6

DRUGS, CRIME AND OTHER WORLDS

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Democratising the field of enquiry

Welcome to the marginal places that the obedient citizen rarely encounters. Welcome to the deviant places through which no god-fearing middle-class person would ever dare wander. And welcome to the parts of cities and towns where fearful prejudice forbid you to go. Enter the literary world of narcotics, theft, murder and weird technology, of back street alleys, cocktail penthouses and paranoid suburbs, of the lo-fi, the downbeat and the popular, of crime, sci-fi, sex and drugs. In all of this beware of the pushers, pimps and androids, who curl a beckoning finger and invite you to take a trip into the type of novels and buildings historically frowned upon by the great and good of the Academy. But be equally beware of the frock-coated sages who reside within and who ridicule the idea that pulp fiction and the garden shed have aesthetic and cultural value and who shake at the proposition that the pigeon racer's dovecot should sit alongside the Opera House or that the novels of Dashiell Hammett should be allocated space next to Hemingway.

Forty years ago the literary sub-genres of crime, sci-fi, sex and drugs, along with the architectural structures famously dismissed by Niklaus Pevsner as mere buildings, at best occupied the margins of literary and architectural scholarship. They were like 'guilty pleasures' wrapped in brown paper, something to be consumed surreptitiously.[1] Since then it is tempting to think that the battle against such intellectual conservatism has largely been won and to be sure there are now peer-reviewed journals and anthologies devoted to both science fiction and crime that nestle alongside critical works on Joyce, Mann and Woolf.[2] In a similar vein, architectural students are just as likely to hear discourses on prisons, bus stops and haunted houses as lectures on iconic modern masters like Gropius, Mies van de Rohe and Le Corbusier.

FIGURE 6.1 'Uncovering marginalised histories', alley wall, Glasgow

But this new-found status for the previously ignored did not occur overnight or without a struggle, and was very much part of a cultural revolution after the Second World War that sought to democratise the field of that deemed worthy of study. New narratives began to emerge that aimed to uncover the forgotten and marginalised histories of the disenfranchised and dispossessed, and to illustrate social history with the material and cultural phenomena that make up the fabric of actual real life.[3] 'The Making of the English Working Class' meant not only understanding the political subject in terms of class, but also gender and race and this was paralleled in an appreciation of the cultural importance of popular music, literature and film – that is, the study *not* of what intellectuals thought people should be reading or listening to, but what they actually *were*.[4] In the spirit of this *critique of every day life*, architectural and urban history began to discover the value of the commonplace, the ugly and the ordinary. It began to take seriously and non-judgementally the iconography of the street and how people appropriated and used the city in unforeseen and unregulated ways.[5]

France was at the epi-centre of this politico-linguistic revolution that infused social history with a new geographical and spatial narrative. The Situationists' 'revolutionary urbanism', Lefebvre's 'differential space' and Foucault's 'heterotopia', redirected our gaze to the sites of difference – of rebellion, of the covert and underground, to the places and spaces that fall outside of the normal pathologies of power and governance.[6]

It was the start of a deluge. Certeau and Auge added the transitory 'non-places' of supermodernity, such as the motorway, the airport lounge and the waiting lobby, whilst George Perec contributed *Species of Space* and 'All the bedrooms I have slept in'. Meanwhile Virillio offered an idiosyncratic index of ideas on the architecture of war, cinema and optics, and Vidler the architectural 'uncanny' and 'warped'.[7] There were many more besides, but what is significant is that urban theory and history became a lot more interesting as it began to investigate and narrate the multiplicity of spaces and places that the writers of fiction had been playing with since the nineteenth century. For novelists, the architect's and urbanist's belated discovery of the 'marginal' and 'fleeting', of the leftover spaces of everyday life must have seemed somewhat bizarre. On the other hand it was a timely reminder of the literary and political potential of exploring some of the new typologies of space thrown up by contemporary capitalism that the genres of crime, drugs and sci-fi are particularly adept at dealing with. Through such literature we can be marooned underneath a traffic intersection in Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974), wired up on a micro-chipped inhabited bridge in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), or hanging around in the prison car-park waiting for news of Gary Gilmore's death in Mailer's *Executioner's Song* (1979).

