

Coming Home
Veteran Readjustment, Postwar Conformity
and American Film Narratives, 1945-1948

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Contents

Contents	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv

Introduction 1

Part One: The Sociology of Veteran Readjustment 57

1. **'The Most Orderly Society in the Modern World'**
Military Culture and Society 58
2. **'Like the Orphan and the Prisoner'**
The Problem of Veteran Readjustment 74
3. **When Dreams Came True**
Marriage and Family on the Postwar Home Front 89
4. **Democracy at War**
Enemies, Allies and Others 104
5. **Between Two Worlds**
The Veteran and The Stranger 121

Part Two: Readjustment and Film Narrative 136

6. **'Am I Really Home?'**
Veteran 'Readjustment' and *The Best Years of Our Lives* 137
7. **The Battle of Bedford Falls and the Suburban Ideal**
Postwar Suburbanisation and *It's A Wonderful Life* 156
8. **'Awful Cheap Material'**
Veda's Dress, Consumer Culture and *Mildred Pierce* 175
9. **Decor and Recollection: *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna and American Cultural Readjustment**
Letter From an Unknown Woman and *The Emperor Waltz* 193
10. **Big Business and Little People**
The Organisation and *Force of Evil* 210
11. **'In Harper, there's nothing to be afraid of ...'**
Renascent Fascism and *The Stranger* 227

Conclusion: 'The Uniform of the Day' 245

Bibliography 248

Film Index 266

Abstract

The aftermath of World War II witnessed large-scale military demobilisation and, in its wake, a vast influx of returning servicemen. Their homecoming signalled a transition from military to civilian life which was often described as 'readjustment.' The term is usually taken to imply a process of homogenisation which engendered a condition of conformity in ex-servicemen and, by extension, in society at large. This thesis argues against this view and demonstrates that 'readjustment' wasn't intended to reproduce conformity but, on the contrary, was to provide the means for the reconversion of the 'conformist' ex-serviceman into the independent, autonomous citizen necessary for the functioning of a democratic society, especially in contradistinction to the conformism associated with the totalitarian Other. It was assumed that servicemen had become habituated to the military's authoritarian regimen of regulation and command which subsumed individuality. Hence, 'readjustment' was concerned with the 'nonconformist' individual who would become indispensable to a postwar 'Americanism' which was being defensively constructed against totalitarianism and, moreover, against the 'totalitarian' implications of a conformism often seen as endemic in America as a mass society.

This study recontextualises postwar film narratives (1945-48) in relation to the discourse of 'readjustment' and, by treating 'conformity' as a complex, contradictory and unreliable term, it problematises 'readjustment' and its role in the construction of postwar 'conformity.' The thesis draws methodologically on Michel Foucault's work on discourse theory, and Dana Polan's approaches to 1940s' narrative and social history. The study comprises two principal areas of research: part one analyses the sociological construction of 'readjustment,' and part two examines how 'readjustment' and its ramifications were refracted through film narrative. The film readings acknowledge the incoherence and instability implicit in the title's key terms through an approach which highlights narrative inconsistency, ambivalence and contradiction, and which works to disturb the notion of postwar social history as a stable, coherent narrative.

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Cornell Woolrich dedicated one of his 1940s' novels to his writing technology (a Remington typewriter) and, like him, I acknowledge mine (an iMac) for the sheer beauty of its technological efficiency and dependability in the service of this project.

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Odysseus stirred and woke from sleep in the land of his fathers. Not that he knew his whereabouts. Partly he had been absent for so long; but in part it was because Pallas Athene had thickened the air about him to keep him unknown while she made him wise to things. She would not have his wife know him, nor his townsmen, nor his friends. ... So to its King Ithaca showed an unaccustomed face, the pathways stretching far into the distance, the quiet bays, the crags and precipices, the leafy trees. He rose to his feet and stood staring at what was his own land, then sighed and clapped his two palms downward upon his thighs, crying mournfully, "Alas! and now where on earth am I? Shall I be spurned and savaged by the people of this place, or find them pious, hospitable creatures?"

Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XIII
Trans., T. E. Shaw (Colonel T. E. Lawrence), 1935

Introduction

Manhattan. Glistening modern giant of concrete and steel, reaching to the heavens and cradling in its arms seven millions. ... Happy beneficiaries of the advantages and comforts this great metropolis has to offer. Its fine wide boulevards facilitate the New Yorkers' carefree, orderly existence. A transportation system second to none in passenger comfort. Quaint little sidewalk cafes make for leisurely, gracious living. For its nature-lovers, the peace and privacy of a day in the sun.

Bill Cole (Melvyn Douglas), *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948)

You know, Betty, when you're lying in a foxhole in Okinawa, you've got plenty of time to think things out. ... Betty, do you know what a fellow thinks about when he's lying out there in the mud with the shells bursting all around him? ... He thinks about the fundamental things, the things that really count, the basic things. ... Darling, I've bought a chicken farm. It's the most wonderful place you can possibly imagine. It's situated high up in the mountains, miles from everywhere. Forty beautiful fertile acres.

Bob MacDonald (Fred MacMurray), *The Egg and I* (1947)

Bill Cole's voice-over narration is a paean to city life, but the city we actually see in the film's opening montage is a visual contradiction of his advertising-copy description. A series of establishing shots depicts narrow, gridlocked streets with traffic brought to a frustrated standstill, horns blaring in exasperation; the subway teems with thousands of commuters, desperately attempting to board trains already full; crowded lunch counters are packed with customers eating with frenetic haste. At home, Jim Blandings (Cary Grant) and his wife Muriel (Myrna Loy) live with their two daughters in a cramped, cluttered, 'cracker-box' apartment in which the rituals of everyday life must be continually negotiated within the confines of a domestic space so ridiculously small that it can scarcely accommodate them. Resigned to this way of life, they are, says Bill, 'just like thousands of other New Yorkers: modern cliff-dwellers.' Bill's ironic commentary satirises the sheer awfulness of city life both for the Blandings and the 'seven millions' like them who put up with these degraded forms of urban living as a matter of course.

But city life here doesn't merely entail discomfort and inconvenience: these are unequivocal depictions of *mass* existence and the Blandings are situated as representative figures in a mass society. Jim is not only a 'typical' New Yorker but 'typical' in other ways too. He has a conventional job, as an advertising executive, and, according to Bill's perfunctory description, a conventional family ('lovely wife, two fine kids'). Jim

and Muriel seem average, typical, undifferentiated: even their name connotes blandness. So when they resolve to buy a house in the country, the move is not only an escape from the privations of city life, but also a means of establishing a sense of their own differentiated identity. Although their 'dream house' turns out to be a dilapidated ruin, each projects onto the decrepit property a fantasised image of what it could be: for her, a chocolate-box cottage, and for him, the manor house of a country squire. But as they proceed with their plans for the house, they are beset by so many problems that they decide to abandon the project. However, on seeing an architectural drawing of the property, they instantly change their minds. It isn't so much the drawing's power to represent the potential actualisation of the house which sways them, rather, as the close-up of the drawing indicates, it is the sight of their own names on it - 'The Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Blandings' - which resolves them to persevere.

Bob MacDonald is similarly disillusioned with city life and he, too, dreams of a new home. Like Jim and Muriel, Bob and his wife Betty (Claudette Colbert) buy a ramshackle country property in order to invest in the promise of a different kind of life. Bob's dream was conceived explicitly in an Okinawa foxhole when he was a soldier in the Pacific war. Now, frustrated by a city job which has nothing to do with the future he envisaged during wartime, he abruptly breaks with the conventional patterns of corporation employment and announces to Betty that he has quit, 'to break new roads into the wilderness.' Despite catastrophic setbacks, Bob and Betty remain undaunted in a venture which represents the possibilities of a different kind of life from the conventional course which seemed so predictably mapped out for them. Like the Blandings' 'dream' house, the MacDonalds' 'wonderful' farm represents both a literal and figurative *space* in which they seek to establish a sense of their own identity by distancing themselves, like pioneers, far from the madding crowd of mass urban society.

In highlighting these narrative representations of 'home,' I raise two related questions arising from historical and theoretical concerns affecting our readings of postwar

American films. How is narrative meaning produced and ascertained? I contend that our understanding of these narratives benefits from an acknowledgment of how they are informed by the historically-specific circumstances of demobilisation and underwritten by the discourse of returning servicemen's 'readjustment' to civilian society. The figure of the returning veteran is writ large in these narratives, even if he isn't always readily identifiable. Although relatively few films deal explicitly with 'the veteran as such,'¹ he remains implicitly as a narrative figure who returns from the war to negotiate his re-entry into a new postwar social order. So, while Bob MacDonald is explicitly characterised as a veteran and Jim Blandings isn't, 'the veteran' remains vicariously inscribed in Jim's characterisation with the residual traces of wartime experience. For example, the apartment bathroom is likened to a war zone where he habitually cuts himself shaving, which entitles him, he remarks, to 'the Purple Heart.' At work, he handles the 'Wham' account, an allusion to that wartime rationing staple, Spam. Moreover, the purchase of the house is itself only made possible through his war bonds. Hence, the notion of 'home' can be seen as a coded representation of postwar suburbanisation linked to the returning veteran.

'The veteran' loomed large in postwar discourse as the subject of intense scrutiny and speculation. He was an especially significant figure in the period's emergent discourse of conformity. There were concerns that military experience would have impaired the ex-serviceman's sense of his own individuality and engendered in him a conformist disposition. Hence, there was an implication that a national proclivity towards conform-

¹ Narratives about veterans are classified, significantly, as either 'social problem' film or as a subcategory of 'film noir.' The 'social problem' is often an injury so the veteran's 'readjustment' involves physical rehabilitation. Examples include, *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945), *Pride of the Marines* (1945), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *The Men* (1950). See also, *Till the End of Time* (1946), *From This Day Forward* (1946). See, for example, Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, 'Readjustment - "Nervous from the Service,"' in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 227-34. The 'noir' veteran is often characterised as neurotic or psychotic. Examples include, *Act of Violence* (1946), *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), *Somewhere in the Night* (1946), *Crossfire* (1947), *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947), *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands* (1948). He could also be a transitory 'homeless' figure characterised by cynical detachment and disaffection. See, for example, Frank McCloud (Humphrey Bogart) in *Key Largo* (1948). (For discussion of the 'noir' veteran, see 'The Problem of Film Noir' below.)

ity could ensue, a characteristic increasingly associated with totalitarianism.² Consequently, 'the veteran' became a crucial figure in the reconstruction of postwar Americanism. The purpose of my study is to problematise conventional readings of postwar films through a discursive 'reconnection' between these narratives and the figure of 'the veteran' constructed within the discourse of conformity. This isn't, however, a study of veteran narratives (although such a study remains to be written),³ but rather, an enquiry into what is often the subtle and covert narrative inscription of veteran 'readjustment.' I argue that we need to reconceptualise postwar narratives in accordance with an understanding of 'the veteran' as a key figure in the discourse of conformity.

