[Final manuscript of a book chapter published in:] Capitalism, Crime and Media in the 21st Century [ISBN: 9783030564438] / edited by Neil Ewen, Alan Grattan, Marcus Leaning, Paul Manning (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

# Noir Tourism and the Black Dahlia Murder

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## Of Cocktails and Bus Tours: Consuming Dark Tourism

In the lounge of the Los Angeles Millennium Biltmore hotel the tourist can purchase a 'Black Dahlia' cocktail containing vodka, Chambord, and Kahlua and costing US$13.00. That a cocktail should be marketed under the name of a murdered woman (22 year old Elizabeth Short) is macabre; that a hotel should profit from the sale of such a prurient memorial is both macabre and troubling. Still more problematic is the fact that this is not an exceptional case, nor is the Black Dahlia cocktail an exceptional product. The commodification and touristic consumption of death and violence are not recent inventions. As Philip R. Stone (2006, p.147) has noted, there is a long history of turning locations of death and destruction into tourist attractions. He claims, "indeed death has been an element of tourism longer than any other form of tourism supply," (2006 p.147) as evidenced by histories of pilgrims and tourists visiting historic battlefields, sites of martyrdom, places of public executions, and graveyards housing famous remains. These are all examples of a wider practice that has recently been labelled dark tourism or thanatourism. Briefly summarised, dark tourism is "the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (Lennon and Foley 1996 p.198). Frequently cited examples are the visitation of sites such as Cambodia's Killing Fields or the concentration camps of Dachau and Auschwitz. This subtype of tourism has attracted controversy in recent years and inspired popular entertainment such as Netflix's *Dark Tourist* [2018--]), broadcaster Dom Joly's 2010 autobiographical travelogue of the same name, and the graphic cautionary tales of horror films such as *Chernobyl Diaries* (Parker 2012).[1]

[1] One typical article in the popular press is Britanny Vonow's online summary for the *Sun* (2017).

The Biltmore Hotel's Black Dahlia cocktail (as well as Black Dahlia tours offered by companies such as Esotouric) are examples of this larger phenomenon of dark tourism. Furthermore, the Black Dahlia cocktail is metonymic of the dark tourist practices accumulating around the horrific murder of Elizabeth Short. The disturbing details of her murder are well known, but worth establishing here. These details, like those of the Ripper case, are ritually repeated in each true crime account -- Short's mutilated and bisected body was discovered on January 15, 1947 in a vacant lot at 39th and Norton Avenue in Los Angeles. Short had moved to Hollywood from Massachusetts, presumably to start a career as a Hollywood actress, like many other young women at the time. Despite the widely circulated forensic (and sensationalist) accounts of her death in true crime and fiction, the details of her life in Los Angeles are largely unconfirmed, contributing to the mystery of her 'Black Dahlia' moniker. The Dahlia case has never been solved, despite many claims to the contrary.[2] Her life and death have become the subject of popular tours that visit the places central to the Dahlia case, such as the corner of 39th and Norton and the Biltmore.

Intimately tied to the true crime genre and dark touristic practices (such as the collection of murderabilia and fan pilgrimages to death sites), the consumption of murder-themed tours and cocktails transforms violent crime into a profitable spectacle and commodifies it as entertainment. We argue that the dark tourism built around the Dahlia case is related to these practices but distinctly gendered. Drinking a cocktail named after a viciously murdered woman in the last place she was seen alive is a form of dark tourism that brings gender politics to the foreground. This particular form of dark tourism highlights a tabloid sensationalism and a touristic glee tied to the sexual assault and murder of women.[3] Furthermore, because the Dahlia was a young woman supposedly set on stardom as so many Hollywood hopefuls, the consumption of her death is framed by cinematic history, aesthetics, and culture. In this chapter we consider the Dahlia case as an instance of commodified dark tourism. More precisely we interrogate it as an indicator of a particular form of gendered, mediated, and hyperreal tourism that we are calling *noir tourism*.

[2] These claims are often solidified in the titles of true crime accounts; for example, Piu Eatwell's account is subtitled, "America's Most Notorious Crime Solved for the First Time" and John Gilmore's *Severed* is subtitled, "The True Story of the Black Dahlia Murder."

[3] The authors wish to acknowledge their own positions in processes of dark tourism and its expertise. We recognise that this article represents another contribution to the mythology surrounding the Black Dahlia focusing on her brutal abuse and murder. However, it is our hope to offer feminist critique and analysis of the exploitation of Elizabeth Short's murder and the use of other murdered women as objects of dark tourism.

