

## René Balcer's Seeing As and the Crime-Scene Aesthetic

By Robert Hobbs

When the Canadian-American writer, producer, and filmmaker René Balcer (b. 1954) invited me to introduce this book documenting 54 years of his photography, I was surprised to learn of this work, even though I was clearly aware of his many well-publicized accomplishments. These include his highly lauded contributions as executive producer and head writer for the long-running TV show *Law & Order*, as well as creator of its well-received spin-off series *Law & Order Criminal Intent*, in addition to his award-winning documentary filmmaking and notable art collecting. News of his long-term commitment to photography encouraged me to rethink who René Balcer is and what exactly might be his special contributions to this medium. Because others may respond similarly to this news, I will begin this introduction by retracing the steps I took in coming to terms with his photography and the ways it complements his other occupations. Then, I will investigate a particularly innovative aspect of his photographs, his participation in a crime-scene or forensic aesthetic, which dovetails well with his success in television as well as with his long-term fascination with the ways current events and social conditions profoundly impact human lives. In singling out this aesthetic, I remain cognizant of the ways Balcer's photographs also take part in such well-established photographic subjects as decisive moments, exotic images, contradictory signs, and ironic occasions, in addition to the more formal categories of dazzling abstract constructions and saturated color combinations. Hopefully, my reconsideration of the crime-scene aesthetic vis-à-vis photography and Balcer's contributions to it will provide an analytical tool for those wishing to look at the distinctiveness of his work in greater depth.

As an art historian and curator, I began to contextualize Balcer's photography by rethinking his overall involvement in the visual arts. At our first meeting, he responded to my question about the type of art he and his wife Carolyn Hsu collect by showing me on his iPhone dozens of cutting-edge contemporary works by Chinese artists. Because of our mutual connections with the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, I soon learned that he and Hsu were donating to this institution an extraordinary collection of over 800 works by or

related to the work of Japanese landscapist Kawase Hasui (1883-1957), a celebrated Shin Hanga (new print) artist. This collection, which was begun in the mid-1990s, was initially inspired by memories of Balcer's maternal grandfather Joseph Chênevert (1892-1958), a sales agent for a Canadian paper manufacturer, who in 1921 had spent two months in Japan. While Hasui's notable renditions of snow resonated with Balcer's upbringing in Montréal and stories his parents liked to relate about his birth in a snowstorm, his main reason for amassing this collection was his immersion in this art's considerable aesthetic qualities and innovative subject matter. According to Balcer, these include "its narrative quality," ability to recount "human drama[s],"<sup>1</sup> appealing mixture of traditional and contemporary Japanese cultural artefacts, in addition to its remarkable range of saturated hues, sometimes numbering as many as twenty in a single deluxe print, as well as the overall intensity Hasui's collaborators achieved through painstaking over-printing.

I later learned that Balcer's collection of Hasui's work reflected an even earlier interest in acquiring Canadian Inuit prints. Inuit artists had initially been introduced to printmaking in the mid-twentieth century by the Canadian artist James Archibald Houston (1921-1997), who had studied with the Japanese master Hiratsuka Un'ichi (1892-1958)—a fact that was not lost on Balcer. At age 13, he first became acquainted with Inuit art at Montréal's Expo 67, when it was featured in Canada's pavilion. His involvement with this art and his subsequent friendships with several Inuit artists stems not only from a fascination with its widely respected formal qualities but also from a profound respect for these printmakers' and sculptors' abilities to cope with the many challenges their community has faced, including forced relocation to the High Arctic, starvation, compulsory attendance in abusive residential schools, and now climate change. "I was drawn by the wildness and freedom of the designs, the legends and mythology they [the Inuit] represented," Balcer has explained. "But as I became more familiar with the art, what stood out was how it expressed the humor, humanity and soul of the Inuit community and its relationship with nature, the creatures of their world and the larger universe. It is a world filled at once with compassion and terror, with extremes—the comfort of kinship and the threat of starvation." He then added, "The designs, compositions, colors and subject matter flew in the

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face of western art standards and took me into a whole other world.”<sup>2</sup> Together with a group of related sculptures, Balcer and Hsu’s collection of Inuit material, now numbering approximately 600 pieces, has recently been promised to a major museum on the East Coast.