Postwar 'Readjustment' and Conformity

The aftermath of World War II witnessed military demobilisation on a formidable scale and, in its wake, a vast influx of returning servicemen. The veterans' homecoming signalled a transition from military to civilian life which was often described as 'readjustment.' The term was predicated on a presumption of *difference*, where servicemen's military experience had rendered them unlike and apart from mainstream society at home. The difference between military and civilian society was often described as worlds apart, worlds not merely different but mutually incompatible and the servicemen's return was viewed as a vast migration from one world to the other. Even prior to their demobilisation, veterans were beginning to assume the appearance of an army of alien beings: incomprehensibly strange and different. The purpose of 'assimilation' would be to efface this perceived difference and ex-servicemen would undergo a process of social reconversion whereby they would become, as the term implies, *like* civilians again as they were reabsorbed into the social system of home. The term, in this sense, alludes to an implicit

² On the ideological function of the term, see Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, 'Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930's-1950's,' *American Historical Review*, 75 (1969-70), 1046-64. The term conflated dissimilar enemy states and served in shorthand to 'explain' them as the same to Americans who 'casually and deliberately articulated distorted similarities between' Nazism and Communism. 'Once Russia was designated the "enemy" by American leaders, Americans transferred their hatred for Hitler's Germany to Stalin's Russia with considerable ease and persuasion.' *Ibid*, 1046.

³ On the veteran in Hollywood narratives, see Larry Langman and Ed Borg, 'Veterans,' in *Encyclopedia of American War Films* (New York: Garland, 1989), 614-17.

ideological agenda. Demobilisation had brought back the servicemen, but 'assimilation' would see them brought back *in*. The ideological implication is of a social process which would oversee the ex-servicemen brought back into line with 'orthodox' social norms. The issue precipitated an unprecedented level of government intervention leading to an extensive series of measures in the GI Bill (of Rights), legislation which would have far-reaching implications for the postwar reconstruction of American society.⁴

'Readjustment' was seen as a critical social problem with crucial implications for postwar American society. The term is usually taken to mean a process of homogenisation which engendered a condition of conformity in the ex-servicemen and, by extension, in society at large. Hence, 'readjustment' would be subsequently identified as the precipitating cause of the overall sense of conformity which is generally held to typify - and denigrate - the postwar period as the *Zeitgeist* term for American society from the end of the war and throughout the ensuing decade.⁵ It appeared to many commentators that Americans *en masse* were settling into a conformist way of life and that key social institutions were becoming culpable agencies in the production of what appeared to be a universal 'conformity culture' as a byproduct of 'assimilation.'

Many of these institutions seemed to confirm a national tendency towards con-

⁴ Significantly, the inclusion of 'readjustment' in the Bill's formal title ('The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944') had little popular appeal. On the GI Bill and its postwar implications, see Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington: Brassey's, 1996).

⁵ Influential texts in the critique of conformity include: Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, rev. edn (New York: Collier, 1961); Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, new edn (New York: Vintage, 1992); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992); John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York: Vintage, 1956); Norman Mailer, 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,' in *Advertisements for Myself*, new edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 337-58; C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, new edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); *The Sociological Imagination*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); *The Status Seekers: An Exploration of Class Behaviour in America*, new edn (London: Longmans, Green, 1960); David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1949); William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Rinehart, 1942).

formity and uniformity and 'home' became the crux of these concerns.⁶ Together with marriage and family, 'home' would often be represented by the new suburban housing developments as serried ranks of seemingly identical, barrack-like units. According to William Whyte, residents themselves had wry descriptions for suburbia, such as, 'a lay version of Army post life.'⁷ Work was seen to add another dimension to this conformist tendency, especially through corporation employment. As corporate structures grew bigger, the employee began to look smaller, one of the 'new little people' described by C. Wright Mills,⁸ and later personified as 'organisation man,' an anonymous little cog in an enormous faceless machine. Even his clothing looked like a uniform and terms which signified uniformity, like 'white-collar' and 'grey flannel suit,' would become emblematic of the postwar years.⁹ There was also a preoccupation with consumerism and materialism as the postwar economy became increasingly driven by mass production and mass consumption.

There were concerns that increasingly large-scale national organisations had assumed the characteristics of 'total' *systems*, a condition which has been conceptualised as 'Fordism.'¹⁰ These systems derived from Frederick Taylor's reorganisation of labour processes and Henry Ford's automated production plant. The incorporation of these principles under the rubric of 'Fordism' didn't simply mean automated assembly-line production but the consolidation of integrated systems of organisation and regulation where scientific, technological, informational and managerial innovations were harnessed in systems of rationalisation. Where the logistics of war-time mobilisation had established large-scale organisation and production, postwar reconversion consolidated the

⁶ 'Home' is treated here as a complex and unstable term which encompasses multiple meanings. In the most obvious sense, it is the actual place where one lives, or rather, where one has lived and to which one returns. It is also an imaginary space which, for the serviceman abroad, became the focus of past recollection or future aspiration. Homecoming might confirm a distant conception of 'home sweet home' or otherwise reveal some disparity between the real and the imagined. 'Home' is also the matrix of familiarity, the central point of orientation from which the self is defined against all that which is not 'home,' that which is foreign. 'Home' structures the self and conceptualises national identity.

⁷ Or, 'a Russia, only with money.' Whyte, *Organization Man*, 259.

⁸ Mills, *White Collar*, xviii.

⁹ See, Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* [1956] (London: Pan, 1958) and its film version, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956).

¹⁰ See, for example, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 125-40.

transformation of an American economy geared towards mass production and mass consumption. Underpinned by these economic requirements, Fordist economic rationalisation had far-reaching implications for the modernisation of American society in which the standardisation and commodification of culture became structurally determined. The transformation, as David Harvey suggests, was all-encompassing. 'Postwar Fordism has to be seen ... less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life.'¹¹

Moreover, there were increasing anxieties that postwar America had become a mass society with a mass culture. Indeed, 'mass' would become one of the key terms to define a period which seemed geared to the mass production and consumption of conformity. Many commentators readily inferred signs of mass conformity in their readings of postwar culture. Lewis Mumford, for example, found that the 'mass movement' to suburbia signified the standardised mediocrity of where people lived and how they were living. For Mumford, every aspect of suburbanisation represented industrialised *sub*-standardisation: 'a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold.'¹² It seemed as if, like the military, everything and everyone was beginning to look the same.

These representations suggest a universalised sense of mass conformity but competing claims would find evidence to the contrary. According to this 'alternative' view, the period's nonconformism can be seen in various cultural texts and social practices in which 'The Individual' is identified as 'breaking ranks' with conventional patterns of behaviour. Indeed, critical claims on behalf of the 'nonconformist narrative' came to provide oppositional ways of reading the period. There are many well known examples of this revisionist tendency. For example, 'rebel' screen stars such as Marlon

¹¹ Ibid, 135.

¹² Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), 486.

Brando and James Dean would come to represent through their 'outsider' roles and 'Method' performances an iconic repudiation of conventional society.¹³ Moreover, the brooding, introspective demeanour of the disaffected, marginalised loner suggested a *thinking* and *feeling* kind of dissent which appeared in opposition to the 'mindless' and 'robotic' characteristics generally attributed to 'mass' society. According to this 'alternative' view, there were a number of other counter-currents to mainstream orthodoxy. Holden Caulfield, the narrator in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), exemplified teenage dissatisfaction with postwar 'phoniness.' The Beats became one of several movements to eschew the *mores* of conventional society, where Jack Kerouac's 'on the road' mythology pointed away from the sense of 'home' associated with the ones in suburbia. Norman Mailer found the exemplary figure of resistance to conformity in 'the American existentialist - the hipster.'¹⁴ This figure, drawing on black forms of cultural identity, was historically associated with 'Negro' marginalisation and alienation because, says Mailer, 'he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries.'¹⁵ The 'hipster' constituted a crucial figure of defiance in the face of a totalitarianism which, for Mailer, *already* characterised postwar America.¹⁶

The period is often seen in terms of these polarities, characterised, *in general*, either by a prosaic mass conformism or a romantic dissenting individualism. Both perspectives, however, are affected by the same misconception: a tendency to disavow narrative inconsistency, ambiguity and contradiction. For the purpose of this study, I am drawing on a reading model alert to these narrative characteristics. As Dana Polan has proposed: '[u]nderstanding cultural texts ... as neither inevitable apologies for a central power nor as a concerted subversion of that power, an emphasis on contradiction allows

¹³ See, for example, Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *The Wild One* (1953), *On the Waterfront* (1954); Dean in *East of Eden* (1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). On these 'rebel' stars, see Graham McCann, *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando and Dean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Mailer, 'White Negro.'

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 340.

¹⁶ For Mailer, postwar American 'totalitarianism' was prefigured by the wartime military. See, Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* [1948] (London: Flamingo, 1999). On America's 'totalitarian environment,' see also, Mailer, 'Totalitarianism' ('Two Columns from *Esquire*: "The Big Bite" - May and August, 1963') in *The Presidential Papers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 191-203.

an open and variable approach to the processes of social production.¹⁷

Hence, 'conformity' becomes a more complex, contradictory and unreliable term. One of the problems with putative conformity is that it is one of those obviously indefensible categories, like 'masses,' to which only others belong.¹⁸ Conformity, then, is Other. As Daniel Bell has suggested, 'no one in the United States defends conformity. Everyone is against it.'¹⁹ I acknowledge this problem by treating 'conformity' not as an absolute or general overview but as a portmanteau term, as a category which proffers a range of heterogeneous possibilities. Specifically, I argue that 'readjustment' cannot be seen as generating conformity but, on the contrary, that conformity would have been contrary to its purpose. The *raison d'être* of 'readjustment' was actually to produce nonconformity because conformity was becoming increasingly associated with totalitarianism. Many commentators sought to dissociate postwar Americanism from totalitarian conformity through the demonstrable expression of a national nonconformism in contradistinction to the totalitarian Other. Nevertheless, the consolidation of a complex of systems, following on from the military systems of wartime, can be seen as instrumental in the production of predisposing conditions for conformist tendencies.²⁰

Amongst general concerns with the effects of *military* conformity, it was widely assumed that the institutional determinants of a military society were based on an au-

¹⁷ Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 43. See also, Mark Jancovich, 'Othering conformity in post-war America: intellectuals, the new middle classes and the problem of cultural distinctions,' in Nathan Abrams and Julie Hughes, eds., *Containing America: Cultural Production and Consumption in Fifties America* (Edgbaston: University of Birmingham Press, 2000), 12-28.

