

The Grid, the Spectacle and the Labyrinth in *The Big Clock's* Skyscraper: Queered Space and Cold War Discourse

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The skyscraper in the *noir* thriller *The Big Clock* (1948) serves as a microcosm of the American postwar cinematic city; as oppressive as the eponymous timepiece that it houses; but the film also offers a propaganda-inspired solution for the tall building's restoration as a symbol of masculine achievement and a beacon of freedom. As I plan to show, the film rehearses aspects of conservative Cold War political discourse by utilizing a multitude of spatial strategies, creating a temporarily 'queered' space in need of liberation. Through its use of various architectural tropes (e.g. façade, lobby, boardroom, hallway, bathhouse, and elevator) and architectural idioms, especially the International Style, and its tracking of the main character's phenomenological journey to greater and greater degrees of claustrophobia, it prescribes normative views on masculinity and sexual identity.¹ It also relies on spatial metaphors such as veneers, insertion, entrapment, and ejection, to communicate aspects of prevailing United States governmental strategies for 'normalizing' institutional space from the putative deleterious influence of gays and lesbians. For example, it associates the homosexually-inflected villain Earl Janoth's (Charles Laughton) dissembling and subterfuge with the imported exterior of an International Style skyscraper, and the grandeur of its Art Deco theatrical lobby. Beyond these dual facades lie Janoth's and the skyscraper's true character, both authoritarian and irrational, pictured in the prison-like offices and the Mies van der Rohe-inspired, labyrinthine lower

hallways, which temporarily contain the film's hero, George Stroud (Ray Milland).² In accord with official policies which sought to jettison homosexuals from employment, the film's depiction of spatiality, calls for the rooting out of foreign-born homosexual infiltrators or aliens, posing as enlightened capitalist entrepreneurs who are literally and figuratively embedded in cinematic architectural space.

Novel and Film: The Plot

Based on the 1946 pulp fiction novel by leftist poet and pulp fiction writer, Kenneth Fearing, *The Big Clock* is a battle for normative heterosexuality against marginalized homosexuality in the corporate skyscraper office, which serves a spatial metaphor for the entire country.³ The pulp fiction venue was often a repository of sexually explicit material that was frequently ignored by the censors. It is important to plumb the depths of these originary sources to glean many of cinema's coded references, which often bubble up from novel to script.⁴ In spite of the author's progressive political views that were explored in the novel, his views on gender and sexual identity were decidedly conservative. Screenwriter John Latimer preserved most of the author's intentions; in both novel and film, the tall building is ruled by media tycoon Janoth, an effeminate, homosexually-coded character with limp hand gestures and a nervous twitch meant to underscore his impotency and emotional instability respectively.

At the outset, author Fearing characterized Janoth's queer space as a 'gilded cage full of gelded birds', thereby introducing the skyscraper as given over to upper class pretension and impotence, both of which he viewed as threats to hegemonic masculinity.⁵ In spite of his expansively fleshy body and luxurious garments, Janoth exacts rigid conformity and restraint from his employees, signaling that, like his building, his outward persona is a dissimulation. Even his name suggests a Germanic variant of the two-headed Roman god Janus, indicative of his split identity; while his first name Earl signifies his royalist, antidemocratic leanings. Is he an upstanding Englishman or an embedded fascist posing as one, the film queries? No doubt, the divided sexuality and foreignness of Laughton to American audiences served as a casting ploy to further mark the character as one given over to divided allegiances.⁶ Indeed, the film's three other homosexually-inflected characters are explicitly involved with Janoth physically, including the scar-faced Steve Hagen (George Macready who played the Nazi homosexual in *Gilda* of 1946), the glowering bodyguard/houseboy and masseur Bill Womack (Harry Morgan), and mistress Pauline York or Delos in the novel (Rita Johnson). Janoth's desire to 'possess' Stroud by making him his new protégé thus has sexual implications, often seen in his proximity to, and touching of the main protagonist. The deaths of the film's four homosexually-coded characters serve as a necessary expedient to further underscore its conservative message.

The plot revolves around Janoth's effort to frame the innocent Stroud for a murder that he committed after being symbolically 'outed' by his part-time mistress, evidence of his primitive irrational core and his homosexual panic. The tycoon sees his star employee George Stroud leave *femme-fatale's* York's apartment on the night of the murder, but fails to recognize him, although he suspects an erotic liaison. A heated altercation between Janoth and York ensues in which she questions his potency, referring to him as a 'disgusting', 'pathetic', 'flabby, flabby'.⁷ In the novel, she is more explicit, accusing him of a covert homosexual relationship with his protégé