Besides these two collections, Balcer and Hsu have assembled an impressive range of contemporary Chinese art, with an emphasis on the widely acclaimed conceptual work of Xu Bing, as well as the works of Liu Xiaodong, Yu Hong, Yun-Fei Ji, Qiu Ting and Wu Jian’an (who in 2022 participated in an artist’s residency with Inuit artists in the Arctic organized by Balcer and Hsu).<sup>3</sup> In addition, Balcer and Hsu became involved with the then little-known No Name (Wuming) group of artists, active in Beijing between 1970 and 1981. Working at the time of Mao Zedong’s horrendous Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when privacy was deemed subversively bourgeois and even seditious, No-Name artists created paintings that were implicitly critical of the ongoing Communistic purge of capitalist and traditional elements. Taken out of context, their works might appear to be reflections on early twentieth-century School of Paris landscapes, still lifes, and portraits, but this underground movement’s concentration on personal expression, without overtly political references, was created under the radar of Red Guard revolutionaries, who were then condemning any remaining western and/or bourgeois sympathies discernable in members of the country’s elite. In addition to assembling a representative collection of this tacitly subversive work, Balcer through his Mattawin Company sponsored in 2010 a thirteen-volume catalogue of works by No-Name artists. The following year, he and Hsu also supported an exhibition featuring this art together with the Stars and Grass groups in the appropriately titled *Blooming in the Shadows: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985*, which was shown at New York’s China Institute. Concurrently, Balcer highlighted this work in his award-winning documentary film *The No Name Painting Association*.<sup>4</sup>

After recalling Balcer’s long-term art collecting and generous museum patronage, I turned to his biography and early hobby, photography. In several conversations,<sup>5</sup> he has related that, like many children of his generation, he

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enjoyed taking pictures of his neighbors' gardens with an Eastman Kodak Brownie camera. While this pastime was unremarkable, Balcer personalized it by moving his camera as close as possible to his subject in order to enhance the flowers' abstractness. Like many members of his generation, he benefited over the years from looking at the many excellent journalistic photographs reproduced in *Life* and *Look* magazines, as well as those reproduced in *Life's* stunning book on World War II, which his family owned, so that he was able to familiarize himself at an early age with stellar works by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Leonard Freed, Dorothea Lange and Werner Bischof. In recognition of Balcer's continued fascination with photography, his father in 1967 helped him purchase his first "professional" 35 mm camera, a state-of-the-art single-lens reflex Minolta SR-T 101. Because Expo 67 showcased a range of work sponsored by the National Film Board of Canada, Balcer recalls that this showing not only contributed to his interest in photography but also confirmed his growing attraction to films, which was enhanced by the film noir and French New Wave films that were frequently shown on French-language Canadian television.

In 1974, Balcer enrolled in Montréal's Concordia University and majored in its innovative Communications Studies program that combined work in specific media with theory, criticism and history, in addition to drawing together aspects of the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts.<sup>6</sup> Although most of his communications courses focused on media theory, film production, and criticism, he did enroll in two photography courses, including one titled *Dynamics of Visual Representation*. He has referred to its professor, Denis Diniacopoulos, as "a visionary" because of his ability to transform the process of analyzing and creating visual images into a series of discrete assignments that were applicable to both fine art and commercial photography. "He had us put aside the cameras we owned in favor of an Olympus 35 ED rangefinder," Balcer recalls, "It was a simple automatic camera with an excellent lens. Simple, because Denis wanted us to concentrate on composing an image, not on the technical bells and whistles of photography." As a Communications Studies major, Balcer was also able to enroll in a six-month lecture-seminar taught by renowned French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. While Balcer regards the course as a "misfire" since Godard was preoccupied with other matters, it did put him in close

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touch with a French New Wave film master and thus helped to demystify the process of filmmaking. This and other production experiences on such films as *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974) and the position of personal assistant to director John Huston during the filming of *Angela* (1978) set Balcer on a career path that led in 1980 to moving to Hollywood. There he worked as personal assistant to cult film director and photographer Monte Hellman who told Balcer, “I just want to make you see.” In California, he also met directors Francis Ford Coppola, Werner Herzog, Barbet Schroeder, and Wim Wenders—who also became known as a writer and a photographer of monumental still photographs. For almost a decade, Balcer undertook various screenwriting jobs before being hired in 1990 as a staff writer on the *Law & Order* series, where six years later he was promoted to the position of showrunner.