¹⁸ 'Masses,' as Raymond Williams succinctly puts it, 'are other people.' Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 289.

¹⁹ Bell, 'America as a Mass Society: A Critique,' in *End of Ideology*, 35.

²⁰ Mills, for example, identified the emergence of a new form of state power, enlarged and centralised, through an 'interlocking directorate' of political, economic and military institutions. See Mills, *Power Elite*. Revisionist historians have suggested how America became permeated with a postwar national identity. Michael S. Sherry, for example, argues that 'militarization reshaped every realm of American life - politics and foreign policy, economics and technology, culture and social relations.' He concurs with Mills that it was a system 'beyond control' which invoked an ideology of 'the state's dependence on war and defense for its role in national life.' Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), x, 142. See also, Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995); Alan Nadel, *Containing Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan, 1996); Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy, 1938-1976*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

thoritarian regimen of command and regulation. After all, it was an incontrovertible condition of military life that servicemen were permanently *under* orders. Moreover, the military regime was absolute, assuming total control over every aspect of the servicemen's existence. It was consequently presumed that servicemen habituated to the patterns of a military regimen would have become institutionalised, dependent on a structured military life which subsumed the individual and disavowed the very notion of individual identity. It was often assumed that within this military culture of conformity, uniformity and dependency, individuality had been impaired to the extent that the ex-servicemen could no longer assume personal responsibility for their own actions and decisions and, consequently, that they had been rendered unfit for a place in civilian society. As a result, 'readjustment' wasn't intended to reproduce conformity but to *counter-act* it, to provide the means for the reconversion of the 'conformist' ex-serviceman into the independent, autonomous citizen necessary for the functioning of a democratic society. The role of the 'non-conformist' individual would become indispensable in the formation of postwar 'Americanism,' especially in the construction of a national identity which was being defensively positioned against 'foreign' totalitarianism.

In the context of these concerns with conformity, the terms 'familiarity' and 'strangeness' acquired different kinds of meaning. They became complex and unstable terms as 'the familiar' could no longer be seen to have an obviously positive value (as an intrinsic quality, say, in the familiarity of 'home'); conversely, 'the strange' didn't necessarily indicate a negative quality (the alien, unknown or unknowable). Thus, 'the familiar' could become suspect, questionable and a threat to individual autonomy. As non-conformity became a postwar imperative, it would find expression through the individual-as-citizen who needed to question, criticise and challenge the familiar and taken-for-granted. The ex-serviceman, as the reconstituted citizen, would distinguish himself from others. Hence, 'the strange' could become a marker of difference and the guarantor of individuality, autonomy and non-conformity, providing for a distinctive postwar Ameri-

canism *against* the totalitarian Other, and establishing a frontier between itself and 'them' through an ideological demarcation of its own national non-conformity. Because it was assumed that the experience of military service had necessarily produced a culture of conformity, it followed that such a culture would be carried over to civilian society where it would lead inevitably to a national susceptibility to totalitarianism. What was ultimately at stake, then, was an endangered 'Americanism' which would be safeguarded through the process of 'readjustment.'

Because discourses of postwar 'Americanism' were refracted through American film narratives, we need to examine the cultural politics of the Hollywood film industry in a 'democracy at war' and the factors affecting its role in the construction of America's postwar national identity.

Hollywood in the 1940s

An industry seldom constitutes a national symbol as Hollywood did for America in the 1930s and 1940s when it uniquely signified popular culture in national life. It was a culture produced within a *system*, an amalgamation of industrial technology and corporate business enterprise.²¹ Hollywood played a significant part in the construction of America's postwar national identity as both a cultural and political force. The cultural hegemony of the Hollywood system became a crucially ambivalent element in discourses of postwar American culture and society, becoming in itself an unstable symbol for a mutable Americanism.

By 1939, Hollywood's 'golden age' was beginning to wane: the industry at large was faltering and already showing indications of the commercial decline which, although deferred for the duration of the war, would recur soon afterwards.²² Transformations in

²¹ On Hollywood as industry, see Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (London: Octopus, 1988); Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry*, rev. edn (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1986); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Janet Staiger, ed., *The Studio System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. edn (New York: Vintage, 1994).

²² On the industry in the 1930s, see Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood As a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

1940s' Hollywood were linked to a series of industrial, economic and political factors together with wide-ranging changes in the patterns of social and cultural life.²³ Hollywood would become especially significant as the focus of debates about America's political, social and cultural identity. As commentators debated questions of postwar Americanism, they became increasingly concerned with a perception of an American mass culture exemplified by Hollywood. Ensuing questions of art, culture and politics often centred on Hollywood's power to define and represent Americanism or, conversely, *un-Americanism*.

Transformations in the industry occurred in three phases. From the late 1930s until Pearl Harbour in December, 1941, Hollywood found itself under attack for producing pro-interventionist 'propaganda.' when the prevailing national mood was isolationist.²⁴ Following President Roosevelt's appeal to the industry for cooperation and support, two isolationist Senators, Burton K. Wheeler and Gerald P. Nye demanded an investigation into what Nye described as Hollywood's pro-war 'propaganda machine' which, he claimed, was being run by the studios, 'almost as if they were being operated by a central agency.'²⁵ Allegations that Hollywood was a 'propaganda machine' invited comparison with the state-controlled film industry in Nazi Germany. The Senate Subcommittee on War Propaganda subsequently investigated several films until the hearings lapsed shortly before Pearl Harbour. Hollywood was also attacked for 'unAmerican' propaganda. As part of a conservative counter-offensive in reaction to FDR's New Deal liberalism, Congressman Martin Dies fronted an attack against Communism in the industry through the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). In 1941, Dies attempted to establish proof of Communist infiltration in the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and, in what now seems like a dress rehearsal for the McCarthyite witch hunts, he

²³ On the industry in the 1940s, see Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). See also, Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's* (London: Headline, 1987).

²⁴ See, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition In Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 159-62; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 13, 35-40.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

interviewed several stars about their alleged links with the Communist Party.²⁶ Dies was largely unsuccessful but the allegations, and HUAC, would later return with a vengeance.

Hollywood faced another challenge when its trade practices came under scrutiny. Senator Matthew Neely attempted to introduce legislation to prevent the studios' standard practice of block-booking (by which exhibitors were bound to take all of a studio's annual releases).²⁷ More ominously, the industry's organisational structure came under threat from Neely and the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice. The industry operated as an oligopoly and its 'vertically integrated' system exercised almost total control over production, distribution and exhibition.²⁸ A series of anti-trust suits were brought against the industry in a concerted effort by the Justice Department to disestablish monopolistic trade practices.²⁹ The Supreme Court's 1948 ruling in the *Paramount* decree eventually forced the divorcement of the major studios' ownership of their theatre chains which precipitated the disintegration of Hollywood's studio system and signalled the demise of the corporate hegemony of 'the system' itself.³⁰

However, with Pearl Harbour, all these concerns were immediately superseded with the all-out conversion of national industries to war production and the transformation of Hollywood to a strategic role in the industrial war effort. Unlike other war industries, Hollywood wasn't subject to total conversion, nor to direct government control. 'Free' from Washington control, its very 'independence' served as an expression of democratic Americanism in articulating the 'freedom' philosophy envisaged by FDR in his 'Four Freedoms' address as 'the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create.'³¹ FDR had already set out the terms for the wartime administration of Hollywood with the appointment of Lowell Mellett, responsible for government co-ordination and liaison with the industry. FDR wrote to Mellett: 'The

²⁶ Ibid, 13, 31-4; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition In Hollywood*, 155-7.

²⁷ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 13, 19-21.

²⁸ See, for example, Gomery, *Hollywood Studio System*, 1-25.

²⁹ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 14-15.

³⁰ Ibid, 323-8.

³¹ FDR, 'The Annual Message to the Congress,' January 6, 1941, repr. in Chester E. Eisinger, ed., *The 1940's: Profile of a Nation in Crisis* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 460-1.

motion picture must remain free in so far as national security will permit. I want no censorship of the motion picture.³²

But like the proliferation of the ‘alphabet agencies’ under the New Deal, wartime saw the rapid growth of a network of organisations and agencies for the administration and co-ordination of the war economy by which the government assumed extensive new powers.³³ Several of these agencies were consolidated in 1942 with the institution of the Office of War Information (OWI)³⁴ under the directorship of Elmer Davies when Mellet’s office was reconstituted as the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP). The BMP was responsible for the production of war information films, the co-ordination of agencies and industry liaison. At the same time, the Production Code Administration (PCA) retained its traditional role in the regulation and control of on-screen content. The OWI exercised an unprecedented level of control over the industry and, as Clayton R. Koppes has argued, ‘engaged in the most systematic governmental effort to regulate content that has been seen in any American medium of popular culture.’ The OWI, in conjunction with the PCA, ‘regulated the American screen more tightly than at any time in its history.’³⁵

As this administrative and regulatory apparatus determined the terms and conditions for what could and couldn’t be shown on screen, it was effectively empowered to define a strategic wartime ideology and, hence, its own version of Americanism. To this end, it publicly eschewed the use of ‘propaganda’ in favour of ‘information.’ Privately, however, ‘propaganda’ was in common use within the administration. Although Davis publicly avowed that the OWI’s strategy would be ‘to tell the truth,’ he privately acknowledged the value of a self-consciously propagandist version of ‘the truth’ which could be readily accommodated within the conventional Hollywood narrative: ‘The eas-

³² Quoted in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 139.

³³ For a summary of these wartime agencies, see, for example, Richard R. Lingeman, *Don’t You Know There’s a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: Putnam’s, 1970), 104-6.

