie tosses the gun down, too. She will use a different weapon on Vince.

The direct visual connections tying Debbie's murder of Bertha to Bannion continue with an overlap-dissolve from the shot of the abandoned revolver, thrown on the floor by Debbie as it was earlier tossed on the bed by Bannion, to a shot of Bannion, his back to the camera, looking into a window display. This is one of the last display windows Lang will film in his career. Bannion's identity as a man without any desire, except to carry out his revenge, is starkly imaged by the complete contrast between this shot of window-shopping and every other one in Lang's *œuvre*. Although we see a mannequin wearing women's clothes, this plate glass window appears primarily as a reflecting mirror. Bannion does not look into it: there is nothing there he wants. Instead he uses it to keep an eye on the building across the street, Stone's residence, and turns his head towards us only as he (and we) see, in the window's reflection, a car drive up and a man enter the building. Exactly what Bannion intends by watching Stone's apartment is unclear. If his intentions are homicidal, Debbie is there before him, and Bannion only enters after Stone shoots her, supplying a crime he can charge Stone with red-handed.

The final conversation between Bannion and Debbie as she dies not only completes the conversation Bannion earlier refused, but allows Bannion to realise and affirm that Katie and Debbie 'would have gotten along fine', a statement that erases, or at least denies, the sexist (and class) dichotomy which structured so much of the film. But he is only able to speak this way to her when (because?) she is dying. What are we to make of his death-bedside manner? Several forces are operating here and

while any one of them makes sense, they are, as often happens in American cinema's dream logic, rather mutually exclusive. First, Bannion's work is accomplished; he can again return to the living and express the tenderness (for his wife, as well as for Debbie) that he has repressed throughout the second half of the film. This would indicate that the process of revenge, including its violence, has been cathartic for him, his mourning has been completed. In a second reading, the sexist dichotomy has not been purged from the film, merely upheld by a fatal sacrifice. Debbie could kill Bertha Duncan because she is already tainted, and the stain on her virtue could only be eliminated with her death, and it is only the purified, dying Debbie who could be equated with Katie (McArthur seems to read Debbie this way).⁴⁴ A third reading, (for me the most Langian, but perhaps only the most Gunningian) would see Bannion as still immersed in the realm of death and able to commune tenderly with Debbie precisely because she, too, now approaches that world. The tone of his voice here not only expresses a tenderness totally lacking since his wife's death, but an immersion in a memory of past time as he invokes not only his dead wife, but his life with her which has been destroyed. His speech mourns the domestic tranquility he once possessed, that middle class *intérieur* we saw emptied out.

In constructing Bannion, then, Lang invoked the typical action hero of the 50s, the man who takes the law into his own hands, restores justice and in the process gains (or regains) a new sense of community and an ability to love, the drama, as McArthur says, of rehumanisation and reintegration. However, a close examination, especially of the author-text rather than the genre-text (these are, as McArthur does not seem to acknowledge, different approaches and highlight different aspects of the text they are applied to) shows Lang resisting the emotional catharsis and psychological approach of most such films. Boehm's original scenario actually included a happy ending where Debbie (who in this version did not kill Bertha, — who was shot by Laguna instead — and therefore has no legal charges hanging over her) survives. A surgeon even indicates her scars can be healed, and a marriage with Bannion seems to be in the future. Bannion and Burke leave the hospital as dawn breaks to go to have breakfast with Bannion's daughter. Here the drama of reintegration is fully imaged, with a return to both the force and the family, a replacement wife for Bannion and middle-class redemption for Debbie. Lang eliminated all this and returned to a more pessimistic ending drawn partly from McGivern's novel. Rather than portraying a romance of transformation and redemption, Lang maintains a distanced observation, highlighting moral ambiguities and social *gestus*.