Inflected with cinematic and mediated constructions of erotic femininity and risk, noir tourism takes the murdered female body as a driving force of its image-based entertainment practices. As a subject for noir tourism the Black Dahlia case represents an important digression from examples of dark tourism that emphasise memorialisation or commemoration (such as pilgrimages to Ground Zero in New York) and from adrenaline-seeking high-risk tourism to dangerous locales (such as visiting nuclear fallout zones). These forms of dark tourism have similarities to hyper-masculine survivalist television programming, such as *Survivorman* (2004-2015) or *Man vs Wild* (2006-2011). Noir tourism veers from thrill-seeking or embracing the darker aspects of life to the pure consumption of the erotically-charged murder of women as cinematically inflected entertainment. Adopting the cinematic lineage of film noir in order to frame its fascination with dead and murdered female bodies, it fuses with dark tourism with reflexive, image-based, metanarratives drawn from film. Providing a fundamentally and essentially *cinematic* touristic entertainment, noir tourism borrows from, and remediates, the conventions and nostalgia of film noir, such as the figures of the femme fatale and the hardboiled detective, urban risk, and the eroticisation of violent death.

Importantly, this reflexivity is not unidirectional -- instead, we contend that the transformation of Short's death into "the Black Dahlia case" adopted noir tropes from the moment of its first reporting, creating a mediatised feedback loop that continues to permeate its touristic consumption. We characterise this relationship as a metadiscursive engagement that makes little distinction between crimes, representations of crime, and entertainment genres based around both (novels, tabloids, film, crime tours, or television series). Framed by cinematic conventions, noir tourism builds on noir's coupling of hardboiled detective and femme fatale in order to offer a doubled lens of investigation and entertainment. More precisely, it sells its participants the vicarious experience of the expert as well as the attractions of the tour guide. The commercial enterprises around noir tourism mobilise both the tour guide's discursive framing of crime that allows for its consumption as entertainment and the expert's exculpatory participation in procedural elements aimed at justice and the solving of crime. These gazes are usually opposed: the tourist is associated with leisure and consumption and the forensic expert with archaeological rigour. The tourist's model for knowledge is a collection of superficial signs (or souvenirs); the forensic expert leans on an rationalist model of investigative epistemology. The tourist seeks pleasurable entertainment (even in darkness) rather than the forensic expert's moral (if not always legal) justice. The

touristic experience is distracted absorption, while the expert deep dives into details in a kind of focused fervour. The key to this twin lens of noir tourism -- filtered through mediated and noir saturated images of murdered female bodies -- is to offer its consumers an experience of crime that feels at once real and cinematic. We contend that the Dahlia case's particular embeddedness in the cinematic cultures of noir offers a unique point of entry into investigating the construction, attraction, selling and buying of entertainment based dark tourism focused on the corpses of violently-murdered women.

**The Noir Dahlia and the Hardboiled Tour Guide**

The Dahlia case is certainly not the first example of dark tourism built around murdered women. The explosion of media coverage of the women killed in the autumn of 1888 in the Whitechapel neighbourhood of London, assigned to the unknown killer Jack the Ripper, is a precursor of the Dahlia case. The Ripper case is tied to a gothic mode of address in a way that parallels the Dahlia case's relationship to noir. Both unsolved cases feature risk permeated urban streets and a failure of police intervention (both pre- and post-mortem). Both cases are built on widely-circulated images of female murder victims and fixate on the sexual conduct of the victims as contributing factors in their death. Furthermore, they both feed into later mythologies of the serial murderer, which were to become fixtures of crime literature and film in the 1990s (for example, Thomas Harris's creation of Hannibal Lecter).[4] Judith R. Walkowitz's (1994) insightful study of the Ripper murder, fixes it firmly in its London context, as we would fix the Dahlia case in the post-war city of Los Angeles. The armchair forensic expert and true crime author are drawn to these cases with almost similar intensity. These investigators become dark tour guides, leading participants through the back alleys of crime-saturated cityscapes. They provide the narration and framing for the gothic or noir stories of murdered women, becoming private citizen detectives offering to pick up the cold cases that the police may not have the time or resources to investigate.