³⁴ On the OWI, see, Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes To War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

³⁵ Koppes, *Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration*, in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 262. See also, 262-81.

iest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds,' Davis said, 'is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.'³⁶

The OWI represented wartime America first and foremost as a *democracy* at war with Fascism. National unity was forged out of the promotion of 'the people's war' with the ready acknowledgement by 'the people' of its collective purpose: a national defence of democratic principles against the threat of totalitarianism. Wartime America would be shown as a fighting democracy, a war of *participation* involving ordinary people, all contributing in different ways to the collective war effort and doing so of their own choice. In 1942, the OWI published its guidelines for the industry in the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*. The *Manual* wasn't simply a 'do's and don't's' guide but a declaration of freedom in a liberal democracy. 'Show democracy at work,' it exhorted, 'in the community, the factory, the army.'³⁷ 'At every opportunity, naturally and inconspicuously, show people making small sacrifices for victory - making them voluntarily, cheerfully and because of the people's own sense of responsibility, not because of any laws.'³⁸ In its insistence on showing 'democracy at work,' the *Manual* also wanted representations of racial and ethnic diversity (within limits): 'Show colored soldiers in crowd scenes; occasionally colored officers. Stress our national unity by using names of foreign extraction, showing foreign types in the services.'³⁹ As we shall see, Hollywood responded with a new type of generic narrative, the 'combat film,' in which the unified diversity of the platoon would imply a microcosm of America's democratic society.

Wartime brought an unprecedented increase in cinema-going and, in a reversal of the industry's declining revenues, the wartime boom saw spectacular increases in box office returns.⁴⁰ The upheaval of war precipitated massive demographic change bringing

³⁶ Quoted in Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes To War*, 64.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

³⁸ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 183-4.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 184.

⁴⁰ For statistical details of studio revenues and profits, see Finler, *Hollywood Story*, 286-7.

an unprecedented scale of relocation to meet the needs of wartime production. As millions moved to new jobs in the war industries and millions of servicemen shipped abroad, few remained unaffected by the effects of dislocation and separation. Wartime cinema-going assumed a new kind of social and cultural significance and, as Schatz suggests, 'the moviegoing experience remained the central, unifying wartime ritual for millions of Americans, from the war-plant worker in Pittsburgh to the foot soldier in the Pacific.'⁴¹ Its significance was recognised by government agencies as *the* social and cultural practice through which the tenets of wartime Americanism could be most effectively disseminated.

For civilians at home, the cinema acquired new meaning as the locus of wartime community. As Thomas Doherty has pointed out, 'theaters were natural places to disseminate information, sell war bonds, hold rallies, solicit money for charities, and collect scarce goods for the war effort.'⁴² Front-of-house displays often featured the juxtaposition of film publicity with anti-Axis propaganda. Cinemas were also used as official collection points for shortage materials and as emergency shelters for servicemen in transit.⁴³ Moreover, cinemas assumed church-like ritual significance where patriotism was often fused with religion. Community singing became common and, especially after Pearl Harbour, 'The Star Spangled Banner' was universally included in theatre programmes. On occasion, as Doherty notes, the theatre virtually doubled as a national church: 'For momentous and bracing news on the order of D-Day, the death of FDR, V-E Day, and V-J Day, managers-turned-deacons led audiences-turned-congregations in recitations of the Twenty-third Psalm or the Lord's Prayer.'⁴⁴ For servicemen abroad, 'the movies' signified 'home' and going to see them assumed special significance as a 'two-hour furlough home.' Numerous articles reported on GI moviegoing.⁴⁵ Such articles would often emphasise the large-scale logistics involved in supplying films to military personnel

⁴¹ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 132.

⁴² Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁵ See, for example, 'G.I.s and Movies,' *Time* (July 31, 1944), 50.

abroad and affirm the co-operative effort between the industry and the military, coordinated through the War Activities Committee (WAC). The scale of these operations in itself acknowledged the military importance of distribution to the war effort.⁴⁶ 'Motion pictures,' affirmed Major General Charles H. Bonesteel, 'are as necessary to the men as rations.'⁴⁷ Articles also highlighted the unconventional conditions in which films were shown, often in the most improbably makeshift circumstances, 'in muddy jungle clearings, ice-covered Quonset huts, battered barns, open-air amphitheaters, on hillsides, beaches, on ship decks in the moonlight and jammed into reeking heat below decks while in enemy waters.'⁴⁸

Hollywood's wartime role also extended to providing live entertainment through the United Service Organisations (USO). Many stars made personal appearances before service audiences on various USO circuits including the highly publicised front-line 'Foxhole' circuit.⁴⁹ At home, many stars appeared at the Hollywood Canteen, a venue at which servicemen in LA, en route to the Pacific, could fraternise with the stars.⁵⁰ As the industry adapted its marketing and publicity to the exigencies of wartime, the star system was reconfigured in accordance with democratic war aims. Many stars became visibly less stellar as they became more accessible through performances 'as themselves.' Their 'Canteen' roles, in which they wore aprons, cleared tables and washed dishes, demonstrated their willingness to set aside their star status and publicly assume more equal rank, to share a new civic responsibility in an 'all hands on deck' ethos. Stars were now presented as workers in a war industry.

The reconstituted star persona was constructed through a reformulated intertextual complex in support of the national war effort. Stars remained uniquely identifiable, but

⁴⁶ See, for example, Bosley Crowther, 'The Movies Follow the Flag,' *New York Times Magazine* (August 13, 1944), 18, 38; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 144-50.

⁴⁷ Quoted in, Editors of *Look*, 'Beachhead Bijou,' in *Movie Lot To Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes To War and Prepares for the Future* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1945), 105.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 104. On military exhibition, see Doherty, *Projections of War*, 76-8. On front-line exhibition culture, see, William Friedman Fagelson, 'Fighting Films: The Everyday Tactics of World War II Soldiers,' *Cinema Journal*, 40 (2001), 94-112.

⁴⁹ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 146-7.

⁵⁰ On the Hollywood Canteen, see, for example, Roy Hoopes, *When the Stars Went To War: Hollywood and World War II* (New York: Random House, 1994), 168-92. There was an equivalent venue, the Stage Door Canteen, in New York. See also, *Hollywood Canteen* (1944) and *Stage Door Canteen* (1943).

star status was self-consciously adapted to a more 'participatory' role within the collective national effort. Many enlisted as servicemen and became newly familiar in military uniform.⁵¹ These military roles would often have a significant bearing on the construction of the postwar star persona and often informed screen roles.⁵² Similarly, within the 'militarisation' of Hollywood, stars assumed various wartime roles. Many were involved in the promotion of war bond sales.⁵³ Others undertook extensive USO tours on the 'Foxhole' circuit, notably Joe E. Brown and Bob Hope.⁵⁴ Some worked for wartime agencies. Myrna Loy, for example, quit Hollywood for the duration and worked for the Red Cross. Although stars were somewhat 'deglamourised' in the interests of national utility, some found iconic status as 'pin-ups' and national wartime symbols.⁵⁵ Pictures of Veronica Lake, Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth, for example, became the most familiar features in the visual culture of military life and their images became the most favoured type of portable Americana for servicemen abroad.⁵⁶

Hollywood provided the cultural texts and social practices which symbolised wartime America and, in conjunction with the government and the military, defined for popular consumption the cultural meaning of America at war. In wartime Hollywood, distribution and exhibition became as important as production in signifying the war effort. The sheer scale of the operation in bringing Hollywood to the 'Beachhead Bijou' acknowledged the importance attributed to Hollywood's extended constituency. The makeshift arrangements in these *ad hoc* theatres - where seats might be made of broken crates and screens fashioned from parachute silk - demonstrated a national resolve to maintain American popular culture abroad where it would be 'business as usual.' More-

⁵¹ Several stars had illustrious military careers which attracted considerable news coverage. See Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 206; Hoopes, *When the Stars Went To War*, 133-67.

⁵² James Stewart, for example, provides an illustrative case-study (see Chapter 7).

⁵³ See, for example, Hoopes, *When the Stars Went To War*, 110-32; Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 175-6.

⁵⁴ On USO, see, Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 146-7; Hoopes, *When the Stars Went To War*, 193-219, 282-316. On Brown, see Editors of *Look*, 'One-Man Laugh Wave,' in *Movie Lot To Beachhead*, 96-103. On Hope, see Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 208-9, 213.

⁵⁵ Veronica Lake changed her tumbling hairstyle following a government request to Paramount. The style, emulated by women workers in munitions plants, was deemed hazardous to machine operatives.

⁵⁶ On the ideological significance of the pin-up's relation to 'home,' see Robert B. Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,' *American Quarterly*, 42 (1990), 587-614. See, in particular, the discussion of Betty Grable's 'representative' American femininity. *Ibid.*, 596-605.

over, such exhibition 'promoted' characteristic American attitudes of initiative, ingenuity and improvisation together with a kind of insouciant pragmatism.

Wartime Hollywood had been manifest in America's national consciousness in myriad ways but after 1946 - its most successful year - the industry resumed the commercial decline already apparent in 1939. Various factors were instrumental in Hollywood's decline.⁵⁷ This has often been attributed to the parallel rise in television, but there were other significant social and cultural factors.⁵⁸ Hollywood was affected by major transformations in postwar demographic trends. A sharp rise in the marriage rate and the impact of the 'baby boom' signalled a national orientation towards family life and, in the context of acute housing shortages, an increasing preoccupation with the postwar home. Ensuing suburbanisation precipitated a widespread shift away from town and city as the centre of social and cultural life and, hence, away from traditional 'downtown' cinema-going. Hollywood also found itself in competition with an increasing range of alternative social and cultural options.⁵⁹ Certainly, the meaning and value of cinema-going had changed for the postwar public.⁶⁰

There were also significant shifts in the perception of cinema. The GI Bill instigated the popularisation of higher education and colleges with massively increased enrolments widened the scope of their curricula to accommodate new subject areas such as film 'appreciation.' As film became integrated into the arts curricula, it began to acquire legitimacy through the status of 'art' which, hitherto, had been denied to Hollywood's critically denigrated entertainment industry. Film study was predicated on claims for its status as an art form. Film gained legitimacy primarily through an increasing interest in independent and foreign cinema, both of which were seen as alternatives to Hollywood's

⁵⁷ On postwar Hollywood's economic and cultural decline, see Finler, *Hollywood Story*, 286-7; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 291; Schatz, *Genius of the System*, 411-81; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 249-317.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Christopher Anderson, 'Television and Hollywood in the 1940s' in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 422-44; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 269-85.

⁵⁹ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 285-95.

