

Crime Fiction and the Idea of the Normal Space: *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime*

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This paper investigates a central albeit largely implicit premise of the genre of crime fiction: a normative vision of society in relation to which the criminal event forms an exception or a mystery. In my paper, I discuss Sean Penn's film adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's story *The Pledge* as well as Lars von Trier's *The Element of Crime*. Both films explore a normal space in dissolution or in the process of becoming a zone in which the lines between detective and criminal, as well as crime and its solution, become blurred. I use the term 'katechon,' an ambiguous figure Carl Schmitt uses to describe a double movement—designating both the fight against the antichrist but at the same time the postponement of the kingdom of God—to capture this moment of blurring, which at the same time is a form of clarification; it reveals the fictionality of the normal space, its absence of absolute legitimacy, ironically at a time when this space—at the end of history—has reached its complete, immanent form, one that no longer recognizes an 'outside.' In both *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime*, I show, what brings us back from the edge of destruction is the figure of the detective surrendering to madness, that is, to a self-enclosed and separate world, a gesture that thus restores the possibility of the normal space.

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Zoom link: <https://tinyurl.com/mpbhp4>

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