However despite the chronotopic novelty of such modern tales, their underlying themes – murder, theft, sexual desire, narcotic pleasure and the imagination of other worlds – are strikingly familiar. In fact they are as old as literature and as ancient as the first declarations of private property. Parricide, robbery, corruption and detection have haunted the literary imagination forever, from the 'golden age' fiction of Christie and Chandler, to the Brothers Karamazov all the way back to Cain and Abel. Narratives of carnal delight, corporeal deviancy and excess have a similarly long-standing literary history. One only has to think of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1351), and in particular Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532) that set the template for writers from Lautreamont to Bukowski on how to explore the taboos and conventions of the world around them.[8] As for making a critique of the present through the imagination of some other state in which civilisation has either collapsed or been rebuilt in an ideal form, this too possesses a lineage that stretches back centuries. It is quite literally a bibliographic space–time adventure that begins with the classic dystopian texts of the twentieth century, passes through the dream worlds of Francis Bacon and Thomas More, and eventually arrives in the pages of Plato's Republic.[9]

What transforms these ancient literary examples of social criticism into recognisably *modern* genres, exemplified by the novels featured in this part of the book by Peace, Waites, Trocchi and Dick, is the *urbanisation* of their narratives. Again, this is to be entirely expected. The modern crime novel can only come of age when the professional detective first stalks the city in Dickens and Dostoevsky. The modern dystopian and sci-fi novel is only possible when the modern city has been built and found wanting. And the modern sex and drug novel emerges only when the city is complex, layered and multi-dimensional enough to hide its secrets.

True to the unsentimental realism that is typical of such genres, there are no fairy-tale endings in the *Red Riding Quartet*, the *Life of Cain*, or *A Scanner Darkly*. There may be a glimmer of hope in which the recovering addict regains keys to a home, the nasty case is resolved, and the utopian dream of the good society survives the secret police, but there is little in the way of the sort of warmth that comes from reconciliation or redemption.[10] No, these are stories that are buried to their necks in alienation, paranoia and moral corruption, in which the 'wasteland', the subterranaean 'gothic' and urban disintegration are recurring themes.[11] In Dick we stumble through entropic ruins, in Peace and Waites, urban dereliction and in Trocchi watery industrial hinterlands. These are portraits of cities that have unravelled, and that are scarred by destabilising forms of social and spatial inequality. They are cities in which the architecture of prosperity is juxtaposed with poverty and disease. They are collage cities fractured by a split reality in which subjective and social alienation from the world of work and the normal conventions of civil society are realised in real time and space; cities in which streets, urban blocks and suburban estates echo with warnings: 'No Entry – Private Property', 'Caution – Armed Guard', 'Danger – Radioactive Zone', 'Warning – This area is controlled by CCTV', 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted', 'Humans Only', 'No baseball caps, children, Irish and Dogs'.

The prospects for tranquillity and peace are remote in such novels. The contradictions of the capitalist city seem almost irreconcilable, such that even departure to a new planet is no guarantee of liberty or happiness. It is a form of intellectual pessimism that verges on political hopelessness. A crime might be solved but somehow the system that incubated such activities stays intact. A revolution happens but rapidly descends into surveillance hell and scarcity. The drugs provide momentary respite but the addict dies. Despite this we remain drawn to such bleak stories of unrelenting gloom. One reason for this is that tales about the restoration of reason, the realisation of social freedom, love fulfilled, and of an ideal family and home seem somehow implausible. The fear is that utopia is boring, and that a society without conflict can no longer produce exciting stories (Jameson 2005: 82).

Deeper into the urban familiar

If as detectives we were to trace the urban and architectural history of the modern crime novel our notebooks would fill with an offbeat but recognisable spatial history of twentieth-century capitalism. Symbolically the scene of the crime shifts from the 'boulevard' to the 'highway', from the affluent country house to the poverty-stricken estate, and from intoxicated gambling dens to the HQ of the corporation. A more thorough investigation would reveal a detailed inventory of familiar 'non-places', 'differential spaces' and 'heterotopias'. 'There is nothing out of the ordinary, officer.' The evidence points to crimes in bedrooms, cafes, lobbies and telephone boxes, at street corners, airports and doctors' surgeries. Two men

FIGURE 6.2 'At home with the unfamiliar', tourist bus, Cardiff

are shot outside the pub. There are deals going down in car parks, bodies buried on building sites, and fugitives pushed under trains. There are junkies in an alley with a baseball bat. Covert operatives are whispering in graveyards, unaware the dead have ears and gravestones microphones. Phone calls report that Daddy is being brutal in the kitchen or depressed with a gassy hose in the garage.

Peter Clandfield's essay underlines these quotidian themes in his survey of recent crime fiction. In *Dark Blood*, the paedophile is burnt out of his suburban home. In the *Marx Sisters* the old street is murdered to make way for finance capital and in *Red Riding* violent racists and misogynists commit the unspeakable whilst ordinary people go shopping, pay electricity bills and take the rubbish out. In such novels the mean streets and heroic detectives of the golden age are a distant memory and have long been replaced by white-collar crime and the institutionalised corruption of the body politic. The smoky backrooms of underground bars and mysterious deep throats still figure, but modern subterfuge and embezzlement can just as easily occur in the closed chamber of a covert council meeting or at a computer terminal in a thoroughly ordinary office block.