Balcer’s over four-hundred *Law & Order* scripts have drawn on his long-term interest in social injustice, which had been inspired by his family’s involvement in Québec’s *Quiet Revolution* and was sharpened by his violent encounter as a 16-year-old with martial law during this province’s October Crisis (1970) as well as by the many blue-collar jobs and months-long cross-country hitchhiking and freight-hopping “rambles” undertaken during his teens and early twenties. These experiences enabled him to witness at first hand the effects of ongoing prejudices, unwarranted inequities, and the justice system’s often arbitrary practices. Working on scripts for the *Law & Order* series, which was often commended for taking stories directly from the news, Balcer was able to create what he has called “socially engaged fictional dramas that use crime stories to bear witness to American society” in order to realize his own need “to be fully engaged in society . . . to be in the world and of the world. . . [and thus] use my art to bear witness to my times.”<sup>7</sup> As he reflected on another occasion, perhaps, thinking of his own work as well as that of others, “the best mysteries are moral mysteries—not only whodunnits, but whydunnits.”<sup>8</sup>

Because my task is to introduce Balcer’s photography, I will cite only one more of his observations about his work on the *Law & Order* series in order to connect his roles as writer and producer with the crime-scene

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aesthetic formative to many of his photographs. “In each episode, Balcer explains, “I use crime as a window through which I can examine different social phenomena, human behaviors and pathologies .”<sup>9</sup> While the two *Law & Order* series combine serious legal transgressions with unflinching efforts to restore at the end of each segment a modicum of stability, there is no comparable violence in Balcer’s photographs, even though there remains an abiding sense of unease or “creepiness,” using his apt term, that calls into question the setting one is witnessing and at times viewers’ potentially suspicious roles as onlookers. Balcer’s “creepiness” is much more subtle than either frightening or horrific types of images would be; it depends on a low-key strangeness and on situations in which one or more elements do not quite gel, so that there remains a lingering and persistent uneasiness that something is awry.

This disquietude is evident in the very first photograph appearing in this publication, an image made in Washington, D.C. in 1968 when Balcer was only 14 years old. He no doubt wished to include this prescient work because it sets the stage for the crime aesthetic, which many of his subsequent photographs have nuanced and enlarged. Balcer has referred to this work’s “sniper feel” because its overhead perspective and dirty frame on the right imbue the image with a foreboding sense of menace as if this well-groomed soldier has been caught in the crosshairs of a sniper’s rifle instead of a camera’s lens. Balcer has recollected that at the time he was unaware of the telling clues about this soldier’s circumstances: later study has revealed the Vietnam Service bars he is wearing and the packet of orders he is carrying, perhaps to or from Vietnam, since some military personnel were compelled to serve multiple tours of duty there.

A number of different types of disconcertedness attend other Balcer photographs. A 1976 image of a snow-covered vista featuring a modest Québec church and tombstones implies that something is amiss since the strangely foregrounded and seemingly abandoned graves compete for attention with the adjoining building. Perhaps this odd juxtaposition underscores crimes that the Catholic church enacted on the First Nations’ children placed in its care. In this publication of Balcer’s photographs, there are several especially poignant images of the graffiti that is emblazoning and

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defiling the elaborate base supporting the General Robert E. Lee equestrian monument in Richmond, Virginia. The most compelling photographs in this series center on memorials of people whose deaths are linked to the Black Lives Matter movement making one wonder exactly what offenses took place and why these particular individuals' deaths are being venerated in this setting. Certainly, something macabre can be ascribed to Balcer's 2009 New York photograph of scissors left on a tufted leather bench, especially if one approaches this work from the chary perspective Balcer has acknowledged assuming. And something appears to be definitely amiss in his Brooklyn still life of 2015 featuring an American flag, a set of knives, and a splotch of red paint resembling blood. Far less dramatic and yet still evocatively mysterious is the 2019 picture of a small smooth stone on a bench located behind a metal fence in Feldkirch, Austria. Comprising eight images of the same intersection in the ancient Chinese city of Pingyao in central Shanxi, albeit with different individuals and groups, Balcer's 2012 series of photographs suggest a Hitchcockian scenario—a Chinese version of this filmmaker's black comedy *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) --thereby demonstrating how close his photographs are to his screenwriting.