Crime novelist Patricia Cornwell's investigation into the Ripper case is one notable example. Her 2002 BBC show (*Patricia Cornwell: Stalking the Ripper)*[5] begins with a disorienting tour of Victorian Whitechapel at night that borrows its style from the killer-cam convention of horror films. After a grim re-creation and description of Mary Kelly's death (and the

[4] For in depth analyses on cultural fascination with murdered women, see Elisabeth Bronfen (1992).
[5] This documentary ties in with the publication of Cornwell's true crime novel on the Ripper case, *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper Case Closed* (2002).

widely-circulated crime scene photograph), Cornwell addresses the viewer directly, "... I believe that we owe it to society and to the victims to pursue the Ripper cases. And that takes lay people like me because Scotland Yard, they've got active cases to investigate, are certainly not going to investigate a 112 year old case for which there will be no prosecution and which would cost a lot of money." What is unusual here is that Cornwell speaks directly to her neoliberal responsibility for solving the crime, framing her investigation of Jack the Ripper as a social duty. Thus, the obvious sensationalism of the sequence immediately preceding her declaration is diffused, working to excuse both the spectator and Cornwell herself. Tour guide figures such as Cornwell, whether leading Jack the Ripper walking tours of London, writing true crime accounts of serial murders, driving bus tours of L.A. or even curating virtual tours online are selling an expert version of themselves that performs this kind of sensationalist public service while simultaneously profiting from stories of the original crimes.

Like the Ripper victims, the Black Dahlia murder is mobilised to stand for larger cultural concerns - whether L.A. police corruption, organised crime, Hollywood's exploitation of young women, or tabloid journalism's parasitic relationship to violent sexualised crime. As Katherine Farrimond (2013) notes, the case has been compulsively reworked and re-investigated as a crucial and iconic moment in Los Angeles' urban, cinematic, and criminal history. However, this centrality always relies on and returns to the brutally murdered body of a young, attractive white woman, whose image in death is compulsively mediated, re-imagined, and persistently circulated. Even Farrimond's astute and feminist article on De Palma's *The Black Dahlia* includes the gory and now iconic photographic images of Short's brutalised naked corpse and mutilated face. In almost all of the Dahlia material -- including postcards, academic articles, tours, documentaries, fictional and mediated accounts -- Short is reduced almost exclusively to three images only: a glamourous before death photo; and two port-mortem shots (one close-up of her face in the morgue and one of her body in the place it was discovered). These images, like those of the victims of the equally infamous Jack the Ripper, are endlessly circulated in contemporary capitalist consumer culture. They are offered on postcards for sale at L.A.'s Museum of Death and the headquarters of Dearly Departed tour company. In this mediated circulation, the Dahlia becomes the victimised femme fatale, inextricable from the discourses and remediation of film noir.

From the moment that Short's murder was first reported in the contemporary press, the case activated a potent fusion of Los Angeles crime, Hollywood mythology, and moral panic. According to Lt. Harry 'the hat' Hansen, one of the lead detectives on the Black Dahlia case, it was the name that made the case a legend and gave it a life of its own (Eatwell 2017 p.23). According to insider (and creator of *Dragnet*) Jack Webb, the "newspapers were playing the case as no crime had ever been played in Los Angeles" (1958 p.31). Webb suggests that it is the newspapers that coined the term, 'Black Dahlia.' Furthermore, he reports that the L.A.P.D. maintain that these same journalists are the reason the case remains unsolved (1958 p.199). Piu Eatwell's 2017 true crime account describes how journalist Aggie Underwood of the Los Angeles Evening *Herald-Express* claimed to have invented the term in a wider context of other flower-themed murder cases such as the Red Hibiscus and White Gardenia. Eatwell traces the name to a pharmacist named Arnold Landers, Jr. who testified to police that Short appeared at his soda fountain and that he, and perhaps others, took to calling her the 'Black Dahlia' after her black bathing outfit and dark hair. Wherever the origin, it is clear that the name is inspired by the 1946 film noir *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall) starring Veronica Lake and Alan Ladd, a fact that drives home the cinematic transformation of Elizabeth Short into the Dahlia. Whether the name was invented by journalists after her death or whether it was given to her in life, the Black Dahlia became a cinematic entity in her renaming.[6]