⁶⁰ We might speculate that the postwar decline of cinema-going may have been partly attributable to its abnormally intense connection with wartime. Hollywood had extraordinary wartime significance for civilians and servicemen who, after the war, may have wished to distance themselves from its powerful wartime associations.

mainstream commercialism.⁶¹ The emerging *cinéaste* culture also had a strong interest in *avant-garde* productions.⁶² Several ancillary developments contributed towards this trend and to the emergence of a different kind of postwar film culture. By 1949, for example, there were over two hundred film societies in America with 'art-house' programmes espousing European and independent cinema.⁶³ With the rapid postwar revival of European national film production, notably through Italian neo-realism, such films such as *Open City (Roma, Città Aperta)* (1945) and *The Bicycle Thief (Ladri Di Biciclette)* (1948) became highly influential in the promotion of foreign 'art-house' cinema, receiving considerable critical acclaim and commercial success.⁶⁴

'Foreign' began to signify a new kind of cultural value, especially as an alternative to 'American.'⁶⁵ In 1947, approximately one hundred foreign films opened in New York and, by 1949, it had as many as thirty cinemas devoted to exhibition of foreign films.⁶⁶ In addition, arts journals and magazines contributed towards the development of the new film culture with 'serious' reviews of 'art-house' films.⁶⁷ The emergent film culture sought to legitimate a radical 'art-house' cinema in contradistinction to the corporate hegemony of Hollywood's mass commercialism which, despite its popular decline, remained an active cultural force. Ensuing debates about cinema would be dominated by these issues of cultural distinction which, as we shall see, were linked to wider debates about American art and culture in discourses of emergent postwar national identity.

As we take account of the industrial contexts in which Hollywood was producing its films, we also need to address the critical contexts in which their narrative meanings have been determined and evaluated.

⁶¹ See, for example, Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (London: BFI, 1992), 180-88; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 292-4; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 295-7.

⁶² See, for example, Lauren Rabinovitz, 'Experimental and Avant-Garde Cinema in the 1940s' in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 445-60.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 447-8.

⁶⁴ Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 296.

⁶⁵ This changing value can be linked to the wartime experience of servicemen abroad when unprecedented numbers of Americans found themselves for the first time involved in foreign cultures.

⁶⁶ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 181; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 295.

⁶⁷ Rabinovitz, 'Experimental and Avant-Garde Cinema in the 1940s,' 450.

Narrative and Genre

One of the main problems affecting our readings of postwar film narratives arises from their generic classification. A voluminous quantity of genre criticism has accumulated since these films were produced and, consequently, a substantial body of critical interest has been interpolated between these narratives and their present readers. As I want to reconstitute these texts in relation to postwar discourses, we need to consider how our retrospective readings of these films have been affected - often detrimentally - by those critical concerns. The textual meanings generated through these discourses have been effaced or deflected by a prevalent critical agenda. Unlike postwar audiences, we have no immediate experience of these narratives *as* they were released, nor do we have any direct connection with postwar discourses as they would have been experienced and understood by those audiences. The meanings of these narratives are necessarily different for us than they would have been for them. Our readings are often informed by certain forms of critical *intervention* which frame the narrative and, of these, genre remains a critically problematic area.

This isn't to suggest that genre has an unimportant function in the categorisation of film types. 'Hollywood is a generic cinema,' says Richard Maltby, 'which is not quite the same as saying that it is a cinema of genres.'⁶⁸ This fine distinction raises the problem of the different purposes for which the term is used. Although both the industry and its audiences have always been concerned with narrative types, the use of 'genre' as a classificatory term is relatively recent, emerging in the 1960s as the standard critical term for a predominant critical concern.⁶⁹ Subsequent developments in film studies may suggest that genre has been superseded by other critical concerns, but it stubbornly remains as a residual preoccupation and recent work indicates a resurgence of in-

⁶⁸ Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 107.

⁶⁹ Several contributory essays in the debates about genre theory and criticism, together with a comprehensive bibliography, are included in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

terest.⁷⁰

Although genre remains an active critical force, it also remains a critically problematic concept. For example, it is widely presumed that genres have a material existence of their own and exist - or preexist - as 'obvious' categories to which film texts are allocated. There seems to be a generic logic whereby a text naturally 'belongs' to a given generic category. Genre remains, however, a critical invention. A methodological problem then arises through the process of generic categorisation, the 'empiricist dilemma' highlighted by Andrew Tudor.⁷¹ Like Maltby, Tudor highlights the problem of the term's critical application as against its popular use ('a thumb-nail classification for everyday purposes is now being asked to carry rather more weight.') Although 'genre' became the specialised critical term, genre criticism picked up the standard industry categories (such as 'western') more or less unproblematically, treating them as ready-made categories. Another problem is genre's critical predisposition to look for patterns of textual resemblance, to seek out textual similarities rather than differences so textual 'irregularities' are smoothed over.

An additional problem is genre's tendency towards a transhistorical perspective. Early work on genre, notably by André Bazin, linked generic narrative (the western) to myth.⁷³ One of the residual effects of this mythologising tendency has been to extract texts from their particular socio-historical circumstances so that they seem 'timeless' and 'universal,' existing *outside* or *above* the specific conditions of their production and consumption. In this sense, 'genre' can be a misnomer as its studies are often restricted

to a narrowly selective, minimally representative sample of texts. Moreover, these texts

⁷⁰ See, for example, Nick Browne, ed., *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999); Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁷¹ 'To say a film is a 'Western' is immediately to say that it shares some indefinable "X" with other films we call "Westerns"... To take a *genre* such as a "Western" ... and list its principle [sic] characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are "Westerns". But they can only be isolated on the basis of the "principal characteristics" which can only be discovered *from the films themselves* after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle which first requires that the films are isolated, for which purpose a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films.' Tudor, *Theories of Film* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 132-8.

⁷² *Ibid*, 133.

⁷³ Bazin, 'The Western, or the American film *par excellence*,' in *What is Cinema? II*, trans., Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 140-8.

are often already credited with canonical status. Because genre criticism habitually revisits the same texts, it consolidates their canonical status as it neglects the rest. Genre, we might say, operates as a restrictive practice. Even where genre does relate narrative to period, further problems arise when certain social conditions and concerns are seen as the privileged preserve of certain genres. It is often claimed, for example, that a particular generic category - '*film noir*' - represents such a view of the 1940s and 1950s (a claim which, as I argue below, is invalid).

The theoretical issues raised by genre become particularly problematic when applied to the 1940s. As we are concerned with how meaning is generated in the period's films, we need to consider how genre can provide a theoretical or practical basis which elucidates that meaning. As we have seen, prewar Hollywood was criticised for what was taken to be 'pro-war' propaganda, evidenced in films such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Sergeant York* (1941), and others.⁷⁴ This is, of course, a generically disparate set of films. To the investigating Committee, however, there was a generic 'logic' which made them similarly classifiable as 'pro-war' propaganda. The processes of generic categorisation arose here from contested issues of national representation between government and industry in discourses of 'the national interest.' In order to ascertain textual meaning, we need to establish generic categories which link text to context and narrative to discourse. Instead of reliance on the standard, general categories, we need to create new, specific generic categories which draw on a recognition of the particular conditions in which the films were produced and consumed. If we devise a new generic category for these prewar films, which we might call the 'pro-interventionist' film, we can then undertake a more effective analysis of the discursive relationship between narrative, industry and discourse which generates narrative meaning.

We also need to consider these problems in the context of a long-standing and widely-held perception of Hollywood itself. Hollywood has often been seen as a pur-

⁷⁴ See Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition In Hollywood*, 160.

veyor of 'harmless entertainment' motivated by profit and as a self-serving industry bound by commercial interests to political neutrality in order to safeguard its foreign market revenues. Prewar Hollywood in particular has been subsequently criticised for its failure to address European Nazism. Lewis Jacobs, for example, suggests that before 1942, 'most Hollywood movies were escapist entertainment, which aimed to distract a spellbound public from agonizing radio and newspaper reports about the Axis partners' expansion in Europe.'⁷⁵ I would argue differently, that before 1942, Hollywood repeatedly demonstrated an engagement with Fascism and an interventionist commitment, maintaining this stance in opposition to the predominant isolationist sentiment in the country at large. Hollywood, in fact produced scores of 'pro-interventionist' narratives which stressed the urgent need to defend (American) democracy against Fascism. While all the films investigated by the Senate Sub-Committee on War Propaganda were certainly 'pro-interventionist,' all were generally identifiable as 'war' films. Others, however, adopted different narrative strategies to challenge isolationism and these narratives are evident across virtually all conventional genres where the narrative treatment is coded.⁷⁶

The war period saw the emergence of two distinct narrative cycles which became predominant in wartime productions: the combat film and the home-front melodrama.⁷⁷ However, as Schatz points out, 'virtually all of Hollywood's major genres were affected

⁷⁵ Lewis Jacobs, 'World War II and the American Film,' *Cinema Journal*, 7 (1967-68), 1.

⁷⁶ Examples include costume drama, such as *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940); literary adaptation, such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939); and adventure-melodrama, such as *Test Pilot* (1938) and *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939). The latter, ostensibly a melodrama about mail pilots in South America, is a proto-war narrative which provided an archetype for the 'democracy-at-war' combat film and introduced several of that genre's staple elements: the close-knit, democratically-constituted, interdependent 'combat' unit, the remote and beleaguered outpost, the hazardous flying missions and repeated exposure to danger (there is even a 'bombing' sequence). The narrative deals with issues of leadership and co-operation, injury and disfigurement, death and bereavement; and the separation of 'war' marriages. (A history of the pro-interventionist narrative and its codes remains to be written.)