Returning to the early image of the soldier, which set Balcer on the course of pursuing a crime-scene aesthetic, I believe such work may have been informed by his early attraction to Raymond Chandler's hardboiled mysteries, which served during his childhood in Québec as particularly captivating ways to become acquainted with the United States and the crime world featured in so many of its films and television shows. Apropos this immersion in Chandler's fiction, Balcer later quipped, "You want to learn something about America, look at who's whacking who, and how, and why," before elucidating, "Crime is the basement door into a nation's character, as worthy and telling a subject of literature as Madame Bovary's affairs."<sup>10</sup>

Balcer has recounted an early haunting and firmly ingrained crime scene from his childhood:

It was a slightly-seedy hotel in my neighborhood named The Pine Beach Hotel, a two-story clapboard building along the shores of the St-Lawrence River, where it was rumored for as long as I can remember

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that a Chinese man had been found dead under mysterious circumstances – this hotel became the iconic crime-scene of my childhood imagination and can be found echoed in some photos.<sup>11</sup>

He has also attributed the world view occurring in many of his photographs to the genre of mystery writing that has been a central feature of his professional life. Significantly, he does not want his photographs to be “explicit”—the goal is to provide his viewers with enough “crumbs to form a narrative without controlling it,” so that suggestiveness is central. He is adamant in believing that all his photographic scenarios must be found, not set up and certainly not contrived, so that their ambiguities remain a mystery. His photography therefore remains a search for evocative settings in which he is able to discern one or more elements slightly out of sync so that his resultant works can be construed as forensic settings. Consequently, the aforementioned pair of scissors left on an elegant bench in a New York loft remains for Balcer an “odd detail.” While some viewers might consider these shears menacing, possibly alluding to someone in the background outside the photograph’s frame, making perhaps even the assumed viewer an implicit accomplice in a murder site, Balcer intends for such clues to remain open-ended so that they function in a manner similar to actual crime-settings tracked by seasoned detectives. As a professional who has first needed to generate numerous stories about ways crimes can be committed before advancing ingenuous tactics for resolving them, Balcer is not an innocent.

Far from being naïve, Balcer worked for almost a dozen years with Dr. Park Dietz (b. 1948), one of America’s foremost forensic psychiatrists and criminologists in the United States, who was an advisor to *Law & Order* when Balcer was its showrunner. Dietz became known as an expert prosecution witness in trials for such famous cases as those involving John Hinckley Jr., Jeffrey Dahmer, and Ted Kaczynski (“The Unabomber”). Accordingly, Dietz prides himself on cultivating an “idiot savant knowledge of obscure things that pop up in relation to crimes.”<sup>12</sup> In the course of recounting his relationship with Dietz, Balcer has affirmed the lessons he has learned from this forensic specialist:

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My association with Dr. Dietz continued over a dozen years. He taught me, in effect, how to observe a crime scene in order to pick up behavioral clues left by the offender/suspect, that provide insight into the suspect's psychological profile. He was a mentor who honed my eye and whose influence is reflected in my approach to my "street photography."<sup>13</sup>

When characterizing his own investigative approach to his work, Balcer has pointed out, "I walk the streets like the best type of detective—with a lantern consciousness radiating to take in everything in my environment." Thus, in creating many of his photographs, Balcer wears a detective's hat when studying the types of overarching patterns cohering given locales; at the same time, he is interrogating them for disquieting anomalies, so that he is forced to ask, as will many of his prospective viewers, "How did this happen?" "What does this possible fragment of evidence signify?" "How might it portend an illicit view of the world?"

Similar to Chandler who explained in his often-cited 1950 essay *The Simple Act of Murder* that "if the mystery novel is at all realistic. . . it is written in a certain spirit of detachment: otherwise, nobody but a psychopath would want to write it or read it,"<sup>14</sup> Balcer maintains enough distance from his subjects so that he shares in the enigma of his work. In this way, he refrains from the well-known subjectivity of French theorist Roland Barthes expressed in his widely respected treatise *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* in which he touchingly writes, "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident [in an image] which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."<sup>15</sup> Instead of subjectivizing his work, Balcer serendipitously discovers evocative locales that move from Barthes's melodrama, while still subscribing to this critic's often-cited *noeme*, signaled by the phrase "that has been,"<sup>16</sup> thereby reinforcing photography's essence to be exemplary of the present perfect continuous tense. In this way, Balcer's images are more broadly conceived as socially oriented visual pieces than private conundrums.

