



Chiaroscuro: Gilles Deleuze, Ernst Bloch, and the Philosophy of Detective Fiction

Gray Kochhar-Lindgren

Abstract. Philosophy and detective fiction have relied on a regime of truth in which the darkness of crime is brought into the light of knowledge through a rational process of reconstructing clues toward a *telos* of explanation. The oscillations of noir—a dynamic play of the differential forces of darkness and light—keep reading, writing, and thinking in play.

Philosophy, like the detective novel, is a distinct-obscure undertaking that creates hybrid zones of light diffused with the shadows of devilish plots, jealous loves, knots of questions, and the problematics of reading for the truth. The neon sign is always broken, buzzing in the wet night. Both Gilles Deleuze and Ernst Bloch ask, philosophically, about the truth, or its others, in the experience of detective novels. What is happening that conjoins the event of philosophy and the event of crime fiction? The flickering of noir is the play of a chiaroscuro of forces that always emerges in a particular historical moment that then bleeds across times, spaces.

This “distinct-obscure” event—which is history, philosophy, and the narratives of crime—is a resonant phrase picked up by Deleuze from Leibniz and developed further in *Difference and Repetition*, in which Deleuze argues that

ideas as they exist in themselves are distinct-obscure. Opposed to the clear-and-distinct of Apollonian representation, Ideas are Dionysian, existing in an obscure zone which they themselves preserve and maintain . . . the obscure zone of an intoxication which will never be calmed; the distinct-obscure as the double color with which philosophy paints the world . . . (280).¹

Recently retired as professor and director of the University of Hong Kong’s Common Core, **Gray Kochhar-Lindgren** now serves as an Honorary Professor in the Humanities and Affiliate Professor of Comparative Literature at the university. He is lead editor of *Transdisciplinary Experiments*. His most recent book is *Urban Arabesques: Philosophy, Hong Kong, Transversality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), and he is currently completing *The Event of Noir*.