Hagen, 'Did I ever see you two together when you weren't camping?' she inquires provocatively; continuing, 'As if you weren't married to that guy all your life. And as if I didn't know. Go on, you son of a bitch, try to act surprised'.⁸ Flying into an uncontrollable rage in the film, Janoth strikes her with an old-fashioned sundial, a symbol of his primeval rage and his obsession with controlling time. In need of emotional support and an alibi, he rushes to Hagen's apartment, thereby corroborating his mistress' accusation in the novel of a clandestine homosexual relationship. Not only does Hagen provide the alibi, but he hurries to the scene of the crime to doctor the evidence. The subordinate's sartorial presentation and his analogic space serve to underscore their secret liaison. Hagen's long satin robe and ascot is in keeping with the stereotypically feminine and upper class decadence, and his physical disfigurement with abuse or sadomasochistic practices that were associated with gays and lesbians in cinema. This is reinforced by his surroundings, which are redolent with numerous extravagant objects, described in the script as a crystal pitcher, 'antique furniture, many bookcases, a huge Victorian marble fireplace', and 'Aubusson carpets', objects not likely to be found in the wholesome, middleclass home.⁹

In a strange twist, Janoth and Hagen concoct a scheme to frame Stroud by assigning him to head the company investigation to find the mystery man, with the entire media staff at his disposal. The story thus becomes a test of wits; the virile, heterosexual and married Stroud, who acts out his own frustration by partaking of the boss' mistress, is invested with reclaiming the once proud capitalist icon, the skyscraper from the domination of queer foreign interlopers who threaten to render the already emasculated employees, collectivist-like automatons in its cell-like environs. Stroud has also exhibited his own capacity for divided loyalties by engaging in this illicit affair. Hence, he is simultaneously in a race with time inside the building to prevent the real culprits from pinning the blame on him, while seeking to restore his marriage, or the normative heterosexual bond.



• Fig. 1: Facade of the Janoth Building, *The Big Clock* (1948).

Grid, Spectacle, Labyrinth

The establishing scene, which was shot on location in New York City, announces *The Big Clock's* theme of 'fronting', and augurs the subsequent layering of space. The camera lovingly pans a nocturnal skyline, its melting silhouettes accented by tiny pinpoints of light, a romantic cityscape borrowed from late eighteenth advocates of the picturesque.¹⁰ One skyscraper, the blocky, grid-like surface of the Janoth Building, corporate headquarters for a large media conglomerate, stands out starkly from the rest. In the final script, screenwriter Latimer recommended the following treatment while clarifying the scene's thematic intent: 'THE CAMERA MOVES IN on this building, a clean-lined structure of white concrete and stainless steel', with only a cross section of its exterior illuminated (Figure 1).¹¹ Following his instructions, Paramount's art director Hans Dreier and his assistants (Roland Anderson and Albert Nozaki) fashioned the film's fictional skyscraper, a studio miniature fabricated at a cost of almost six thousand dollars, in an International Style idiom.¹² The scene is thus a combination of buildings shot on location and one given over to creative artifice to underscore that style was employed for ideological intent.

In the fall of 1946, when Latimer was a work on the script, there were few International Style skyscrapers in the United States. According to

architect and historian Robert Stern, Raymond Hood's McGraw Hill Building (1931) was the first International Style Building in New York, but had little impact at the time. Virtually no corporate structures were built for the next fifteen years due to the Depression and the war, underscoring that Latimer's description and Dreier's creation were replete with significance. Indeed, in the postwar period, the viability of the style was hotly debated in the United States. Some regarded it as a harbinger of progressive modernity; while others like architect Frank Lloyd Wright in accord with Latimer, writing in a book evocatively titled *When Democracy Builds* (1945) regarded International Style skyscrapers as the 'sordid reiteration everywhere of space for rent! The overpowering sense of the cell. . . . Box on box beside boxes. Black shadows below with artificial lights burning all day long . . . Prison cubicles!'¹³

In addition to regimenting its inhabitants, Wright, and urbanologist and architectural critic Lewis Mumford had additional complaints against the International Style, which further explain its use as an analogue of Janoth in *The Big Clock*. Employing xenophobic rhetoric, Wright charged the European 'internationalists' of being little more than the new eclectics, who were attempting to peddle their alien goods abroad. 'The predatory eclectic in the right eye. The predatory internationalist in the left eye', Wright intoned. Mumford concurred. In his opening postwar salvo against the style in his weekly 'Skyline' column in *The New Yorker* of 1947, he referred to these architectural practitioners as little more than academic copyists who ignored the human art of living. He encouraged American architects to reevaluate their indigenous traditions, thereby promoting a form or architectural nationalism rather than relying on European importations. Instead of a singular monolithic variant which he found confining, Mumford called for a plethora of modernisms as an antidote to the International Style. Hence, Latimer and Dreier's fashioning of an International-style skyscraper after 1946 was purposeful, signifying, like Janoth, an authoritarian and singular idiom imported by pernicious foreigners.



• Fig. 2: Lower Floor of the Janoth Building, *The Big Clock* (1948).