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While a most useful text outlining the forensic aesthetic is critic Ralph Rugoff's 1997 exhibition catalogue *Scene of the Crime*,<sup>17</sup> it is possible to reformulate this aesthetic so that it works in concert with Barthes's *noeme*; in this way, one can appreciate how forensic sites are able to function analogously to photographs. This tactic is poetically and historically justifiable since photographs of crime settings, beginning in the 1890s, became crucial tools for the detection of wrongdoings as the early French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) details in his book *Legal Photography*.<sup>18</sup> Both photographs and pictures of crime settings are two-part narratives that entice viewers into the interpretation of an image by reconstituting and/or imaginatively devising the likely set of prior actions giving rise to it. This process can be undertaken by first studying a given composition, including its details, that is, by searching for overarching patterns while also remaining open to glitches in these arrangements that might serve as telling clues—in other words, by regarding the roles played by a picture's minutiae as probable traces of an earlier sequence of events yet to be revealed or constructed. Balcer's crime-scene aesthetic therefore involves viewers in a concentrated mining of the given, embracing even the ostensibly unexceptional and apparently prosaic for potential meanings, so that nothing is taken for granted. In such work, the visible is haunted by the invisible; it is replete with traces regarded as ciphers pointing to once suspect presences and now "creepy" absences. As in archaeology where a single shard and its context can divulge extraordinarily relevant knowledge about past lives, the forensic aesthetic depends on incidentals, which can turn out to be the momentous evidence in which a given work's meaning is predicated. In this aesthetic, physical evidence bears the burden of silent and reliable witnesses, and the aftermath that a photograph represents must be regarded as a reliable source if this type of art is to function effectively. Thus, an unsettling sense of a disconcerting outcome infuses this type of photography, just as it would an actual crime locale.

In consideration of this type of work, I should point out that the early twentieth-century German critic Walter Benjamin, who enjoyed detective stories to the point of contemplating writing one himself,<sup>19</sup> theorized that the

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rise of the flâneur, a peripatetic urban dandy and a recent fixture in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, who was celebrated in art and literature for his aimless, leisurely strolls, paralleled the contemporary development of the modern detective story.<sup>20</sup> Similar to flâneurs, astute and successful detectives both in fiction and real life would permit themselves the necessary time to assimilate their unhurried views of the modern city in order to uncover the causes and culprits of crimes that might otherwise be missed. In his essay *The Flâneur*, Benjamin notably remarked, “No matter what trace the flâneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime.”<sup>21</sup> That these two contemporaneous figures paralleled the historical origination of photography is a particularly telling happenstance that was not lost on Benjamin. In his *Little History of Photography*, this critic credited the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Parisian architectural photographer and latter-day flâneur Eugène Atget with being aware of this conjunction, noting, “Not for nothing have Atget’s shots been compared with those of a crime scene.” Benjamin followed this observation with the question, “But is not every spot of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a perpetrator? Should not every photographer—descendant of the augurs and the haruspices—expose guilt on his pictures and identify the guilty?”<sup>22</sup>

Photography’s crime-scene aesthetic also relates to the prospect of “seeing as,” the term Balcer has chosen as the title for this publication. This phrase, which notably appears in the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations (1953)* by the Anglo-Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), usefully substantiates his theory pertaining to the ways words and images can function in the world as socially based language games. In this book, Wittgenstein refers to the well-known Jastrow rabbit-duck optical illusion, named after the Polish-born American psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1863-1944), in order to point out that even though this image does not change, one’s perception of it can readily shift, depending on one’s orientation and surroundings. For French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), this same image, in addition to the Wittgensteinian phrase “seeing as,” helps to clarify poetic metaphors as dynamic acts. ““Seeing as” Ricoeur notes, “is the sensible aspect of poetic language. Half thought, half

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experience, ‘seeing as’ is the intuitive relationship that holds sense and image together. How? Essentially through its selective character.” Continuing his thought, Ricoeur explains that in this type of perception, “the image is not free but tied; and, in effect, ‘seeing as’ orders the flux and governs iconic deployment. In this way the experience-act of ‘seeing as’ ensures that imagery is implicated in metaphorical signification.<sup>23</sup> Considered in terms of Balcer’s photographs, “seeing as” can be understood as a metaphorically induced reading that looks at his images with a certain wariness if not suspicion.