True to form these twists on the crime genre still boast high body counts, grisly murders, unexplained deaths and the strains of police procedurals. But a new twist is added. Architecture and urban development not only provide the backdrop and setting through which the crime narrative unfolds, but as arenas notorious for

financial speculation, kick backs, money laundering and the suspension of democratic procedures they become the 'objects of crime', 'whose control and definition are at stake, and whose pursuit grounds individual crimes from bribery and fraud to assault and murder.'[12] It is a plotline that recalls Chester Himes' epic re-depiction of New York in the *Harlem Cycle* (1959) in which urban restructuring and urban demolition translates into a violent confrontation – 'murder the neighbourhood and you murder the Afro American' (Gifford 2010: 43–6). And it echoes Marx's description of the reconstruction of Paris as a series of 'colossal robberies committed upon the city … by the great financial companies and contractors … ' (Marx 1969: 414).

Meanwhile in the cities of late twentieth-century Britain, history is repeating itself as contemporary experiments in the privatisation and gentrification of urban space provoke their own tales of illegitimacy. Barry Maitland's description of the redevelopment of Jerusalem Lane is clearly analogous to Canary Wharf, controversially built on top of the old working-class area of east London's Isle of Dogs. Peace tells us of dodgy builders, of gypsy camps burnt down for malls, and of northern cities of the dead. Waites reserves a walk-on part for the real-life figure of T. Dan Smith, the notorious tower block speculator, and the ghost of Donald Trump hovers over McBride's Aberdeen. In such scenarios architecture and land development are the battlegrounds in which profits are sought, images sold, and crimes occur. But it is a vision of a 'modern' architecture that bears little relation to the socially progressive ideals of the modern movement that Clandfield argues have been co-opted and deformed by the financial priorities of the real estate market and building industry.

A parallel forensic search through the locational and spatial archaeology of dystopian and science fiction literature would produce a similar inventory of buildings and environments that whilst superficially strange and alien are somehow recognisably familiar. We might find ourselves searching for the miracle orb inside the spectral radioactive zone in the Strugatskys' *Roadside Picnic* (1972), but we could just as well be caught in the nightmare waiting to happen at Long Island or Chernobyl. The city might materialise, vanish and slowly atrophy in Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven* (1971), but it remains a city we have visited. Karinthy's *Metropole* (1970) might be the archetype of an endless dystopian bureaucratic madness but it is also a facsimile of any twenty-first-century mega-city. Even on journeys to discover new cities on alien worlds in which we encounter implausibly coloured forests of flowers and hallucinogenic clouds of red dust, their geometry, spatial organisation and material structures are easily identifiable as extensions of earthly cities and phenomena. But this is to be expected. It is why Wells' Sleeper wakes in a giant version of the Crystal Palace. He could never have woken in a place made of things that have never been thought of or imagined.

However, despite the fact that we cannot dream of a science that is not already rooted in the accumulation of existing knowledge, Fortin's essay reminds us of how architects have understandably been drawn to sci-fi precisely because of the

allure of new technology, and the delight in the promise of ever more astonishing and miracle-producing gizmos and tricks.[13] But this he suggests is a superficial reading of the genre. At its best such as in the work of Dick, technology and what Suvin describes more generally as the *novum* are not in fact the principal themes.

Dick's descriptions of the city and technology are far more subtle and complex than one might think or imagine. The sci-fi of Dick is not about crass new forms of gadgetry, it is about a discourse concerning the implications and limits of scientific knowledge (Suvin 1979: 65). He mentions in passing smart new technology, but it is meshed into images of ruin and urban decay and layered over the crises of identity that his characters suffer. The combination of machines for manipulating time, empathy boxes, vid phones and hover cars are more like props that embellish far more prescient antonymic themes and issues – the real and imaginary, the human and robotic, safety and fear, war and peace and crucially for an urban narrative, individual liberty and invasive surveillance.[14] In other words whilst Dick, like other science fiction writers is often imagined as an architect of futurology – his city is very much of the 'ravaged' here and now – a city on the edge of reason plagued by 'psycho-spatial' uncertainty and madness, a very special case of what Fortin describes as 'disturbanism'. This is the other side of the rational society, where technology rather than a means of social liberation becomes an instrument of domination, a mirror world where the competing interests of those who wield political and economic power tear the socially equitable planned city of reason to pieces. In this, Dick's urban environments are eerily reminiscent of the real-time urban crises of the contemporary capitalist city.