• Fig. 3: Lobby of the Janoth Building, *The Big Clock* (1948).

A close-up shot of the building's flattened curtain-walled facade and rationalized grid, which echoed Wright's grim characterization, is also meant to highlight it spatially and thematically as a thin veneer for the sinister undertakings which lie beneath the surface. After panning the building from top to bottom, the shot continues into a murky hallway in which Stroud is trapped, linking the exterior grid and the interior labyrinth, different sides of the same coin (Figure 2). While the former outwardly signifies rationality, it is as confining as its maze-like counterpart, which threatens to engulf Stroud in its darkened innards. In most films featuring skyscrapers, buildings are surveyed from bottom to top in order to chronicle their proportions and evoke awe. In contrast, the compromised Janoth Building is given over to evil; hence the downward tilt shot serves as a cinematic device to convey its hellish character, and prefigures the film's surprise ending.

After penetrating the façade and the corridor, Stroud is seen peering down from the multistoried clock, the electronic heart which dominates the theatrical Art Deco-inspired lobby, and recounts the events leading up to his imprisonment in the enormous timepiece. From a high vantage point which echoes Stroud and the machine's downward gaze, the camera surveys a group of tourists who are being led through the lobby by a guide. They are small in proportion to the clock's enormous circular drum which

dominates the lobby's central core. Its tower-like presence in the building's heart conjures up Bentham's panopticon tower, which exerted power and control via surveillance rather than brute force, here transferred to a seemingly autonomous mechanism. The computer-like clock, a sculpture of an armillary sphere-toting Atlas resembling Rockefeller Center's, and the numerous international maps similar to those in Raymond Hood's Daily New Building (1931), which adorn the capacious lobby are meant to serve collectively as a dramatic, touristic spectacle for a public who is awed by display (Figure 3).¹⁴ Like the building's façade, the spectacle of the clock and the dramatic exhibit obfuscates the work-a-day world of office denizens in their austere cubicles in the layered spaces of the confounding labyrinth posing as the grid. A guide who leads a group of gawking spectators through the lobby highlights the mechanic timepiece's far-reaching grasp and seeming omnipotence, proclaiming it 'the most accurate, most uniquely privately owned clock in the world. Behind a huge map of the world is a single huge *master mechanism* built at a cost of \$600,000. It is set so you can tell time anywhere on earth – London, Chicago, Honolulu and so forth. It is also *synchronized* with those in secondary printing plants in Kansas City, San Francisco and 43 foreign bureaus in the Janoth Organization.'¹⁵ The description is purposeful – the clock is a sinister tool of a profligate fascist who regulates

workers' time and seeks Atlas-like control over the entire globe with his dishonest media apparatus, which he does not hesitate to use for his own nefarious ends. Like the body of the bloated, finely-attired Janoth who hypocritically inveighs against waste, the pretentious lobby provides a contrast for the parsimony and restraint he demands.

Both the theatrical foyer replete with images of power and Janoth himself are employed to imply the conservative Time-Life Corporation, a media conglomerate housed in Rockefeller Center, and Henry Luce respectively, perhaps warning Americans of a sinister homegrown fascism. Hence, the film's largely conservative sexual message is mitigated by politically leftist author Fearing, who worked briefly for Time-Life, and whose ideas surface from novel to script. Luce's 'American Century' was a veiled attempt to establish American economic hegemony as a paradigm for a new internationalism. After the war, he called for a 'United States of Europe', sponsored by the United States and Great Britain.¹⁶ Although he touted democratic values, he was mistrusted for his abiding admiration for Mussolini, and his benign acceptance of Hitler right up to the invasion of Poland. In accord with Janoth, Luce was also notorious for the manner in which he presided over his company with military-like precision and intimidation, which he believed insured maximum productivity.

Penetrating the building further with Stroud, the viewer embarks on a skyward elevator journey. Close-up, reverse shots picture each story, featuring window displays advertising various Janoth periodicals, highlighting a product-oriented, increasingly tabloidized media much like Luce's. Similar to the character of the Parisian arcades discussed by Walter Benjamin, the viewer travels upward to partake of products which have been artfully arranged to connote prosperity and sell commodities via seductive advertising, reinforcing the spectacle offered in the lobby.¹⁷ Male and female riders in close proximity engage in flirtations before disembarking and assuming their prescribed tasks in their generic cubicles.