This renaming of Short's murder highlighted a sense of mystery that is inflected by noir's irresolutions and lingering unease. It is not merely the riddle of who murdered Short and why, but Short herself becomes a central enigmatic figure. This doubled mystery facilitates the obsession that characterises attempts to solve the case, which are more often than not connected to gothic family secrets or oedipal narratives. For instance, in *Black Dahlia: A Genius for Murder* former L.A.P.D. Detective Steve Hodel insists that his celebrity father, Dr. George Hodel was the murderer. Similarly focused on fathers, John Gilmore, whose father was in the L.A.P.D., is the author of *Severed: The True Story of the Black Dahlia Murder,* an account which accuses alcoholic Jack Wilson of killing Elizabeth Short. These authors exploit their fathers' positions to build and sell their theories. In addition to these kinds of 'family tree' or witness accounts of the case, the striking imagery of the Dahlia case

[6] Joyce Carol Oates stresses this nominal transformation in *Black Dahlia and White Rose* when she parallels Elizabeth Short's renaming with Norma Jean Baker's rebirth as Marilyn Monroe. Although murder naming was common at the time, it is clear that this case, in drawing on *The Blue Dahlia*, is fundamentally cinematic in a way that other murder namings (such as the Red Hibiscus) were not.

continues to fascinate true crime authors. For example, Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Baylis (2006) make some sinister and striking parallels between the Dahlia case and the imagery of surrealist artists such as Man Ray. Piu Eatwell's (2017) more recent account, *Black Dahlia Red Rose* suggestively names each of its chapters after films noir and puts forward the theory that the murderer is Leslie Dillon, a psychopath who murdered Short under the orders, and with the participation, of wealthy nightclub owner Mark Hansen. Like the Ripper case before it, the Dahlia murder is a tempting puzzle and potent imagery for tabloid, true crime, and cinematic products.

More than an enigma, the Dahlia case is fundamentally a Hollywood narrative -- it is inextricably linked to Hollywood and to retrospective and retrofitted ideas of noir, the archetypal character of the femme fatale and her place within risk-attuned urban space. Elsewhere Steenberg has suggested that noir in recent years has become "a distended, indistinct term" (2017 p.62), used primarily as marketing category. Noir as a brand is further used as a legitimation strategy to justify prurient spectacles and to insist on a text's status as art (Steenberg 2017). True crime recitations of murder are frequently informed by this sense of noir (as an atmosphere, thematic system and marketing shorthand), if not by its actual cinematic practices. The Black Dahlia case is a perfect example of this sensibility at work, almost from the moment that the case was assigned its cinematic name. Arguably, this influence goes both ways as the unfolding of the Black Dahlia case in the newspapers occurs at the moment when the label of 'noir' is first being used in France to describe American crime films. Certainly, filmmakers working in Los Angeles existed in a media culture saturated with references to the Dahlia murder, a murder which in turn influenced the production and reception of the dark thrillers or film noirs being made in mid-century Hollywood.

As Short is transformed into the Dahlia, she becomes a hypermediated spectacle available for a noir touristic gaze. Bringing the touristic and forensic into alignment, the case mobilises sensationalist imagery of violence as entertainment and offers a forensic historicism as its justification. In analysing the Dahlia case and its afterlives as rooted in noir tourism's sensibility, we focus on notions of urban risk that highlight the city space as dangerous for young white women. Tours such as Esotouric's "The Real Black Dahlia" or novels such as James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* chase this noir touristic experience through a focus on the tabloid obsession with female corpses and a geographic locatedness, both of which are

simultaneously rendered imaginary, nostalgic, historical, and concrete through the touristic gaze. The site of Los Angeles anchors the Dahlia; but at the same time, this geographical reference point ripples outwards to include "Hollywood" and "noir" as concepts, sensibilities, ideologies, and affective nodal points for celebrity and consumerism. Layered on this is the tourist's experience of the city as a cinematic setting of crime films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich 1955) and *L.A. Confidential* (Hanson 1997). Cities, bodies, and cinema come together to produce noir tourism, through which spectacles of misogynistic murder like the Dahlia's are consumed, bought, and sold.