In *Do Androids Dream…* we meet Isidore in a 'deteriorating, blind building of a thousand uninhabited apartments, which like all its counterparts, fell, day by day, into greater entropic ruin' (Dick 2001: 18). In *Minority Report* we hear of tumbled miles of cheap hotels and broken down tenements, bacterial crystals and radiation tabs. In *A Scanner Darkly* we trip over McDonalds, bugs, malls, bungalows and the general detritus of suburban America. And, as Fortin highlights, scattered throughout his works is the recurring image of the large mixed-use block, the 'conapt', for many the realisation of dreams of prosperity and freedom, but for Dick and others like Ballard and Saramago, an architecture that is far more like an unsettling form of voluntary incarceration. All of this is a long way from the stereotyped wicker fence image of the American Dream Town. It is in short a literary landscape in which the realisation of utopia and the 'strivings for the de-alienation of human kind and their social life' seem very far away (Suvin 1979: 82).

Utopia seems equally distant in the literature of 'outsider angst' introduced by Boyd in the next essay. Focussing on a reading of the works of Alexander Trocchi, renowned for their explicit descriptions of sex and drug use, it is a literature that has a respectable and aristocratic history. Images of the drifter, the drop out and the rebel that hang like a ghost over *Young Adam* boast an illustrious past that would include Camus' *Étranger* (1942), Gide's *Immoralist* (1902), Hesse's

Steppenwolf (1927) and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864). As for narcotic adventure that riddles its way through *Life of Cain*, there is a double history. On the one hand there are stories of observation like Aldous Huxley's mescaline experiment in *The Doors of Perception* (1954), Benjamin's tales *On Hashish* (1927) and de Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (1821), the progenitor, Boyd suggests, of Situationist-style 'urban drifting'. But on the other, there are novels that describe a far more brittle world of addiction and psychosis such as the internalised torment of Ageyev's *Novel with Cocaine* (1934), the disconnected amphetamine strip lights of Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1974), the rabid urban dissection of Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and any one of the mangled body spaces we encounter in Burroughs's *Junkie* (1953) and *The Naked Lunch* (1959).

It is tempting to think that tales of weird sex and drugs and of social and spatial alienation only happen on the periphery of the human imagination and the physical city. 'After all, it never happens here, it happens over there.' Maybe in Hellfire Clubs, in a celebrity detective's lounge, in Rhymes of Ancient Mariners, in ghettoes, crumbling squats and derelict warehouse raves, and sometimes as in the case of Trocchi, on the distant slow time of a floating barge and scow. However the truth about narcotic and sexual transgression is somewhat different. In reality whilst physical and psychological end games can take place in some subterranean urban recess under the flickering pink neon of a shady shop, they can just as easily happen on sunlit park benches, amidst the trimmed lawns of everyday suburbia, or behind the varnished doors of a thoroughly middle-class cul-de-sac.

In other words sexual and narcotic activity is geographically unrestricted which is why the archetypal 'junkie' novel is often architecturally ambivalent. As Boyd suggests, the city for Trocchi borders on the irrelevant; it has little in the way of redeeming features or any intrinsic majesty and despite his acquaintance with the celebratory urbanism of Cedric Price and the Situationists, the city for Trocchi is something to be negated or escaped from. In *Young Adam* it is a looming but opaque hinterland, an industrial behemoth that offers little sanctuary. In *Cain's Book* it is a hazy mirage, little more than a network of places for scoring drugs and pursuing other bodily satisfaction. In both novels the sense of spatial dislocation and exile illustrate Trocchi's own alienation from the world of capitalist work, and the reality of his itinerant life that took him from one urban margin to another.

> It had been the same for years. The same situations. Sometimes I thought I was learning something of my own constructions. A scow on the Hudson, a basement room in London, a tiny studio in Paris, a cheap hotel in Athens. A dark room in Barcelona, and now I was living on a moving object …
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> *Trocchi 1992: 117*

Whether in the squat, the suburb or the salon, the architectural narrative in narcotic tales like those of *Cain's Book* and the *Naked Lunch* is not to be found in bricks

and concrete, nor in romanticised Beat generation tales of travel, but in the claustrophobic frozen-time reality of the human mind and body. In this way the sensual animal architecture of flesh and the obsessive focus of a drugged mind operate as a metaphor for the modern city. It is punctured, severed, deformed, poisoned and prostituted. It is in desperate need of radical surgery and psychotherapy to prevent the complete atomisation of any belief in a practical alternative future, after which the only thing left is political nihilism or Trocchi's call for an 'Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds', a rather conservative utopia that Boyd argues 'eschews any direct or meaningful spatial *praxis*'.