Once inside the multilayered skyscraper office, International Style rhetoric is reintroduced particularly in the depiction of interior offices, continuing the theme of containment and claustrophobia suggested by the façade. Cubical rooms with colourless, unadorned walls lacking in tactility are almost literal quotations of the style, whose advocates described it as 'utility-and-nothing-more', while recommending the use of restrained colour.¹⁸ High-key lighting flattens both the space and its inhabitants, while underlining each room's atonal, geometric shapes, lacking in texture. Weightless planes or curtain walls render the space scopic rather than haptic, thereby diminishing the actors to simulacra, to signify their dehumanization at Janoth's hands. The International Style's often exacting steel frame construction is further explored and hyperbolized in Stroud's office, where the entire window, stretching from floor to ceiling, is depicted as an enveloping cage-like metal grid. Dreier and company accentuated the hero's entrapment by rendering the glass as opaque rather than transparent, precluding the ocular possession of the city available to prestigious executives, a sign of his thwarted masculinity.

Stroud's ability to eventually elude his would-be captors is foreshadowed in the homosocial boardroom that is presided over by Janoth and Hagen, who intimidate the already gelded men into submission. In the lean, austere interior, each executive is given only one minute to deliver his pitch on how to increase magazine subscription rates under the duress of public humiliation or outright dismissal. 'All this waste, sheer waste under the leadership of chuckleheads', Janoth intones hypocritically, seeming to speak the language of the International Style.¹⁹ Shot from below, a cruciform table bisects the frame, setting the bloated Janoth off from an empty chair at the boardroom table. Bursting from a private elevator in tardy disregard of Janoth's strictures, Stroud walks rapidly to his seat but remains defiant in contrast to the cowering others. His demeanor, lean physique, authoritative gait, and winning pitch enforce his emerging autonomy, and identify him as a

paragon of normative masculinity. Later, he will employ a surfeit of logical, unmediated facts, the tools of Janoth himself, to gum up the corporate works, and subsequently stop the clock. Although Janoth is impressed by his soon-to-be nemesis, the battle lines are drawn between normative masculinity and its obsessive, nervous homosexual variant.

Stroud temporarily escapes Janoth's regimenting spatial clutches only to be ensnared by Janoth's double-dealing mistress and the areas she inhabits, which include bars and boudoirs. Hence, metropolitan space is rendered as either a stultifying trap or array of sinful temptations, in contrast to the bucolic vacation dwelling inhabited by Stroud's wholesome wife Georgette (Maureen O'Sullivan). In a gambit which mirrors Janoth's lack of bodily boundaries, York eavesdrops on Stroud's conversation, via an intrusive intercom system in the overly mechanized skyscraper, which piques her erotic interest. She plans later to meet him at a bar in order to have her way with him. They engage in a night of bar hopping and carousing, signified by dissolve shots of neon signage advertising various nightspots to the accompaniment of upbeat music, buy a painting in an antique shop before returning to York's apartment.

A thin, androgynous body type appointed in black gloves and a netted hat, York is meant to evoke a predatory spider, a classic cinematic *femme fatale* intent on her victim. Yet, unlike many of *noir's* fallen women, she exudes sexual ambiguity, which is underscored in the novel by her name Delos, which sounds like Lesbos, and by her austere masculine suit. After escaping to Hagen's apartment, Fearing's Janoth rationalizes the murder by referring to her as a 'part-time liz', which echoes his own divided sexuality. This presages the film's prescriptive message that death is a just punishment for the practice of illicit, and/or homoerotic sex.

Stroud tries to rejoin his wife in a rural vacation cabin to enjoy a belated honeymoon, representative of goodness and homespun values, but is forced to return to undertake the bogus investigation launched by Janoth. He goes back reluctantly to the confining interiors of the

International Style skyscraper, which is becoming increasingly more claustrophobic as witnesses are brought in who saw the mystery man with York on the night of the murder. The accelerated hunt for Stroud, the false culprit, who is desperately trying to evade his captors, occurs later in a Mies van der Rohe-inspired subterranean corridor appointed in variegated marble paneling, further embedded in the skyscraper's interior. Latimer and Dreier employed the International Style to signify an irrational architectural language masquerading as its opposite, hence the rich materials in an otherwise economical setting. Furthermore, the German-born Dreier may have also recommended the use of an Expressionist-influenced film vocabulary, including exaggerated long shots and radically oblique camera angles, to conflate the two European-derived idioms, strengthening the association of the style with foreign evil. By the adept use of style and cinematography, the grid's logic metamorphoses into the confounding character of the labyrinth, a familiar *film noir* spatial trope. Stroud's negotiation of the skyscraper's dark subterranean passages, his entrapment in the clock, and presence in the *femme fatale's* high-rise apartment represent his temporary containment in the maze. The tall building's labyrinthine spaces may also be viewed as analogues of its homosexually-coded characters, who also dissemble, one of the 'blind alleys' that threaten the consummation of Stroud's virile heterosexuality, seen also in Janoth's refusal to allow the hero to symbolically consummate his marital union.²⁰