The last images of the film portray a return to normality as Bannion is back at his desk and the routine of the office begins again. The version of the scenario (dated 4 March) that introduced this new ending describes it as 'nearly a repetition of the first scene' (referring obviously to a different beginning than Duncan's suicide). Even without this literal circularity, one feels that the film is beginning again and that the 'The End' imprinted on the scene intervenes arbitrarily. The absorption back into the everyday routine could be seen as the final step of Bannion's reintegration, but even McArthur comments, 'The bleak cycle has begun once more, picking up on the film's final sense of limbo. Bannion's mechanical routine does not visibly differ from his earlier behaviour. The success of Bannion's revenge is portrayed in a cold headline, a new newspaper story cancelling out the previous newspaper story of Duncan's suicide which filled the screen earlier. There is no community shown welcoming the news, no reunited family to find happiness in its promise of a new life. For an apocalypse, very little has changed; perhaps Bannion

only brought the 'little heat'. Has Bannion returned from the realm of the dead, or is he still wandering among them? Lang again refuses to tell us. Perhaps the ultimate critique of 50s culture is that normal life does not look so very different, whether the mob has been defeated or not, whether Bannion has completed the work of mourning or not. Bannion's last line as he exits to go out on another case is, 'Keep the coffee hot, Hugo.' Something is kept warm — but coffee? Can you drink it after you watch this film?

- 24 A. W. Merrill, et al., *Book Two: History and Identification of Old Telephones*, quoted in Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989), p. 301.
- 25 Bergstrom, pp. 105–6.
- 26 Kaplan, pp. 83–9.
- 27 Elizabeth Cowie, 'Film Noir and Women', pp. 121–65.
- 28 Kaplan, p. 85.
- 29 P. Ye, 'Trusting the Tale: Lang and Suppressive Narrative', in Michael Koller and Clare Stewart (eds), *Fritz Lang: Traps for the Mind and Eye* (Melbourne: Melbourne Cinematheque, 1998), p. 28, also makes the point of Crystal's *mise-en-scène*.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 This was the original subtitle for Benjamin's Arcades Project. See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, pp. 33–4.
- 32 Bergstrom, p. 108.
- 33 Ibid.

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- 1 Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, p. 20.
- 2 Colin McArthur, *The Big Heat* (London: BFI Film Classics, 1992), pp. 50–3.
- 3 Janet Bergstrom, 'The Mystery of *The Blue Gardenia*', p. 118 n. 26. The original article was written by Friedrich Porjes 'Eine Kamera, die alles sieht: Fritz Lang erfand das "Openglas" System' from the *Berliner Morgenpost*, 27 February 1953.
- 4 Gerard Leblanc and Brigitte Devismes, *Le Double scénario chez Fritz Lang*, pp. 204–5.
- 5 Ibid., p. 23.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Colin McArthur also points out the way the Bannion household operates in opposition to both the previously seen homes and *The Retreat*, p. 58.
- 8 Bertolt Brecht, 'On Gestic Music', in *Brecht on Theatre* (ed.) John Willett, pp. 104–5.
- 9 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 205.
- 10 McArthur, p. 43.
- 11 Ibid., p. 46.
- 12 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 19.
- 13 McArthur, pp. 24–5.
- 14 Peter Baxter, *Just Watch: Sternberg, Paramount and America* (London: BFI, 1993), p. 7.
- 15 'Inter-Office Communication April 10, 1953, to Mr. Fritz Lang on the part of Robert Arthur.' This memo is quoted in Leblanc and Devismes, p. 19, in French and I have translated it back into English, so the phrasing may not be exact.
- 16 Leblanc and Devismes, pp. 77–89.
- 17 Ibid., p. 87.
- 18 Ibid., p. 88.
- 19 McArthur, pp. 16–17.
- 20 Leblanc and Devismes, '... Willis is compromised and has "dirty hands"', p. 86.
- 21 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 125, 154.
- 22 William McGivern, *The Big Heat* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 73. Bannion is quoting St. John of the Cross.
- 23 Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 10.
- 24 Ibid., p. 85.
- 25 Frieda Gräfe, in [Gräfe, Enno Patajas, Hans Prinzier], *Fritz Lang*, p. 50.
- 26 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 38.
- 27 Tom Flinn in his article 'The Big Heat and The Big Combo: Rogue Cops and Mink-Coated Girls' compares these two films and discusses the figure of the 'rogue cop', *Vélvet Light Trap*, no. 11, 1974, pp. 23–38.
- 28 McArthur, pp. 18–22, 66–76.