⁷⁷ For archetypal case-studies from each category - *Air Force* (1943) and *Since You Went Away* (1944) - see Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 252-61.

by the war and might in some way be included under the general rubric of "war film."⁷⁸

All wartime productions, then, were *of* the war and consequently, to a lesser or greater extent, *about* it. But if all wartime films are brought together under the same 'general rubric,' genre criticism can hardly be expected to function as a useful critical tool. If 'war' film seems too vague, 'combat' film is too narrow and, I would argue, misleading in its designation. If, for example, we examine a representative selection of the period's 'combat' films, we can see how little they have to do with actual combat and how much they are concerned with forms of *national* representation which underwrite their combat scenes. For example, the narrative emphasis on the structure of military organisation and the nature of military society would often constitute the basis of America's national wartime identity and provide the *raison d'être* for its wartime role. Although these narratives are routinely seen as flag-waving propaganda, they repeatedly represent wartime Americanism *not* through individual gung-ho heroism but rather through what Jeanine Basinger has called 'the concept of the unified group,' mobilised by wartime necessity 'to work together as a group, to set aside individual needs, and to bring our melting pot tradition together to function as a true democracy since, after all, that is what we are fighting for: the Democratic way of life.'⁷⁹ Democratic Americanism was located in the democratically-constituted platoon which, as a microcosm of American society, became a staple element in the 'combat film.' The platoon, as the core-unit of military organisation, was predicated on *unified diversity*. Its strength and integrity derived from its multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-denominational composition, a combination which empha-

⁷⁸ Ibid, 222. For contemporary surveys of the 'war film,' see, for example, Manny Farber, 'Movies in Wartime,' *New Republic* (January 3, 1944), 16-20; Dorothy B. Jones, 'The Hollywood War Film: 1942-1944,' *Hollywood Quarterly*, 1 (1945-46), 1-19; Bosley Crowther, 'The Movies,' in Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 511-32. Retrospective studies include, Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York: Delta, 1974); Clyde Jeavons, *A Pictorial History of War Films* (London: Hamlyn, 1974); Joe Morella, Edward Z. Epstein and John Griggs, *The Films of World War II: A Pictorial Treasury of Hollywood's War Years* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1975); Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Colin Schindler, *Hollywood Goes to War: Films and American Society 1939-1952* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Doherty, *Projections of War*; Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996); Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1997); Jacobs, 'World War II and the American Film,' 1-21; Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 169-202, 239-261.

⁷⁹ Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 36-7.

sised America's geographical diversity, drawing on characters who variously signified the 'local' value of their 'home' through the personification of town, city or state (The platoon invariably featured some type of 'Kelly-Cohen-Kowalski' combination together with a 'Tex' and a 'Brooklyn').⁸⁰ The platoon was constituted by variety and harmonised by common purpose, typically characterised by its collective identity.⁸¹

As the 'combat film' commonly stresses the collective enterprise of the *group*, many wartime narratives deal with an individual who has failed, for one reason or another, to make the necessary commitment to the national war effort. Here, in what Polan has called the 'conversion narrative,' the recalcitrant individual remains disengaged from any purposeful wartime role. The 'conversion narrative' oversees a transformation in attitude and conviction, leading eventually to an acknowledgement of the indispensability of the individual's contribution and a willing acceptance of a role which accords with national war aims.⁸² The narrative sees the refractory 'outsider' learn the lesson of assimilation in the interests of wartime unity.⁸³

⁸⁰ 'Brooklyn,' as Basinger nicely observes, 'is a state unto itself' in these films. Ibid, 74. The specific place-value of home, as suggested here by 'Brooklyn,' has renewed significance as the place of return. In *It Happened in Brooklyn* (1947), the returning soldier, Danny Miller (Frank Sinatra) finds that after his demobilisation, there are few opportunities to realise his dreams for the future and he reluctantly decides to resume his old job as a shipping clerk. But 'Brooklyn' here, like the platoon, is the locus of *community* and the community creates opportunities. Through the combined efforts of this oddly-matched assortment (an old caretaker, a would-be diva, an English aristocrat) the ambitions of each are secured. Brooklyn is also the location of 'platoon-democracy' in *Cover Girl* (1944) where a troupe (read, 'troop') is putting on a show. 'Brooklyn' here is the site of street-level communal values (showgirls, Gene Kelly, the street), situated in opposition to Manhattan's high-rise elitism.

⁸¹ See Jacobs, 'World War II and the American Film,' 19; Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 15-16, 73-74, 128-30. For Basinger, *Bataan* (1943) is the 'seminal' combat film, based on the collective difference of its 'mixed' group constituted in terms of a *national* wartime manifesto: 'We are a mongrel nation - ragtail, unprepared, disorganized, quarrelsome among ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good. ... our individualism is not set aside for any small cause. Once it is set aside, however, our group power is extreme.' Ibid, 51. Subsequent 'platoon' narratives include *Air Force* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), *Destination Tokyo* (1944); *Back to Bataan* (1945); *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945). See also *Lifeboat* (1944).

⁸² Polan, *Power and Paranoia*, 75-6. See also, Lary May, 'Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War II Films,' in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 71-102.

⁸³ We can see the archetypal figure of the 'conversion narrative' in the pilot, Bat McPherson (Richard Barthelmess) in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and, in a 'home-front' version, Kay Miniver (Greer Garson) and Clem Miniver (Walter Pidgeon) in *Mrs Miniver* (1942). Other examples are displaced to World War I settings: the arrogant Private Plunkett (James Cagney) in *The Fighting 69th* (1940); the conscientious objector, Alvin York (Gary Cooper) in *Sergeant York* (1941); Harry Palmer (Gene Kelly), the careerist stage performer who injures himself to evade the draft in *For Me and My Gal* (1942). Other examples use foreign settings: the cynical 'outsider' Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) and the corrupt Vichy *fonctionnaire*, Louis Renault (Claude Rains) in *Casablanca* (1942); the embittered deserter, Clive Briggs (Tyrone Power) in *This Above All* (1942); the self-serving profiteer, Joe Adams (Cary Grant) in *Mr Lucky* (1943); the cowardly French schoolmaster, Arthur Lory (Charles Laughton) in *This Land Is Mine* (1943).

It is unsurprising that 'home' will become such a *presence* in postwar narratives. We can see here the discourse of 'readjustment' working through narrative representations of 'home.' These representations are often equivocal. On the one hand, there is an affirmative sense of 'home' as the focal point of domestic stability, security and comfort which promises material and familial wellbeing, the potential for resumption and continuity after the disruptions and depredations of wartime. 'Home' promises the restoration of all that was once familiar. Many narratives envisage 'home' as a space of utopian possibilities, an almost magical space invested with wonder and enchantment. On the other hand, many narratives disavow the affirmative potential of 'home' through representations of strange, dystopian spaces, unpredictable and chaotic, which often bear witness to social disruption or disintegration. In many narratives, 'home' is a 'structuring absence:' unattainable, delusional, non-existent, or else a destabilised space.⁸⁴

These representations of 'home' are often informed by the discourse of 'readjustment' in what we might call the 'assimilation narrative,' a flexible generic category underwritten by issues arising from 'readjustment.' The assimilation narrative may deal explicitly with characters who are ex-servicemen and their return to civilian life; alternatively, and more commonly, it may deal implicitly with such issues which remain coded in various ways. For example, a frequent trope in the assimilation narrative is that of a male character who has 'been away' and recently 'come back' or, otherwise, has an unknown and unknowable past.⁸⁵ The assimilation narrative is a useful way to conceptualise these issues, firstly because it is a category which arises from the discourses themselves, and secondly because it is unconstrained by conventional types of generic classification and the limitations which these inevitably impose. Moreover, the assimilation narrative is by no means a minor or specialist category but one drawn from a wide range of conventional genres to constitute the most ubiquitous narrative category of the

⁸⁴ On 'home' as alien space, see Polan, *Power and Paranoia*, 272-6.

⁸⁵ Examples taken almost at random include Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford) in *Gilda* (1946); Frank Chambers (John Garfield) in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946); Jim Garry (Robert Mitchum) in *Blood On the Moon* (1948).

period. These narratives are often informed by concerns with the period's 'conformity complex' indexed to the postwar 'crisis' in America's national identity, concerns which are refracted through the narrative sphere of 'home' and 'negotiated' through narrative representations of strangeness and familiarity.

The Problem of *Film Noir*

Any attempt to address meanings in the period's films must contend with the category - and problem - of '*film noir*' because the narratives collectively constituted under that rubric are often held to be *the* narrative expressions of postwar America. The sheer volume of writing on *noir* would seem to confirm its privileged standing over other generic cate-

gories.⁸⁶ A survey of *noir*'s critical literature, taken at face value, 'reveals' a narrative world of 'estrangement.' The characteristics attributed to this *noir* world are well known: a dystopian nightworld in which the patterns of social order become liable to disruption and disequilibrium; where narratives work to destabilise domestic spaces of the familiar and the ordinary; where 'home' has become defamiliarised, strange and un-

⁸⁶ There is a vast proliferation of *noir* literature. For the inaugural French texts, see, Nino Frank, 'A New Kind of Police Drama: the Criminal Adventure' ('Un Nouveau Genre "Policier": l'Aventure Criminelle' in *L'Écran Français*) [1946], trans., Alain Silver, repr. in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., trans., Alain Silver, *Film Noir Reader 2* (New York: Limelight, 1999), 15-19; Jean-Pierre Chartier, 'Americans Also Make *Noir* Films' ('Les Américains aussi font des films "noirs"' in *La Revue du Cinéma*) [1946], trans., Silver, repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader 2*, 21-3. Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir Américain, 1941-1953* [1955], from which an excerpt, 'Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*,' trans., Silver, is repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight, 1996), 17-25. Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, 'Black Cinema,' *Hollywood in the Forties* (New York: Barnes, 1968), 19-36; Tom Flinn, 'Three Faces of Film Noir,' *Velvet Light Trap* [1972], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader II*, 35-43; Colin McArthur, *Underworld USA* (London: BFI/Secker & Warburg, 1972); Paul Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir,' *Film Comment* [1972], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 53-64; Raymond Durnat, 'Paint It Black: the Family Tree of *Film Noir*,' *Film Comment* [1974], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 37-51; Stephen Farber, 'Violence and the Bitch Goddess,' *Film Comment* [1974], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 45-55; Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, 'Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*,' *Film Comment* [1974], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 65-76; Robert Porfiro, 'No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the Film Noir,' *Sight and Sound* [1976], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 77-93; Sylvia Harvey, 'Woman's place: the absent family of film noir,' in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, rev. edn (London: BFI, 1994), 22-34; Janey Place, 'Women in film noir,' in Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, 35-67; Kaplan, *Women in Film Noir*; Paul Kerr, 'Out of What Past? Notes on the B film noir,' *Screen Education* [1979-80], repr. in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, 107-27. Foster Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (New York: Da Capo, 1981); Robert Ottosen, *A Reference Guide to the American Film Noir: 1940-1958* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981); Spencer Selby, *Dark City: The Film Noir* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1984); Jon Tuska, *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective* (Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press, 1984); David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, 'The case of film noir,' in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, new edn (London: Routledge, 1996), 74-77; Paul Arthur, *Shadows on the Mirror: Film Noir and Cold War America, 1945-1957* [1985] (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1990); Philip Kemp, 'From the Nightmare Factory: HUAC and the Politics of Noir,' *Sight and Sound*, 55 (1986), 266-70; Bruce Crowther, *Film Noir: Reflections in a Dark Mirror* (London: Virgin, 1988); J.P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, genre, masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991); Brian Neve, 'Film Noir and Society,' in *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992), 145-70; Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, eds., *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, 3rd edn (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1992); Joan Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir: A Reader* (London: Verso, 1993); Richard Maltby, 'The Politics of the Maladjusted Text,' in Ian Cameron, ed., *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (London: Studio Vista, 1994) 39-48; Cameron, *Movie Book of Film Noir*; John Belton, 'Film Noir's Knights of the Road,' *Bright Lights*, 12 (1994), 5-15; R. Barton Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir* (New York: Twayne, 1994); Michael Walker, 'Film Noir: Introduction,' in Cameron, ed., *Movie Book of Film Noir*, 8-38; Silver and Ursini, *Film Noir Reader*; James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (New York: Owl, 1998); Silver and Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader II*. Vivian Sobchack, 'Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir,' in Browne, ed., *Refiguring American Film Genres*, 129-70. The most useful analysis of *noir* for the purpose of the present study is Naremore's *More Than Night*, one of the few accounts to treat the term as a discursive construction.