Clandestine space is also found in the skyscraper bathhouse or gymnasium, which is inhabited by Janoth and Bill Womack, the tycoon's silent young body guard, who offers his boss various 'physical' services. Womack and this scene are absent from the novel, underscoring Latimer's intent to highlight the homoerotic liaison. The cinematic skyscraper bathhouse emerged in American Depression-era cinema (e.g. *Skyscraper Souls* of 1932) to signify homoerotic manipulation by unethical corporate predators.²¹ Womack is a short, unsavory gangster, often designated by his dark shirt and



• Fig. 4: Womack Massaging Janoth, *The Big Clock* (1948).

tie, who acts as Janoth's protector and personal servant, and whose gloomy demeanor is laden with repressed emotion. His character fits the description of homosexual characters who, according to Richard Dyer, 'are intensely physical beings who can not 'do anything' physical and hence vibrate with frustrated, twisted sexual energy'.²² The sparse setting is the site of Janoth and Womack's implied relationship, reinforcing the connection of a foreign-derived idiom and homosexual activity. Employing an extreme close-up shot to convey the couple's intimacy and the stultifying claustrophobia of this hothouse environment, director John Farrow captures Womack sliding oily unguent over Janoth's partly nude, recumbent body (Figure 4). Womack sports an amorphous tattoo on his forearm, which is a composite image of Janoth; it is both a face of a devil with horns while upside down, it is a fleshy nude man. The dialogue infers that he may take Womack on a trip where people are more

tolerant of sexually diverse practices. 'Oh, I'm so tired and run down. I need a vacation', Janoth complains. 'Have you ever been abroad, Bill? It's stimulating . . . different people . . . different customs . . .'²³

American Cold War Discourse and the Expulsion of Homosexuals from Institutional Space

Marginalized gender variants and homosexual characters are often rendered as pathological in *film noir*, associated with calculated dishonesty and criminality, principally at the height of the Cold War.²⁴ As film historian Robert Corber and others have observed, homosexual identity was highly politicized during this period, frequently associated with ominous plots and subversion.²⁵ In 1950, two related political announcements were made – Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that 205 Communists were secretly housed in

the State Department while Deputy Undersecretary John Puerifoy declared that the government had dismissed ninety-one homosexuals from the State Department as security risks, the first of many purges, after several years of intensified harassment.²⁶ More homosexuals were expelled from government employment than were so-called communists, revealing that the persecution of sexual difference was as overarching and oppressive as that of political dissidence; both were associated with foreign evil and 'strange' practices. Indeed there was slippage in Cold War vocabulary concerning these two 'alien' menaces, frequently establishing them as interchangeable. Psychiatrists and medical experts who testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee characterized gays and lesbians as safety threats because of their supposed susceptibility to blackmail by foreign agents. Their expulsion from governmental institutional space and suburban domestic space alike, because of their lack of adherence to the heterosexual nuclear family model, was viewed as the only way to rid the country of undesirables, which was seen as an additional bulwark against Soviet collectivism.²⁷

The 1948 and 1953 Kinsey Reports intensified the fear because of his discovery that homosexuals were physically and outwardly undifferentiated from 'normal' citizens, which made identifying them all the more difficult, reinforcing their covert presence in the very fabric of American life. Much to the surprise of even Dr Kinsey himself, he found that 50 percent of his male subjects admitted feeling aroused by their own sex, while '37 percent had had at least one postadolescent experience leading to orgasm'.²⁸ The data reinforced the idea that a person could choose a sexual identity, which was neither fixed nor immutable. Instead of fostering a sense of tolerance, Cold War ideologues seized upon the findings as further evidence that dangerous, undetected homosexuals were in positions of authority, threatening national security. This was supported by the joint claims of Senator Joseph McCarthy who charged that a homosexual had been reinstated at the State Department, and the

Chief Officer of the District of Columbia Vice Squad that 'sexual deviates' employed by the federal government had been arrested for cruising city parks in search of contacts. An investigation and a subsequent report by the Senate Appropriations Committee written in 1950, which capitalized on Kinsey's findings, stated that 'no outward characteristics or physical traits' identified homosexuals.²⁹ Only by looking beyond their dissembling facades and through investigative tactics could discovery ensue.

The Senate Appropriations Committee's report concluded further that 'one homosexual can pollute a government office', with their mission to procure additional recruits, which coincided with the appearance of four embedded 'aliens' in *The Big Clock*, who used subterfuge and regimentation to assume positions of power, and had proceeded to compromise others morally and sexually.³⁰ Janoth had even commandeered the media, which he had exploited for his own pernicious ends, both to establish world domination and exonerate himself of a crime. The only method to combat this threat was to rout them out in order to prevent them from corrupting others by these immoral, politicized machinations.

