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## Introduction: Dissolving the false gold: on the relationship between philosophy and detective novel<sup>1</sup>

Chiara De Cosmo

Molto chiare si vedono le cose.  
Puoi contare ogni foglia dei platani.  
Lungo il parco di settembre  
l'autobus già ne porta via qualcuna.  
[...]

Lo sguardo è là ma non vede una storia  
di sé o di altri. Non sa più chi sia  
l'ostinato che a notte annera carte  
coi segni di una lingua non più sua  
e replica il suo errore.  
È niente? È qualche cosa?  
Una risposta a queste domande è dovuta.  
La forza di luglio era grande.  
Quando è passata, è passata l'estate.  
Però l'estate non è tutto.

Franco Fortini, *Molto chiare*, da *Paesaggio con serpente* [1984]

The present issue of *Odradek. Studies in Philosophy of Literature, Aesthetics and New Media* addresses the detective novel as the focal point of several philosophical tensions. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, different authors have identified into the aesthetical and ideological traits of detective novel the repository of a series of clues for interpreting the structural confusion of a modern life dominated by capital. In this world, things appear to be very clear, yet we are no longer able to discern their history. The detective novel emerged as a genre at the threshold of the full unfolding of a mode of production dominated by contradictions: contradictions that make reality an enigma, a phantasmagoria difficult to decipher, a world filled with distrust and suspicion. Thought is thus called upon to undertake a conceptual task appropriate to its time, one capable of reading the traces of a historicity and a logic that seem to hide in the nooks and marginal details, rather than in plain sight.

This issue set out to explore how this gaze could be configured; in other words, how, by engaging with detective novel,

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philosophy finds productive ways to redefine itself, its relationship with the present, its history, and its epistemic orientations. At the core of the investigation lies the question of the detective novel's philosophical resonance, almost as if it were itself both the clue to a committed crime and a possible trajectory for its resolution. The answer to this question lies in the prismatic directions undertaken by the authors of these contributions, which appear as the outcome of a kind of long-distance collective research. In this endeavor, the connection between philosophy and the detective novel unfolds, traversing different historical-philosophical and literary paths, as a necessity of our present time as well. Starting from its relevance to historical method (Carlo Ginzburg) and to the relation between literary products and reality (Italo Calvino, Gianni Celati) up to its importance for the semiotics (Umberto Eco – Thomas A. Sebeok), the detective novel became a productive space to intersect various fields of knowledge. Within this framework, the relationship between the detective novel and philosophy takes on its own specificity. It is not simply, as one might initially think, a matter of inheriting those detective methods that seem to bear an immediate analogy to philosophical inquiry. Rather, it is a matter of deploying a model of knowledge in which the articulation of categories finds its counterpart in the historicity of objects, in a twofold direction: on the one hand, as an investigation of the genre as a historical product, a seismograph of an epoch and a mirror of its contradictions; on the other, as a guide for a critical unveiling of these very contradictions, to show the non-irreversibility of the “crimes” being committed socially before our eyes. The contributions of this issue allow in their plurality to track down the main lines of this epistemic and conceptual model, by exploring this relationship with detective novel through the lens of different authors and focusing on different theoretical questions that, however, could be gathered around this very gravitational point.

The investigative method proper to philosophy is thus, as Sebastiano Taccola emphasizes, a third way between the two traditional paradigms, the evidential and anatomical one, related to detective investigation: a dialectical model of knowledge. Such model requires the active participation of thought, much like in the gameplay discussed by Bernard Suits (Alexander Asay), in which the flattening of contemporary narrative finds its counterpart in the active engagement of the reader in an investigative “making-sense” process. This kind of thought knows how to be attentive to the deviations and irregularities of the real, as in the detective

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novels of Poe (Elisa Bacchi), being able to integrate them in the process of searching for clues without flattening them. In this particular intersection between theory and detective novel, this dialectic does not shed thus its speculative complexity. Instead, it reveals itself to be much more than a logic imposed upon its objects and to be able to deploy the articulation of its elements starting from an empirical and micrological investigation. In a Benjaminian sense, regaining the ability to grasp history – in its remnants and ruins, but also in its potentialities (Giulia Ascione) – could not but turn into the capacity to linger on the fragments and marginal clues. It is through this interpretive orientation that the spaces of the modern world become a plot in which concealed traces are embedded: traces that, as in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, recall its genesis and the urgency of critique (Carlo Salzani). But the detective novel also unravels the dialectical structure of an epoch dominated by antagonisms, carrying with it the unconscious historiography inherent in literary objects. Its very architecture, together with the seriality of its protagonists and situations, make it a privileged mirror of a capitalist mode of production that, to be interpreted, requires a Brechtian estrangement of perspective (Luca Timponelli). It is also the outcome of a literary-political struggle to define the coercive dominion of social reality from a decentralised viewpoint. In this sense, far from being dismissed as a "lowbrow" narrative genre, the detective novel becomes a repository of clues precisely *as such*: as a product of popular culture where the intersection of traces from different times – as Gramsci argued – expresses also an urgency for emancipation from one's own subalternity (Marco Gatto). A philosophical perspective shaped by its confrontation with the detective novel finds ways to redefine sideways the legal apparatuses of power that dominate society through the unforgettable figures like Javert, Holmes, and Father Brown (Federico Di Blasio). The figures of "classic" detectives, from Dupin to Holmes, from Poirot to Father Brown, are rediscovered in this volume as the focal point of literary meanings that, in a Blochian sense, unveil themselves as unfulfilled (Francesca Vidal). For, as Bloch observed, philosophy is far from rejecting paradoxes if paradoxes belong to the things themselves (Chiara De Cosmo): rather, it takes on the task of reactivating them, so that they prompt thought not to stop in the face of the world's opacity.

While not exhausting all the trajectories of a field of investigation that proves to be rich in possibilities and directions

for exploration, this issue nonetheless seeks to outline, within the pluralism of the contributors' perspectives and sensibilities, a common path in engaging with the detective novel in order to outline also the possibility of a critical look on the contemporary social contradictions and to emphasize the epistemic lines of a model able to confront with them. A path that attempts to partially dissolve that glittering gold which is not truly gold.