recognisable. *Noir* sees darkness as strangeness and this, for Marc Vernet, explains its compelling fascination, 'because it is strange.'⁸⁷ This darkness-strangeness configuration is central to *noir*'s critical readings of the period's narratives. Moreover, because of *noir*'s predominant standing as a cultural category, it continues to influence our readings of these films and their relation to the period. Many of these films have been appropriated by *noir* and inflected according to its own critical agenda. Insofar as *noir* 'explains' these films as narrative 'reflections' of postwar social issues, it fails to provide a convincing account of *what* issues are being reflected and *how* these are manifested in the narratives. Moreover, as *noir* often 'explains' discourses of postwar assimilation through its narratives, we need to interrogate the validity of the processes by which it claims to rationalise these discourses.

Although critics disagree about the definition of *film noir*, their attempts to delineate the term commonly involve recourse to what is by now a familiar catalogue of stylistic 'influences' and socio-political 'determinants.'⁸⁸ Critics usually focus on the stylistic or thematic narrative features which, they claim, predominantly characterise *noir*.⁸⁹ These features are seen to constitute a narrative 'tone' or 'mood' which is then correlated, explicitly or implicitly, with a *national* tone or mood which is, by definition, dark.⁹⁰ One of the standard procedures of *noir* criticism is to itemise the constituent elements of its mood and, hence, to claim a causal relationship between 'specified' social factors and

⁸⁷ Vernet, 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom' in Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir*, 1.

⁸⁸ Paul Kerr provides a typical catalogue: 'the influx of German emigrés and the influence of expressionism; the influx of French emigrés and the influence of existentialism; Ernest Hemingway and the "hard-boiled" school of writing; Edward Hopper and the "ash can" school of painting; pre-war photo-journalism, wartime newsreels and post-war neorealism; the creators of [*Citizen*] *Kane* - Citizens [Herman] Mankiewicz, [Gregg] Toland and [Orson] Welles; the Wall Street crash and the rise of populism; the Second World War and the rise of fascism; the Cold War and the rise of McCarthyism. ... general American fears about bureaucracy, the bomb, and the big city ... the industrialisation of the female work-force during the war and the escalating corporatism of American capital throughout the 1940s.' Kerr, 'Out of What Past?', 107. Kerr recognises the pitfalls of *noir*'s generalising tendency.

⁸⁹ There are numerous instances of this critical tendency. In what Higham and Greenberg otherwise call 'Black Cinema,' they describe 'A dark street in the early morning hours, splashed with a sudden down-pour. Lamps form haloes in the murk. ... a walk-up room, filled with the intermittent flashing of a neon sign from across the street ... the specific ambience of *film noir*, a world of darkness and violence.' Higham and Greenberg, *Hollywood in the Forties*, 19. Their description of a *noir* iconography, linked to a 'black' atmosphere and environment, became a critical paradigm for subsequent *noir* criticism.

⁹⁰ Tuska sees *noir* as 'both a screen style ... and a perspective on human existence and society ... a darkening vision of the world.' Tuska, *Dark Cinema*, xv-xvi.

their 'corresponding' narrative representation.⁹¹ Similarly, *noir* criticism identifies a series of thematic concerns with a dark underworld in which criminality stands metaphorically for a destabilised American society.⁹² Framed within the spaces of this stylistically and thematically dark world are *noir*'s archetypal characterisations: figures in inhospitable or hostile environments, marginalised, estranged and alienated from society at large. They are often seen to articulate a pessimistic commentary on the uncertainties of contemporary American society as figures who collectively personify, as it were, pictures of a darkened national psyche.⁹³ For many *noir* commentators, these 'anti-hero' characterisations represent expressions of 'anti-conformity' in narratives often read, both politically and stylistically, as transgressive and subversive, as deviant from the norm.⁹⁴ Indeed, critical interest in *noir* has often been attracted by its supposed deviation from, and opposition to, Hollywood's 'classical' norms.⁹⁵

Noir criticism is also susceptible to overdetermined generalisation which readily infers from predetermined properties evidence for a critical conceptualisation of 'darkness' in the period. If *films noir* are narrative refractions of postwar 'darkness,' we need to examine what this darkness is supposed to mean. We need to know in considerably more detail about the underlying socio-historical concerns which are claimed to surface in *noir*. Where *noir* criticism does include attempts to relate its narratives to specific social issues, such attempts are invariably subject to formulaic generalisation. Some

⁹¹ There is substantial critical consensus about what the attributed *noir* mood broadly encompasses. Indeed, critics often provide virtually interchangeable lists. Place and Peterson, for example, see 'characteristic ... moods of claustrophobia, paranoia, despair, and nihilism.' Place and Peterson, 'Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*,' 65. Ottoson sees: 'Despair, alienation, disillusionment, moral ambiguity, pessimism, corruption, and psychoses,' Ottoson, *Reference Guide to the American Film Noir*, 1.

⁹² Telotte, for example, identifies a focus 'on urban crime and corruption, and on sudden upswellings of violence in a culture whose fabric seems to be unraveling.' Consequently, '*noir* seems fundamentally about violations: vice, corruption, unrestrained desire.' Telotte, *Voices in the Dark*, 2.

⁹³ Silver and Ward claim that these narratives 'evoke the dark side of the American *persona*' and that their 'central figures ... caught in their double binds, filled with existential bitterness, drowning outside the social mainstream, are America's stylized version of itself, a true cultural reflection of the mental dysfunction of a nation in uncertain transition.' Silver and Ward, eds., *Film Noir*, 6. Or, what Telotte describes as an 'abrogation of the American dream's most basic promises - of hope, prosperity, and safety from persecution.' Telotte, *Voices in the Dark*, 2. See also, Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema*, 14; Crowther, *Film Noir*, 12; Hirsch, *Dark Side of the Screen*, 21.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Bordwell, et al, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 74-77. See also, Barbara Klinger, "'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" Revisited: The Progressive Genre,' in Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader II*, 74-90.

⁹⁵ In the context of French critical interest in American 'art' film, *noir* 'rejected the facile optimism, the boring correctness of the usual American product.' Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema*, 14.

of these accounts, for example, do refer to wartime, but they don't so much discuss the issue as *mention* it. There is little attempt to specify the effects of American wartime experience and its postwar impact which remain only vaguely drawn.⁹⁶ Even where there are attempts to address these issues in more specific terms, the approaches often seem desultory and, certainly, not specific enough. While such accounts may mention, for example, the issue of veteran 'readjustment,' they don't undertake any historically-based analysis to determine precisely what they mean by 'readjustment.'⁹⁷

Where 'readjustment' is cited as a causal factor in *noir*, it is often seen as coded through narrative representations of criminality. Paul Schrader, for example, identifies in *noir* criminality a narrative corollary of 'war and post-war disillusionment' which suggests an all-encompassing postwar sensibility.⁹⁸ Similarly, Foster Hirsch sees the soldier coded through criminality in narratives which elide the social specificity of the veteran's return but which, again, seem to inform the general mood of postwar disillusionment.⁹⁹ As in so much *noir* criticism, a general historical context is already given, vaguely assumed, implicitly understood. As Joan Copjec has suggested, '*noir* criticism correlates filmic elements with historical "sources" - World War Two, an increase in crime, mounting paranoia regarding the working woman's place in society, and so on - thinking that it has thereby located the "generative principle" of the films. But,' she argues, 'this reference to external sources in no way resolves the question of the internal logic of the films.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, much *noir* criticism treats its historical 'sources' as little more than 'and so on ...'

Another problem arising from *noir* criticism is that it appears to originate from,

⁹⁶ There are numerous instances of this critical tendency. Place, for example, sees ties between *film noir* and America's 'cultural obsessions' in the 1940s and claims that *films noir*, 'are uniquely able to express the homogeneous hopes ... and fears ... brought to the fore by, for example, the upheaval of war.' Place, 'Women in film noir,' 37. This raises questions about what precisely is meant by 'upheaval.'

⁹⁷ Ottoson formulates this equation: 'General postwar despair: the plight of the returning veteran, and his readjustment to a changing society.' Ottoson, *Reference Guide to the American Film Noir*, 2.

⁹⁸ This 'disillusionment,' suggests Schrader, 'was directly demonstrated in films like *CORNERED*, *THE BLUE DAHLIA*, *DEAD RECKONING* and *RIDE A [sic] PINK HORSE*, in which a serviceman returns from the war to find his sweetheart unfaithful or dead, or his business partner cheating him, or the whole society something less than worth fighting for.' Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir,' 9-10.