Homosexuals were also labeled as disloyal not only because of their supposed connections to foreign influences and practices, but because their 'divided' characters resulted in intra-psychic wars, heightening their so-called emotional volatility. This rationale was often employed to reinforce the idea that they were more susceptible to blackmail, hence representing greater security risks. As John Davidson has recently shown, homosexuality was frequently associated with psychopathology and criminality during the Cold War, in spite of Kinsey's findings to the contrary. For example, in 1948, a sex crime panic was in full swing, prompting FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to declare that sex offenders had replaced kidnapers as the new threats to parents. Sexual psychopathology was often conflated with homosexuality; and many experts viewed gays and lesbians as sick, with an insatiable need for recruits.³¹ This stereotype is

underscored in *The Big Clock* in the character of Janoth who often vibrates with bodily emotion, unable to contain his promiscuity, primitive rages, and murderous outbursts. His sidekick Womack roils with so much repressed emotion that he can barely articulate a sentence. In contrast, Hagen and York represent calculating, sinister homosexuals whose rational exteriors are counterparts to the International Style's thin veneers.

Echoing conservative Cold War discourse, the penultimate scene of *The Big Clock* enacts the ideological and spatial jettisoning or purge of homosexuals from American corporate skyscraper space. Stroud vanquishes Womack, who has been sent by Janoth to find the false murderer, whom he suspects is lodged in the building. Subsequently, Stroud breaks free from his incarceration in the clock, and proceeds to the thirty-second floor of the tall building to assume control, representing his rise in status. He undermines Janoth's false alibi with the help of his wife who now appears at his side, in spite of his transient philandering, thereby restoring marital loyalty and heteronormativity. Frank Krutnik has pointed to the 'tough' investigative narrative of such films as a device to consolidate masculine law, thereby affirming the detective-hero as 'potent, invulnerable, undivided, and also uncontaminated by both the machinating *femme fatale* and the corrupted male figures'.³² Unlike most examples of *noir* detective films, the virile hero in *The Big Clock* is dependent on his wife's resourcefulness and exclusive allegiance to solve the crime, thereby valorizing the heterosexual union and the sanctity of marriage. Georgette Stroud is the one who finds her husband's stained handkerchief in Hagen's office, which had formerly been in York's possession, situating the two homosexual conspirators in her apartment on the night of the murder.

George Stroud sets up a ruse to divide and conquer their alliance, in the hope that they will betray one another, in keeping with Cold War constructions of homosexuals as susceptible to threats and blackmail. He summons them to Hagen's office, accusing Janoth's protégé of being the culprit. The heterosexual couple

dominate one side of the desk, juxtaposed with the homosexual partners on the other in the ultimate struggle for physical control of the building and ideological hegemony. To Hagen's astonishment, the opportunistic, double-dealing Janoth is willing to sacrifice him to save his own neck, prompting Hagen to identify or 'out' his boss as the murderer, echoing the stereotype of the opportunistic, easily compromised, disloyal homosexual. Realizing that the jig is up Janoth shoots Hagen, echoing his fit of rage after being 'outed' by his mistress. He bolts out of the office toward the elevator, which unbeknownst to him is caught between floors because Stroud has ingeniously jerry-rigged it, thereby subverting the tycoon's mechanical stranglehold on office denizens, which is symbolized by the clock. In an impotent gesture, Janoth points his ineffectual pistol at Stroud before falling down the immense bowel-like elevator shaft to his death, literally flushed out of the architectural body (Figure 5). As literary theorist Graham Thompson has suggested in another context, elevator shafts manage to be phallicly and anally symbolic at the same time, strengthening the sexually-inflected resonance of Janoth's demise.³³ The film ends with a reassertion of the primacy of heterosexual masculinity and matrimony at the expense of decadent homosexual infiltrators bent on using the power of the media to distort truth, while simultaneously liberating capitalist skyscraper space.



• Fig. 5: Janoth Plummeting Down the Elevator Shaft, *The Big Clock* (1948).

As a final note, Joseph Breen, the Production Code chief must be credited with helping to forge the film's ending, altering traditional cinematic skyscraper iconography and strengthening the punishment of the culprits. Fearing's novel did not include a triumphant Stroud; rather, Janoth's fall from grace was prompted by his dismissal from the board of directors, followed by a self-inflicted death, which saw him plummeting from the skyscraper's crest. In both Fearing's version and Latimer's preliminary scripts, Hagen lives on and Janoth commits suicide.³⁴ This ending accords with Depression-era films in which corrupt plutocrat's suicide because of financial ruin, loss of power, or the discovery of their malfeasance. However, Breen refused to allow the homosexual criminals the privilege and autonomy to exact their own penalty. In a tersely-worded letter, he stated unequivocally that before the story could be approved, it would be necessary 'to eliminate the suicide' of the tycoon because 'a suicide to escape justice can not be approved'.³⁵ Latimer countered with an even more riveting conclusion by consigning Janoth to the metaphorical bowels of hell for both his sexually 'perverse' and nefarious deeds.