alienation of the urban environment. But Lang's visionary cinema did not end

- 29 McGivern, p. 183.
- 30 McArthur, p. 20.
- 31 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 146–7.
- 32 McArthur also makes this point, although he does not draw my conclusion, p. 20.
- 33 McGivern, p. 160.
- 34 Leblanc and Devismes, pp. 35.
- 35 Ibid., p. 150.
- 36 Siegfried Kracauer, *Le Roman Policier* (Paris: Payot, 1972).
- 37 Tzvetan Todorov, 'Detective Fiction', in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 47–8.
- 38 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 39.
- 39 McArthur, p. 74.
- 40 McGivern, p. 167.
- 41 McArthur, pp. 72–3.
- 42 Leblanc and Devismes, p. 151.
- 43 Ibid., p. 23.
- 44 McArthur, p. 74.

Chapter 17: *While the City Sleeps/Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 219.
- 2 Gerard Legrand, 'L'effacement des traces', *Positif*, no. 248, November 1981, p. 65.
- 3 Patrick McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, p. 418.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 James L. Limbacher, *Four Aspects of Film* (New York: Brussel and Brussel, 1968), p. 112.
- 6 Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, p. 225.
- 7 Jean Domarchi, 'Lang le constructeur', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 63, October 1956, pp. 40–1.
- 8 Jacques Rivette, 'The Hand', p. 140. McGilligan attributes this quote to Stephen Jenkins.
- 9 Jonathan Rosenbaum, in personal conversation, September 1999.
- 10 Legrand, p. 65.
- 11 Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 102.
- 12 E. Ann Kaplan, 'Patterns of Violence toward Woman in Fritz Lang's *While the City Sleeps*, *Wide Angle*, vol. 3 no. 4, 1980, p. 57.
- 13 Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 106.
- 14 Stephen Jenkins, 'Lang: Fear and Desire', p. 55, for illustrations, pp. 58–9.
- 15 For one contemporary account of the concerns over comic books see Robert Marshow 'Paul, the Horror Comics and Dr. Wertham' (1954), in *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), pp. 83–104.
- 16 Legrand, p. 65.
- 17 Edgar A. Poe, 'The Purloined Letter', in *Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 696.
- 18 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 48.
- 19 Philippe Arnaud in his essay 'Beyond a Reasonable Story' in Bernard Eisenschitz and Paolo Bertetto (eds), *Fritz Lang*, also compares the film to Poe's story, see p. 423.
- 20 Serge Daney, quoted in Georges Sturim, *Fritz Lang: Films/Texts/References*, p. 157, from *Cine-journal* 1981–86 (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1986), pp. 15–18.
- 21 Sturim, p. 157.
- 22 Raymond Bellour, 'Double Vi', in Eisenschitz and Bertetto (eds), p. 440.
- 23 See especially the note he quotes without analysing in detail 'suspicion on Spencer' about a scene not shot, but clearly revealing Lang's intention – Arnaud, p. 426.
- 24 Lang discusses this concern in Bogdanovich, p. 109, and in letters to Lotte Eisner reprinted in Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p. 359.
- 25 Bazin's review of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, 'Un incroyable film' originally appearing in *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, no. 405, 20 October 1957, p. 46, is summarised in E. Ann Kaplan, *Fritz Lang: A Guide*, pp. 208–9. Lang's comments on the script are in Charles Higgin and Joe Greenberg (eds), *The Celluloid Muse*, p. 123.