In all of this, Short is present only as a structuring absence and an object of horror and fascination. Even as investigators (contemporary police or investigative journalists as well as armchair and amateur detectives) attach themselves with forensic precision to the details of the case, she is lost in the data -- she has become an image, noir icon, erotic symbol, and commercialised product (tour, postcard, film, novel, cocktail). Through a complex feedback loop between Hollywood, noir, and the apparatus of celebrity, 'The Black Dahlia' is a femme fatale, a glamorous metonym for corruption, a "lost girl"[7] and literally, through the images of her corpse, an object of unsolvable mystery and intense (largely masculine) examination. As Katherine Farrimond points outs, the Dahlia case "consolidates violence and nostalgic femininity" (2013 p.37). It immerses Short, the case and its afterlife in a Hollywood mythology that "permeates contemporary understandings of classic-era Hollywood" (Farrimond 2013 p.34) and draws on "the dark glamour of classic noir spider women" (Farrimond 2013 p.35). Representations of Short's violent death speak "to the ways in which visual culture is compulsively drawn and re-drawn to the juncture of sex and death as embodied by Short" (Farrimond 2013 p.34). While the Short case stands as axiomatic, we argue that it is not unique. Noir tourism in the wider sense depends on the femme fatale, reinforcing her iconic status and, because of her duplicity and complicity, arguably excuses forensic and touristic fascination with her corpse. The murdered women in the Ripper case have been painted as predatory "women of the night," and Washington's Crime Museum includes the category "black widow" on the "Famous Murders" page of their website.[8]

[7] For discussions of the "lost girl" as trope, see Tanya Horeck's analysis of Joyce Carol Oates' use of the term (2009).
[8] See https://www.crimemuseum.org/crime-library/famous-murders/ accessed October 31 2018.

The tabloid attractions and touristic consumption of the murders of women do not, however, happen in a void -- the noir tour guide frames, explains, filters, and directs this spectacle of death so it is approached as entertainment (albeit with an edge), rather than obscene opportunism or sadistic perversion. Whether in actual, audiovisual, or literary form, the noir tour guide lures the tourist/ viewer/ reader with their blend of forensic expertise and assurance of safe distance (reinforced by their hardboiled masculinity). As a guide to murder, this frequently male figure is a complex remediation of the hardboiled detective, who models both a grim authenticity and a savvy world weariness. Celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain embodied such a noir tour guide position, tied to his celebrity persona as anti-establishment, hedonistic, and self-destructive. His suicide in 2018 further cemented his troubled star persona and adds an uncanny edge to a retrospective consideration of his patronage of dark tourism.

In the Los Angeles episode of his series *The Layover* (2011-2013), he finds himself on Scott Michaels' "Dearly Departed" tour (subtitled, "The Tragical History Tour"), which he consumes with a relish matched by his disdain for more mainstream celebrity tours. The Black Dahlia case is mentioned by his fellow bus passengers, but merges with many other murders (including Marie Prevost, famously the subject of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon*) to become merely another interesting landmark on the tour. In an earlier trip to L.A. (as part of the series *A Cook's Tour* [2002-2003]), Bourdain muses on his relationship with the city, "This is where bad things happen to people like me." In this episode, Bourdain further cements his noir readings of L.A. by imaging himself dead in a swimming pool in a re-enactment of the opening sequence of the 1950 noir, *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder).

Bourdain's experience of the Dearly Departed tour is typical of other murder or crime-based tours: passengers are boarded onto a bus while their driver feeds them details of grizzly crimes that happened in the houses and streets seen through their windows. Battered homemade binders are passed back to the passengers (and camera) to show disturbingly graphic post-mortem or crime scene photographs of victims. The passengers in this episode are not shown leaving the bus; they see L.A.'s crime scenes only through the moving window. In *The Layover,* the atmosphere inside the bus is one of jocular fascination, as passengers, including Bourdain, crack dark jokes about autoerotic asphyxiation and report disappointment that the story about Marie Prevost's dog eating her corpse is false. For

Bourdain, the death tour of L.A. is merely a macabre urban curiosity to be consumed like the food around which he builds his trips; no different from any other guilty pleasure.

**The Dahlia Case and James Ellroy as Noir Guide**

If the noir tour guide exists on a spectrum of hardboiled masculinity, then novelist and true crime author Lee Earle Ellroy (better known by his pen name James) self-consciously positions his persona at its most extreme edge. His fame, authenticity and expertise is inextricable from the Black Dahlia case, which he repeatedly parallels with the violent rape and murder of his mother. The Dahlia case had long been an interest of Ellroy's. For his eleventh birthday, he received a copy of Jack Webb's *The Badge* (1958) from his father. Ellroy, already an avid reader of sensationalist true crime, recalls Webb's account of L.A. police cases as transformative: "I read Webb's account of the Black Dahlia murder case. It sent me way off the deep end" (2010 p.109). In 1987, Ellroy published his breakout crime novel, *The Black Dahlia*, framing the story of the murder through the police career of ex-boxer Dwight 'Bucky' Bleichert (played by Josh Hartnett in the 2006 film adaptation). The novel marked the start of his successful L.A. Quartet of crime novels (*L.A. Confidential*, *The Big Nowhere*, *White Jazz*) and cemented his reputation as an expert in the Dahlia case, born not only of his true crime expertise but also out of the authenticity of his trauma and proximity to murder in Los Angeles. As evidence of this correlation, he dedicates *The Black Dahlia* -- 'This Valediction in Blood' -- to his mother. Drawing on and exaggerating these elements, Ellroy's fictionalisation of the Dahlia concludes with the revelation that the Dahlia was killed by a wealthy woman and her male lover as punishment for her husband's incestuous love of their daughter, who looks strikingly similar to Elizabeth Short. Entangling this pathology in real estate scandals and urban risk, Ellroy's novel engages in a certain gleeful salaciousness as it describes in painful detail the murder shack, in which Elizabeth Short was killed and her killers kept grisly souvenirs.