Notes

1 For discussions of the relationship of *film noir* to the Cold War in America, see Paul Arthur, 'Shadows on the Mirror: *Film Noir* and Cold War America, 1945–1957,' PhD diss., New York University, 1985; Brian Neve, *Film And Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Richard Maltby, 'Film Noir: The Politics of the Maladjusted Text,' *Journal of American Studies* 18 (April 1984): 49–71. Maltby cautions against a *zeitgeist* approach to cinema, or establishing a one-to-one correspondence between historical events the cinematic text, preferring instead to establish a chain of plausibility. See also James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998) and Nicholas Carpenter, *Film Noir and the American City* (New York: Free Press, 1997) for a discussion of postwar urban malaise. More recently, Edward Dimendberg has related *film noir* to American post-war spatial practices in *Film Noir and Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Since Dimendberg's concerns were different than my own, he did not consider issues of architectural discourse as they related to gender and sexual identity.

- 2 For the secondary scholarship on the film, see Elizabeth Ward, 'The Big Clock,' in Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, *Film Noir: An Encyclopaedic Reference to an American Style* (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1979), pp. 25–28; J. P. Telotte, 'The Big Clock of Film Noir,' *Film Criticism* 14 (Winter 1989–90): 1–11; Carpenter, *Film Noir and the American City*; R. Barton Palmer, *Film Noir and the Genre Continuum: Process, Product and the Big Clock in Perspectives on Film Noir* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), pp. 141–53; Dimendberg, *Film Noir and Modernity*. Palmer is one of the few scholars to analyze the film's narrative structure in political terms, arguing that the adaptation has more in common with a thriller, a 'socially conservative genre form,' than *film noir* due to Stroud's reestablishment of patriarchal law. Palmer has not examined the various scripts by Latimer nor does he consider the political implications of sexual identity during the Cold War. In addition, he is concerned with narrative structure rather than spatiality.
- 3 Kenneth Fearing, *The Big Clock* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and co., 1946; repr. ed., New York: Mystery Book Club, 1987). The film rights were purchased in the fall of 1946 from Fearing for \$25,000. It was filmed from February 24–April 14, 1947, with adjustments made until August. It was released on April 9, 1948. See Paramount Production Material, *The Big Clock*, files 1 and 2, Margaret Herrick Library of Cinematography, Beverly Hills, California (hereafter MHL). For information on Fearing, see Robert M. Ryley, ed., *Kenneth Fearing: Complete Poems* (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1994); Rita Barnard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nanthaniel West, and the Mass Culture of the 1930s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 4 Paula Rabinowitz, *Black & White & Noir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
- 5 Fearing, *The Big Clock*, p. 10. Fearing's political leftism is well-documented. Despite his denials of actual membership in the Communist Party, he often wrote for their periodicals. In order to support himself, he worked for the Time-Life corporation in the late 1930s, which may have spawned his Henry Luce-inspired depiction of Earl Janoth as a right-wing fascist bent on dominating the media. However, his delineation of Janoth as a homosexual points to his conservative views with regard to gender and sexual identity. See note 14 for more information on Luce. The film went a step further, rendering Janoth as both homosexual and foreign.
- 6 Simon Callow, *Charles Laughton: A Difficult Actor* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), pp. 27–28. Callow

