

## 0. Introduction

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The reader of crime fiction is often a witness long after the fact, after the trail has gone cold. But the point is to reopen the case, look ironically for clues. It is a self-conscious conceit nowadays, to solve crimes, when media floods us with fake clues day and night. Where is the bottom to any crime? In the case of *Bleeding Through*, the reader lives in the year 1986 and makes friends with an elderly lady pushing ninety. The lady's name is Molly. She can often be seen shambling along, always a trifle off balance, up the hilly streets of Angelino Heights, a run-down older neighborhood in Los Angeles. The word out on Molly is that she murdered her second husband. And yet, she looks thoroughly unable to even raise her voice. Finally, the narrator asks Molly what happened to her second husband. She adjusts her jumbo eyeglasses, and answers simply: "His name was Walt, very different from my first husband, who sported with other women. Walt, to tell the truth, even in life, never left much of an impression."

In the original 2003 version, the print novella as well as interactive layers on a DVD delivered background about Molly, on what secrets she had; but as aporia, not enough to begin prosecuting her for murder. The reader chose from over a thousand images, voice-overs, videos, films, maps that both reveal and cloak her story. They reveal not only Molly's erasures, but also those of Los Angeles. Molly lives in the general downtown area, where more noir films were shot than anywhere else on earth. And yet, she hates crime movies, prefers screwball comedies.

In stages, we learn of Molly's seven final thoughts on earth. Tier I of the interface contours her thoughts into an archive of photos, films and

voice overs. The sum of these feels almost like a novel or a movie. In Tier II, back stories, as research, to this potential Film Noir are revealed. By the Third Tier, we are too loaded down with information, as if the reader now knows too much even for a crime movie. This interface, designed by Rosemary Comella and Andreas Kratky, was released in 2002–2003, for the German media museum ZKM, in collaboration with the Labyrinth Media lab at the University of Southern California. It was based on a “docufable” from Norman Klein’s *History of Forgetting* (1997), included as chapter 5 in the “Making of” section of the present book. Indeed, America’s sense of crime has grown so much older since then.

Some 20 years after the first edition, this book includes the original novella, critical and historical essays on *Bleeding Through*, its contexts, its politics, and not least on changing perceptions of its aesthetic and medial strategies over time, as well as short fictions that went into the making of *Bleeding Through*. There are revaluations from different years, up to 2021, and an interview with Norman Klein. The sum of these reveal not only Molly’s story, but the chronicle of what happened to downtown Los Angeles from 1920 to the present. The layers combine comic picaresque and documentary noir (and its hidden sources) as the comic embrace of the city itself.

As for the multimedia material contained on the DVD in the 2003 edition, this cannot simply be transferred to a website, now surely the expected option. More importantly, however, media evolution since 2003 suggests a different path anyway: While the interactive, non-linear hypertext interface requiring constant user activity was highly innovative then, and suited the enthusiasm about such media at the time, such interactivity has become far more normal (the award-winning interface as well as some reservations about its stochastic elements are discussed in Chapter 3 and in the interview in Chapter 9). In short, rather than seeking to replicate the 2003 experience of navigating the DVD<sup>1</sup>, we present links to two documentary films on *Bleeding Through*. One is a documentary combining excerpts from *Bleeding Through* and footage of how the

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1 Readers wishing to experience the original navigation may contact the editor to arrange for the sending of a USB device containing the original digital material.

interface is navigated<sup>2</sup>, the other is the documentary *How to Make this into a Movie – Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986* by two film students from the University of Duisburg-Essen, Lisa-Marie Krosse and Jan Niederprüm<sup>3</sup>, which includes conversations with Norman Klein and Jens Gurr.

Chapter 1 of this book contains Norman Klein's original 37-page novella *Bleeding Through*, detailing Molly's story and highlighting the connection between urban development in LA through the 20th-century and Hollywood murder films. Chapter 2, "Montage and Superposition: The Poetics and Politics of Urban Memory in *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920–1986*" is a long essay on *Bleeding Through* by Jens Martin Gurr, while Chapter 3, "Spaces Between: Traveling Through Bleeds, Apertures, and Wormholes Inside the Database Novel" is an essay by Klein from 2007, which highlights his evolving views on the affordances and limitations of database novels such as *Bleeding Through*. In "Los Angeles since the End of Molly's Story: 1986–2021", which forms Chapter 4, Norman Klein traces some 35 years of urban transformation in Los Angeles to the present day, including thoughts on how COVID-19 may affect the city in the long run.

The 'Making of' section of the book opens with two short docufables from Klein's study *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (1997) that were central to the genesis of *Bleeding Through*: Chapter 5, "The Unreliable Narrator", contains the kernel of Molly's story as later detailed in the novella "Bleeding Through", while Chapter 6, "Noir as the Ruins of the Left" is a docufable imagining what would have happened had Walter Benjamin survived his attempted escape from the Nazis and had settled in Los Angeles. Though never mentioned in *Bleeding Through*, Benjamin's views on the perception of cities are central to *Bleeding Through* and its conception of urban layers. Chapter 7, "The

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2 The 44-minute film is to be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMX5xuuyIDQ>.

3 The 21-minute film *How to Make this into a Movie – Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986* is to be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt5lVDBln5k>.

Morgue: Fifty Ways to Murder a Man” is brief essay on a compilation of graphic newspaper reports on murders in Los Angeles that served as a backdrop to Molly’s story, while Chapter 8, “Absences, Scripted Spaces and the Urban Imaginary: Unlikely Models for the City in the Twenty-First Century” is an essay written in 2002 in the early phase of working on *Bleeding Through*. With its discussion of urban polarities in Los Angeles and how they are both highlighted *and* glossed over in Hollywood films, but also with a discussion of American politics after 9/11, it provides key contexts for *Bleeding Through* and points forward to Klein’s more explicit engagement with US politics in his later work. Chapter 9, a long interview with Norman Klein conducted for this volume in May 2022, focuses on the genesis of *Bleeding Through* and on the centrality of Walter Benjamin to its aesthetics and its politics of urban perception and representation. It thus seeks to tie together the key strands of this book.

We have decided not to modify, adapt or update the essays to express only present-day views; rather, apart from a harmonization of the reference system and the correction of obvious errors, they have deliberately remained unchanged: Written over a period of 20 years, they trace media evolutions and changing views on the strengths and limitations of multimedia database novels, including thoughts on how lessons learned from *Bleeding Through* came to shape Klein’s second media novel, *The Imaginary 20th Century* (2016).

This book has long been in the making. In the words of Sterne’s narrator Tristram Shandy (a shared obsession), we hope the reader will enjoy the roundabout evolution of a “slight acquaintance”, begun in 2009 with an invitation to present *Bleeding Through* at a conference (for some reason, this did not work out), which – over more than ten years of intermittent though increasingly sustained conversation meandering around *Bleeding Through* – has “grow[n] into familiarity” and, in contrast to Tristram’s relations with his readers, has “terminate[d] in friendship”. If this result of our dialogue is only half as rewarding to readers as the dialogue itself has been to us, we will be most pleased.