In his role as noir tour guide, Ellroy offers information and guidance, but does so with the hopes of inviting an active, engaged, and libidinally-invested audience. That is what the noir tour guide is hired to do: offer contained and entertaining passage through brutal violence -- either physically (in a crime-themed bus tours of Los Angeles) or narratively (in the true crime accounts of the Black Dahlia). Despite claiming that he "wanted to piss on the noble-loner myth and exalt shitbird cops out to fuck the disenfranchised" (2010 p.225), Ellroy's writing and celebrity persona remain invested in a Chandlerian version of this hardboiled

‘man of honor’ or ‘noble-loner.’ His childhood adoration of Jack Webb and his sympathetic depiction of Bill Stoner (the police officer who aids in his re-investigation of his mother’s case) are testament to this. The noir tour guide does not believe in the hardboiled hero, but he cannot quite let go of the sense of nostalgia in his mythological obsolescence.

Ellroy is an extreme example of the capitalist forensic-touristic continuum on which we have positioned the noir tour guide -- self-aware, ironic, media-savvy, drawn to appearances (photographs, screens), sensationalist, and postmodernist. In many ways he uses these qualities, and the baseline authenticity of his experience of his mother’s murder, to excuse or justify his tabloid exploitation of the murder and mutilation of Elizabeth Short. As Ellroy himself notes, his engagement with the case is one of compulsive repetition and unapologetic commercialism. He summarises, “I told the Jean Ellroy-Dahlia story ten dozen times. I reduced it to sound bites and vulgarized in the name of accessibility” (2010 p.225). Elloy is not unique among noir tour guides in his admission of deliberate commercial exploitation. Rather, it is his self-disgust that is performed with atypical strength and volume. “My media performances were commanding at first glance and glib upon reappraisal. They exploited my mother’s desecration and allowed me to cut her memory down to manageable proportions (2010 p. 225). Where Bourdain’s admission of complicity is one of charismatic wry irony, Ellroy is aggressive in his admission of guilt. It becomes a fixture of his tour guide performance.

*My Dark Places* solidifies Ellroy’s assumption of the mantle of noir tour guide as he carefully constructs a hardboiled persona that allows him access to the mythic significance of the Chandlerian hero. Thus, Ellroy and other noir tour guides can self-consciously structure the narrative with a mix of nostalgic longing and cynical fatalism. Moreover, this masculine tour guide’s containment of violence through narrative control can be seen to function like film noir’s voice over -- narrating, containing, and focalising the experience of violent death. The noir tour guide and noir hero provide a masculine archetype that contains the disrupting potential of the femme fatale’s death, while at the same time offering up erotically charged and misogynistic spectacles for romantically inflected consumption. Driving this role home in a cinematic fashion, Ellroy references the “*Laura* syndrome” in his valorisation of detective Bill Stoner:

> Homicide detectives loved the movie *Laura*. A cop gets obsessed with a murder victim and finds out she's still alive. She's beautiful and mysterious. She falls in love with the cop...The flip side of *Laura* was *Double Indemnity*: A man meets a woman and flushes his life down the toilet. Both scenarios were equally fatuous (2010 p. 171).

Both equally fatuous, perhaps, but both equally desirable objects of libidinal investment for dark fandom. Indeed, Ellroy's investment in the murder cases of his mother and the Dahlia reveals his own *Laura* syndrome that holds sway even as he mocks it, and then sells it.