- explores at length the furtive nature of Laughton's liaisons. Indulging in a bit of psychologizing, he conjectures that Laughton's ugliness may have prompted his need for beautiful men. Laughton's wife Elsa Lanchester felt that the furtiveness of his encounters represented both his guilt and need to sin.
- 7 *The Big Clock*, director John Farrow, Paramount Studios, 1948, film (referred to hereafter as *The Big Clock*, film).
 - 8 Fearing, *The Big Clock*, p. 65.
 - 9 John Latimer, preliminary script, November 4, 1946, pp. 49–50, Paramount Script Collection (hereafter PSC), MHL.
 - 10 For a discussion of eighteenth-century notions of the picturesque, as articulated by Uvedale Price and William Gilpin, and promoted with regard to the aesthetic appreciation of skyscrapers, see my *The Skyscraper in American Art, 1890–1931* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1990), pp. 28–39. Van Rensselaer and Henry James supported the use of the picturesque in skyscraper imagery as a method for obfuscating his supposedly harsh, commercial properties.
 - 11 John Latimer, final script, 17 February 1947, p. 1, PSC, MHL.
 - 12 In a work authorization form, dated 5 March 1947, it was reported that \$5000 was budgeted, and \$5845 was the estimate for a miniature of the Janoth building's exterior, Paramount Production Material, file 2, MHL. For information on Hans Dreier, see Hans Dreier, 'Designing the Sets,' in Nancy Naumberg, *We Make the Movies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937); Beverly Heisner, *Hollywood Art direction in the Days of the Great Studios* (Jefferson, N. C. and London: McFarland & Co., 1990). Charles Affron and Mirella Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland & Co., 2004). According to Ramirez, Dreier was one of the most directive set designers. He was trained as an architect in Munich; and in 1919, he began working at UFA. He arrived in the United States in 1923. From 1928–50, he served as the supervising art director at Paramount.
 - 13 Frank Lloyd Wright, *When Democracy Builds*, new ed., rev. and enl., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. 30. This book was originally entitled *The Disappearing City* (New York: William Farquhar Payson, 1932). Wright's reaction to the International Style was often xenophobic and laced with gender-inflected innuendos concerning its lack of potency, prefiguring the view put forth in *The Big Clock*. See his 'Of Thee I Sing,' *Shelter* (1932); 'For All May Raise the Flowers Now For All Have Got Seed,' *T-Square* (1932), reproduced in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, ed., with an introduction by Kenneth Frampton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Collected Writings, vol. 3, 1931–39* (New York: Rizzoli and Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1992–1995). There are five volumes of the collected writings, spanning the years 1894–1959. Lewis Mumford reintroduced the attack on the International Style in 'The Skyline – Status Quo,' *New Yorker* 23 (October 11, 1947): 104–10, leading to a symposium at New York's Museum of Modern Art in February of 1947, entitled, 'What is Happening to Modern Architecture?' For a discussion of the relationship of the postwar response to the International Style to cinema, see my *American Skyscraper Cinema and Gender Construction* (forthcoming Minnesota University Press, 2008).
 - 14 For a discussion of Rockefeller's Center's *Atlas* by Lee Lawrie, which stands in front of the International Building, see Carol Herselle Krinsky, 'Rockefeller Center Sculpture,' *Sculpture Review* 58 (Spring 1999): 30. Krinsky claims that the prevailing opinion concerning *Atlas* was that he resembled Benito Mussolini, which may have influenced the set design. In accord with the theatrical, circular lobby in Raymond Hood's Daily New Building (1931), which includes a spherical globe and changing maps that record the weather, the time and various news bulletins, the Janoth Building is designed to announce the all-pervasive character of his publishing empire.
 - 15 *The Big Clock*, film.
 - 16 Robert Herzstein, *Henry Luce: A Political Portrait of the Man Who Created the American Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1994). See also W. A. Swanberg, *Luce and his Empire* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972); James Baughman, *Henry Luce and the Rise of the American New Media* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).
 - 17 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belnap Press of Harvard University, 1999).
 - 18 Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932, repr. 1966), p. 13. According to Robert A. M. Stern, in Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1986). p. 46, the International Style was first noted by the American public at the New York World's Fair of 1939. Early examples of the style during the postwar period include Ely Jacques Kahn and Robert Adams Jacob's Universal Pictures building (1947) and Emory Roth and Sons' 505 Park Avenue (1949). Beginning in the mid-1950s, the style became popular for governmental and corporate buildings.
 - 19 *The Big Clock*, film.
 - 20 The use of the term 'blind alleys' is borrowed from Richard Dyer who employed it to characterize *film*

- The Grid, the Spectacle and the Labyrinth in *The Big Clock's* Skyscraper

- noir narrative structure, while I employ it to underscore the spatial structure of *The Big Clock*. See Richard Dyer, 'Homosexuality and *Film Noir*,' in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 67. See also Dyer, 'Postscript: Queers and Women in *Film Noir*,' in E. Anne Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, (London: BFI, 1978, repr. 1998), pp. 123–29.
- 21 Depression-era cinematic space will be explored in my forthcoming *American Skyscraper Cinema and Gender Construction* in which I include an entire section on the cinematic skyscraper bathhouse.
- 22 Dyer, 'Homosexuality and *Film Noir*,' p. 68.
- 23 *The Big Clock*, film.
- 24 According to Naremore, *More than Night*, pp. 98–99, 'classic noir was obsessed with sexual perversity; the villains in these pictures tend to be homosexual aesthetes . . . who threaten the values of democracy and somewhat proletarian masculinity'.
- 25 See John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Sexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 26 Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, p. 1.
- 27 For a discussion of sexual conformity in the suburbs, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), esp. pp. 82–84.
- 28 D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p. 35.
- 29 *The Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 2, quoted in Corber, *In the Name of National Security*, p. 62.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 31 Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, p. 56.
- 32 Frank Krutnick, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 125. In this description, Krutnick is referring to *The Maltese Falcon* (1941).
- 33 Graham Thompson, *Male Sexuality under Surveillance: The Office in American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), p. 98. Thompson refers here to the depiction of the elevator in Sloan Wilson's novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).
- 34 John Latimer completed five scripts dated: 4 November 1946; 27 December 1946; 17 February 1947; 12 March 1947; 27 August 1947, *The Big Clock*, PSC, MHL.
- 35 Joseph Breen to Luigi Luraschi, 8 February 1946, p. 1, *The Big Clock*, Production Code Files, MHL.