Bodies, backyards and planet B movies in the front room, this is the architectural and spatial significance of these literary genres – we are at *home* with them. The telepathic strange boy next door who knows what you are thinking is not of this world and in the future will grow up to commit unimaginable crimes whilst imbibing a vial of hallucinogens. In other words crime, drugs and dreams of other worlds are socially universal and spatially ubiquitous. Indeed the plausibility of such narratives requires that its chronotopic character, its architecture, along with the critique of our social life, is one we can recognise and identify with. In this the great popularity of such genres, especially crime and sci-fi, is suggestive of something deeply troubling and irreconcilable about our contemporary life. And it is this, the dialectic of capitalist modernity and of human civilisation in general. We gaze longingly at sunlit horizons in which social and technological progress unfolds in a narrative of increasing liberty and freedom. But hastily scribbled on the other side of the balance sheet are the badly hidden statistics of capitalism as a narrative of exploitation and alienation.

All three essays underline the relationship between crime, sci-fi, drug literature and this other history of capitalism, a truly 'noir' history extraordinaire in which 'conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force', play the principal roles, a history that is jammed with crime scenes and provokes both dreams of other worlds and narcotic refuge in equal measure.[15] Enveloped by an overwhelming sense of helplessness, we naturally avoid dwelling on the grizzly truths of this history, which is where crime, drug and sci-fi literature have a crucial double role to play.

Such literature openly celebrates the dark side and the dark city. As a reading public we revel in it. We are voyeurs at the car crash, the murder scenes, the drug score, and it is through this simultaneous distancing and proximity that we deal with the world. Nobody likes those who wield power indiscriminately. Nobody at the time of writing likes investment bankers, pimps or drug traffickers. Which is why perhaps even if it is 'business as usual' the day after the boss is prosecuted we still look forward to the fall of the mighty. We might not be able to bring dictators to trial, but we can still read of their 'fictional' demise as we eat a TV dinner whilst watching a documentary about fraudsters, gangsters, prostitutes and aliens.

Notes

1 Reputedly uttered by W. H. Auden. See Priestman (2003:1).
2 See for example the journals *Clues – A Journal of Detection*, published by McFarland, USA and *Science Fiction Studies*, McPauw University, USA.
3 By this I mean the combination of the work of the British Marxist historians like E. P. Thompson, Hobsbawm, Hilton, Hill *et al.*, the French Annales School, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and the rise of Cultural studies, Feminist and postcolonial theory, that together helped shift both the subject and methodology of historical criticism.
4 See for instance books like Rose (2001) and Bourdieu (1989).
5 *Learning from Las Vegas* by Venturi, Brown and Izenour (1977), although clearly not driven by any revolutionary political impulse, nevertheless represented a landmark in this field.
6 Ideas explored in the classic works by Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) and the *Production of Space* (1971), Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and his essay 'Of Other Spaces – Heterotopias' (1967).
7 See for instance Auge (1995), De Certeau (1984), Perec (1999), Virillio (2009) and Vidler (1992).
8 See for instance Bakhtin's comment on Rabelais, in Bakhtin (1981: 192) 'The sexual series functions, as do all the abovementioned series to destroy the established hierarchy of values via the creation of new matrices of words, objects and phenomena. He restructures the picture of the world, materialises it and fleshes it out.'
9 There are a number of superb anthologies that subject the literary genre and its contested meaning to a critique. Two of the best are by Jameson (2005) and the groundbreaking work by Suvin (1979). There are other fine surveys by Kumar (1987), Wegner (2002) and Booker (1994).
10 See Willett (1996: 139) 'Crime fiction cannot avoid the reproduction of negative images but they may co-exist textually with utopian longings. Furthermore, the preceding examination demonstrates that redemption, the empowerment of the marginalised, the success of the underdog, even redistribution of wealth are all constitutive of the genre.'
11 See for instance Ford (2007) on the gothic allusions of Paretsky's work.
12 Clandfield – in this volume. It should be added that environmental crimes such as toxic dumping have also provided narratives for crime fiction, such as James Crumley's *Dancing Bear* (1983), New York: Vintage.
13 This connects more generally with one of the recurring themes of the twentieth century – technological fetishism and determinism – the idea that perpetual technological innovation can guarantee harmonious social progress and that therefore social revolution can be averted.
14 For a discussion on these themes see Jameson (2005: 142ff).
15 See Marx (1990) on 'The Secret of Primitive Accumulation'.

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