Ellroy highlights reflexivity and citation, putting his dubious comments about sex and violence at a remove from readers-viewers-tourists. Like any good tour guide, he directs attention outward to the "sites" and offers safe transit through the noir city. For noir tour guides, such as Ellroy, and the noir tourist he addresses, crime is not only an event or an act -- it is a place, to which we compulsively and ritually return. In particular, for Ellroy as for the Black Dahlia mythology, postwar Los Angeles is inseparable from its noir associations. This is both in terms of its cinematic and literary representation as well as in its long history of crime, corruption, mobile human geography, and urban risk. A "boomtown populated by psychically maimed misfits running from World War II," (Ellroy 2006) Los Angeles is simultaneously such a boomtown and its cinematic, murderous, noir other: it is never quite itself or at least not only. Of DePalma's cinematic setting for his *Black Dahlia*, Ellroy comments, "It's L.A./ it's not L.A./ it's L.A. seen by Dahlia fiends in extremis" (Ellroy 2006). This L.A. draws on an essentially hyperreal Los Angeles inseparable from its Hollywood past. Zeroing in on the criminal and violent currents of these cinematic conventions, Ellroy comments that Los Angeles' vehicularly centred geography of the freeway -- that icon of progress and momentum -- rationalises and facilitates murder: "L.A. County was large, topographically diverse and traversable only by freeway. Freeways streamlined body-disposal problems. Killers could zip to remote canyons and dump their victims fast." (Ellroy 2010 p.172) Foregrounding the geographical specificity of the Californian city of Los Angeles, Ellroy's treatment of the Dahlia case layers the screen world (the noir glamour of classical Hollywood) with the mean streets of Los Angeles, through which he is more than happy to give us a tour.

**Touring Female Death: From the *Flaneur* to the Driveby**

Hollywood cinema constructed and consolidated "L.A.'s status as privileged noir site" (Brook 2013, p.126). Mid-century Los Angeles was the city of the future and the heart of American capitalism and ideations of success and celebrity. However, as film noir mythology tells us, it was also bound to the ruination of these dreams of success (e.g. the power of the trope of the failed starlet) as well as to dreams of escape from ruinous pasts (e.g. moving westward to start anew, which we know from noir texts, never works out). Los Angeles is frequently seen to stand in "for capitalism in general" (Davis 1990 p.18): it serves as a "mirror of capitalism's future" (Davis 1990 p.21) and as both a dystopic and utopic model for advanced capitalism. This symbolic Los Angeles is inseparable from its mediation: as Mike Davis points out, "celluloid or the electronic screen have remained the dominant media of the region's self-expression" (Davis 1990, p. 23). L.A. might not be planned or designed, "but it is infinitely envisioned" (Davis 1990, p. 23). In mid-century Los Angeles, this envisioning -- as Ellroy recognises -- was primarily a violent one.

Los Angeles' vastness and complex geography of criss-crossing freeways aimed at mobilising the flow of live persons, were equally hospitable to the flow of death and crime. As Vincent Brook notes in *Land of Smoke and Mirrors*, L.A. has always been defined by the vehicular: "By the 1920s the city had by far the highest per capita car ownership in the nation, with 1 of every 2.5 Angelinos owning a car compared to one of four Californians and one of seven Americans." Brook goes on to tie the Lost Angeles autopia to cinema: "When boosters proclaimed L.A. 'the city on wheels' in the 1930s, it was high time for L.A. noir to turn the car into a 'symbolic death instrument'" (Brook 2013 p.115). Mark Osteen (2008) argues for the centrality of car in the noir cycle, particularly insofar as it operates as a symbol of "restored consumer power and renewed possibility—of a refurbished American dream" (2008 p.184). Drawing on Osteen's work, Brook ties the economic aspect to the foregrounded figure of the hitchhiker and the dangerous role associated with trains and other forms of transit in film noirs such as *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and *Detour* (1945). Pushing this idea of the autopia even further into human geography, Paul Fotsch argues that according to Billy Wilder's noir films *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)

> the dominant culture of consumerism braced by the technology of the automobile contained multiple gaps and incongruities. *Double Indemnity* criticized the faith in technical rationality and the isolation produced by transportation planners following

> this faith. *Sunset Boulevard* satirized the shallow consumerism associated with the new automobile-centered landscape. (Fotsch p.120)