In conclusion, I am suggesting that some of Balcer’s most distinctive images participate in the grand historical and metaphorical tradition that joins photography with detective work; the flâneur’s openness to a changing world with urban crimes; and “seeing as” with eminently metaphoric meanings. Balcer’s type of forensic aesthetic resonances with photography’s history, with Barthes’s assessment of its *noeme*, and with our preponderantly surveillant society in which even an innocent trip to a cash machine can potentially be viewed as a potential crime setting, making this aesthetic both ubiquitous in our time and especially relevant to it.

Robert Hobbs has served as Associate Professor at Cornell University and long-term Visiting Professor at Yale University, in addition to holding the Rhoda Thalheimer Endowed Chair of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University. Author of more than fifty books and major museum catalogues, his monographs have focused on such artists as Milton Avery, Alice Aycock, Lee Krasner, Robert Smithson, Frank Stella, and Kara Walker. In 2006, he co-authored *Frank Thiel: Photography*.

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<sup>1</sup> René Balcer, “Kawase Hasui: Collecting a Versatile Modern Master,” *Impressions* 34 (2013), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> René Balcer, Email to Author, December 11, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to collecting Xu Bing’s art, Balcer collaborated with this artist on his *Tobacco Project Virginia*, which was presented at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 2011. He also contributed the essay “Backbone: Two Friends at Work” to Yeewan Koon, *It Begins with Metamorphosis: Xu Bing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Two year earlier, Balcer’s company had supported the publication of a book presenting New York photographs by the renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, which had been made between 1983 and 1993.

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<sup>5</sup> René Balcer, Interviews with Author, October 18 and 19 and November 10, 2022. Information about Balcer's involvement in photography comes from these interviews, each approximately two hours long. Comments attributed to Balcer that are not footnoted come from these revealing interviews.

<sup>6</sup> "Why study Communication Studies?"

<https://www.concordia.ca/academics/undergraduate/communication-studies.html>, consulted December 19, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> René Balcer, Artist's Address, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China. Typescript, December 9, 2009, pp. 5 and 7. This talk was presented to CAFA's faculty and student body.

<sup>8</sup> René Balcer, "Essay for *New York Times* Mystery Writers of America Insert," February 18, 1996, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Balcer, Seminar Talk, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Balcer, "Essay for *New York Times* Mystery Writers of America insert," n.p.

<sup>11</sup> René Balcer, Email to Author, January 2, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, "Dr. Park Dietz: Dangerous, *Independent* (August 16, 2006),

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/dr-park-dietz-dangerous-minds-412116.html>, consulted January 4, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> René Balcer, Email to Author, January 4, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Act of Murder," <https://mysteryfictions.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/17139/2018/08/Chandler>, consulted November 24, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Rugoff, Anthony Vidler, and Peter Wollen, *Scene of the Crime*, ed. Karen Jacobson (Cambridge, MA and London: UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center and MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Alphonse Bertillon, *Legal Photography*, trans. Paul R. Brown (New York, 1897). Cited in Mary Vital Marchand, "Every Contact Leaves a Trace: Wharton's Critique of the Forensic Imagination in *The House of Mirth*," *Edith Wharton Review* 34, No. 2 (2018): 167-188, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> David Frisby, "Walter Benjamin and Detection," *German Politics & Society* "Cultural Transformation and Cultural Politics in Weimar Germany" No. 32 (Summer 1994): 89-106, p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Edgar Allan Poe has been widely credited for the creation of the genre of detective stories, and he was highly revered by a number of illustrious vanguard French poets, including Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé and painters such as Édouard Manet and Paul Gauguin. For more on this subject see Patrick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Carlo Salzani, "The City as Crime Scene: Walter Benjamin and the Traces of the Detective," *New German Critique* "Arendt, Adorno, New York, and Los Angeles" No. 100 (Winter 2007), p. 168.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, *On Photography*, ed. and trans. Esther Leslie (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd, 2015, rpt. 2016), p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny et al. (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 212 and 213.