Despite any critiques of the autopia in-built in the film noirs themselves, noir tourism practices rely on the road systems of Los Angeles, offering bus tours in place of walking tours of London's Jack the Ripper case. Crime bus tours like Esotouric's "The Real Black Dahlia" -- which James Ellroy himself has guided -- seat the tourist as a passenger in the noir autotopias. The participant becomes not the *flaneur* strolling through the European metropolis, but in the position of a drive-by through the streets where criminality is viewed through *and as* a screen via the bus or van window. Therefore, the passenger in the noir tour bus exists in the gaps and incongruities identified by Fotsch. He or she has bought into the consumerist machine of dark tourism. While these passengers might be united in a community of tourist consumption, they are isolated and separated from the people of Los Angeles. They do not interact with anyone on the streets as they speed by, shielded from any experience of the outside city, including its histories of violence. The driver of the bus, like all noir tour guides, offers containment not only in narrative terms (explaining the motives, revealing hidden identities) but in actual terms – presenting themselves as the safe intermediary between the fans' gaze and the crime's reality.

Noir tourism, like the wider term dark tourism, permits (or perhaps invites?) a ludic dimension to its gaze. This is exemplified in the video game *L.A. Noire*'s (2011) evocation of the Dahlia case as a fixture of post-war Los Angeles' streetscape. In this it recalls Rockstar Games' other wildly successful series, *Grand Theft Auto.* Both games profit by offering dark touristic experiences. The former is a mystery-based historical tour of 1947 Los Angeles facilitated by tour guide avatar Cole Phelps, disillusioned veteran and hardboiled detective.[9] The latter is a dizzying journey through arterial roadways participating in the distinct types of violence such car-based exploration makes possible. We would argue that the ludic dimension has become an entangled pleasure of noir tourism, its reliance on car/bus travel, and its gazes. If crime becomes a place that can be mapped, then it also becomes an experience that can be *played* as much as viewed. This can be literal, as with *L.A. Noire,* or more of process of "forensic fandom" (Mittell 2015), whereby spectators must mentally

[9] The game makes explicit reference to the Black Dahlia case and builds much of its imagery on its mythological iconography.

collate complex clues, storylines and characters when viewing, for example, *Making a Murderer* (2015; 2018) or when participating in a Black Dahlia tour. Thus, we argue that the noir tourist gaze is cinematic, forensic and ludic. Through this gaze, the Black Dahlia murder becomes simultaneously an old Hollywood movie, a puzzle to solve and a game to be played.

The multivalent touristic gazes participating in the Black Dahlia mythology is aimed not only at streets, houses, locations, but at bodies, always mediated through technologically reproduced images. Tours include binders of crime scene photographs as well as postcards for purchase. Although the geographical question of "where did the crime take place?" is infinitely fascinating to us, the answer is not just in place (Whitechapel, L.A.), but in the bodies of women that define and determine that space as a forensic geography. Crimes always happen in a place and criminality and expertise are brands tied to a specific city, site, or locale, localisations that become lucrative draws for tourists. The expert offers us a map to murdered women, but can never quite keep their tacit promise to keep us safe from this horror or from being complicit in the women's (post-mortem) dissections. What is mapped in such tours is not only the city, but the bodies of the victims whose voices and lives (rather than deaths) are notably absent. There is an excess of visual representation of murder victims' bodies as images of murdered women are obsessively reproduced. They are offered as 'evidence' that must be obsessively re-examined and finally offered for purchase, further objectifying and de-humanising the women who were the victims of these crimes.

**Conclusion: Closure is Bullshit**

What noir tour guides and their forensic and touristic investigation of the Black Dahlia case promise, but is never quite able to deliver, is closure. Other types of experts, such as the forensic scientist on crime television, mobilises vast technological and scientific resources in order to solve the case for good - morally/narratively if not legally. The noir tour guide, on the other hand, sells a case that can be played infinitely and a puzzle that is always missing its final piece. This is exemplified by James Ellroy's account of closure in the documentary 2001 *Feast of Death* attests:

> Closure is bullshit. For murder victims, for their families, for murderers, for anybody acquainted with murder. The ramifications of murder go on and on and on and they spread outward like a metastasizing fucking tumour and it never ends.

Ellroy, like other dark tour guides, presents his noir vision of a world without closure as a more authentic and sophisticated way of viewing violent crime. What the tour guide offers in place of closure is containment and perhaps the distanciation effects of self-referential irony. The sweetly impossible notion of closure is the noir tour guide's bait. The best and worst closure that can be imagined is encapsulated in the Biltmore Hotel's Black Dahlia cocktail. In this example, the tourist can consume without danger and the multivalent meanings of the Dahlia are entirely depoliticised. The cocktail is a sweet, intoxicating and empty product, erasing the crime of murder while profiting from that crime.

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