⁹⁹ 'The crime dramas absorb the soldiers into the noir world rather than focusing on such problems of the immediate postwar situation as demobilization. ... Specific social traumas and upheavals remain outside the frame.' Hirsch, *Dark Side of the Screen*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Copjec, 'Introduction,' in Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir*, xi-xii.

and belong to, the generic category of films which it describes and classifies, *and* to the period in which these were produced. This is misleading because the films it names were produced *avant le lettre* and the term didn't exist in the period. While seemingly *of* the period's narratives (and of the period itself), *noir* criticism has always been retrospective. Consequently, it always projects back onto the past its own present concerns while simultaneously creating an illusory sense of contemporary authenticity. *Noir* criticism has effectively produced a classificatory order by which its commentators, rather like plasterers, have applied a smooth critical finish over the 'irregularities' of textual difference. The critical category which claims to speak, as it were, on behalf of postwar America in fact says more about itself than the diverse group of films which it purports to define, and functions less as a generic category than a critical one. A further problem arises when we enquire into the meanings of these narratives and the circumstances of their production. This is because *noir* criticism has produced its own interpretive prescriptions which have already been superimposed over the the texts, affecting how they may be read. So although there is nothing intrinsically *in* these films which denote them as *noir*, they are already inscribed with the characteristic properties of *noir*'s predetermined critical agenda.

The effect of this criticism is to construct meanings out of a pathologised sense of the period, a view typified by Silver and Ward: "Film noir" is literally "black film," not just in the sense of being full of physically dark images, nor of reflecting a dark mood in American society, but equally, almost empirically, as a black slate on which the culture could inscribe its ills.¹⁰¹ But this pathologising tendency is unjustifiable. As Richard Maltby argues, *noir* critics 'have identified a *noir* sensibility, traced it across a body of films, and then sought to attach it to a general American cultural condition of "postwar malaise."¹⁰² Maltby suggests that such criticism articulates 'a Zeitgeist theory of film as cultural history, which is based more on critical ingenuity in textual interpretation than on any precise location of movies within the historical circumstances of their production

¹⁰¹ Silver and Ward, eds., *Film Noir*, 1.

¹⁰² Maltby, 'Politics of the Maladjusted Text,' 41.

and consumption.’ The effect is historically distortive and imposes on these narratives ‘an artificial ideological homogeneity.’¹⁰³ This ‘postwar malaise’ *Zeitgeist* is a conjectural construction produced ahistorically by the selective use of certain texts from which inferences of ‘malaise’ are drawn. *Noir*, in this sense, functions as an emblem or synecdoche to evoke what its proponents suppose to be the period’s ‘dark mood.’ Moreover, the sheer volume of *noir* writing so substantially outweighs that on any other category that it permanently obtrudes its own meanings on the period’s narratives.

Noir discourse is further complicated by the attribution of a French critical term to an American cultural category. Although drawing on a complex genealogy of ‘foreign’ influences, *noir* is often seen, paradoxically, as a distinctively American cultural form, as, for instance, a ‘unique example of a wholly American film style.’¹⁰⁴ But if *noir* is supposed to be indigenously American, why is it designated by a French name? In this sense, *noir* operates as a term of value, signifying a postwar complex of inter-cultural European-American issues. The term itself, of course, serves as a reminder of the French perspective from which it was derived, as a cultural by-product of wartime conditions. Occupied France had been denied access to American films throughout the war and with liberation in 1945 received a sudden influx of them. French *cinéaste* critics, viewing this backlog *en bloc*, identified a ‘new’ class of American narrative. However, the ascription of ‘*noir*’ to these films in the aftermath of the war says more about the cultural and intellectual predispositions of newly-liberated France than it does about these ‘new’ Hollywood productions.

French theorists critically ‘reinvented’ these American films through their conceptualisation of *noir* in accordance with what James Naremore has described as ‘a noir sensibility’ in postwar Paris.¹⁰⁵ But if French critics found a cultural affinity between American and Parisian *noir*, they were in disagreement from the outset about its cultural value. We can explain this disagreement if we consider the inception of *noir* within the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Silver and Ward, eds., *Film Noir*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Naremore, *More Than Night*, 11.

wider context of America's postwar national identity and its emergence *vis-à-vis* European culture. The two French critics who originally applied the term to American film differed in their conclusions about its value. Nino Frank, more affirmatively, saw in these 'new' narratives a radical departure from the 'antiquated' formulas of traditional Hollywood productions.¹⁰⁶ He significantly acknowledged that Hollywood was beginning to produce a generic body of work with a cultural value to rival that of the French.¹⁰⁷ Jean-Pierre Chartier similarly highlighted these 'new' narrative developments but, in contrast to Frank, found in them an extremely 'pessimistic or disgusted point of view' which compared unfavourably with 1930s' French *noir*.¹⁰⁸ Both writers, then, *competitively* defined the emergent American *noir* against what they saw as its French antecedents, partly because the 'new' American *noir* was reminiscent of French prewar *noir*,¹⁰⁹ and partly because they discerned in American *noir* a critique of 'Americanism' which came to have a powerful attraction for *noir* critics.¹¹⁰ 'The French have a paradoxical image of the United States,' suggests Vernet: 'on the one hand, it permitted victory in the struggle against Nazism and offers the image of a people whose standard of living is sharply superior. ... But, on the other hand, the United States is an imperialist menace that threatens to impose upon France values and a culture that are not its own: if the Americans are superior ... in the military and economic domains, they are judged to be inferior in the domain of culture.'¹¹¹

The ambivalent 'Americanism' identified in these narratives was often associated with the figure of the returning serviceman who was also becoming the focus of sociological concern, not as the *noir* archetype of shadowy instability, but as a figure of militarised conformity with the potential to endanger American postwar national identity.

¹⁰⁶ Frank, 'New Kind of Police Drama,' 15-19.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Chartier, 'Americans Also Make *Noir* Films,' 21-3.

¹⁰⁹ See Naremore, *More Than Night*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Walker attributes to *noir*, 'a generally more critical and subversive view of American ideology than the norm.' Walker, 'Film Noir: Introduction,' in Cameron, ed., *Movie Book of Film Noir*, 8.

¹¹¹ Vernet, '*Film Noir* on the Edge of Doom,' 5.

The Sociology of 'Readjustment'

As the figure of the ex-serviceman became the focus of intense scrutiny and speculation, his 'readjustment' became the subject of overarching social concern. He was invariably seen as a social problem: 'veteran' inevitably meant 'the veteran problem.' The veteran *as* social problem was a sociologically-determined figure and the processes of his 'readjustment' would be underwritten by sociological interests. A voluminous quantity of sociological literature on 'the veteran' began to appear before the end of the war.¹¹² As sociological research was disseminated through its usual academic and professional channels, it was beginning to set the agenda for 'readjustment' as an issue of national concern. A proliferation of articles on 'readjustment' appeared throughout a wide range of newspapers, magazines and journals which often adopted quasi-sociological approaches to 'the veteran problem.'

Postwar sociology was beginning to assume considerable hegemonic influence and the period saw the empowerment of social science as a significant new form of social power. As Terence Ball has pointed out, 'there emerged for the first time a vast institutional infrastructure - government granting agencies, private foundations, and the modern multiversity, in which the increasing professionalization of the social sciences proceeded apace - for supporting research and training.'¹¹³ The emergence of social science as a political force was due to a large extent to the wartime role it was enabled to assume. 'In some respects,' Ball suggests, 'the war was a godsend for the social sciences.'¹¹⁴ It provided a unique opportunity for social scientists to undertake studies of the extraordinary

¹¹² George K. Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian: Problems of Readjustment* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1944); Willard Waller, *The Veteran Comes Back* (New York: Dryden Press, 1944); Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1944); Charles G. Bolte, *The New Veteran* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1945); Benjamin C. Bowker, *Out of Uniform* (New York: Norton, 1946); Samuel A. Stouffer, et al, *The American Soldier*, Vol. I, *Adjustment During Army Life* and *The American Soldier*, Vol. II, *Combat and its Aftermath* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1949); Robert J. Havighurst, et al, *The American Veteran Back Home: A Study of Veteran Readjustment* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1951). John C. Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, [No. 20-210], July, 1952). See also, Davis R. B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). On the returning veteran in American history, see, Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, *The Wages of War: When America's Soldiers Came Home - From Valley Forge to Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

¹¹³ Ball, 'The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America' in Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 77.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 81.

social conditions imposed by war and, subsequently, the social problems of postwar 'readjustment.' Social science underwent considerable expansion, gaining professional recognition and prestige. With substantially increased funding, often through government agencies, its work was increasingly linked to government interests and often undertaken on behalf of the government. Sociology in particular began to acquire an increasingly ideological function as a quasi-government agency with substantive influence on postwar social policy, often with implications of 'social engineering.' Social science would play a significant part in the construction of America's postwar social identity. Under the guise of disciplinary independence, scientific rationality and, with the rising authority of 'The Expert,' social science claimed the requisite expertise to define social problems and provide their solutions.

Sociologists played a crucial role in defining the terms of 'the veteran problem' and writing the agenda for 'readjustment.' Sociology presented itself not only as academic and professional, but also as scientific, as social science. Its status and authority derived from all that is implicit in its *scientific* study of society. With these credentials, sociology became uniquely qualified to provide authoritative social analysis and consequently acquired the power of 'official' status.¹¹⁵ But sociology's 'scientific' *modus operandi* can also be seen to elide its own ideological agenda. What appears as sociological description may actually be social prescription, working implicitly to position social subjects through processes of identification and classification which, under the guise of 'scientific' disinterestedness, assumed a regulatory and supervisory function.

Sociology's 'hidden agenda' worked discursively to project onto its subject specified forms of social identity. In this sense, sociology's power to identify and classify didn't simply define a preexisting subject but, rather, sociologists invented and produced the subject of their study *as* they described and analysed it. In the discourse of 'readjustment,' we can see how ex-servicemen were subject to such social production.

¹¹⁵ Sociologists were frequently appointed to positions on bodies responsible for the administration of veterans' issues, including legislation such as the GI Bill, and often served to chronicle 'official' accounts of demobilisation and 'readjustment' as, for example, in Stouffer's account of *The American Soldier*, undertaken through the Information and Education Division of the War Department.

The processes of identifying, defining, describing and classifying had already begun to coalesce in the initial designation of 'the veteran' and its referent, 'social problem.' Hence, '*the* veteran' stands for *all* veterans as they are all collectively subsumed under this rubric. The term works as a synecdoche or metonymy, but it can also be seen as a *label* for a generic category as it simultaneously constructs and homogenises the category which it names. This process illustrates a concern with 'type' in the sociology of culture. Because 'the veteran' is 'typical,' all veterans become undifferentiated as they are drawn into a general category which presumes sameness.

Sociologists conducted a vast amount of wartime research into the nature of military society and we can see here their construction of the military as a subculture. Hence, the sociological perspective of the *ex*-servicemen is predicated on its earlier observations of servicemen in military service.¹¹⁶ While the focus of sociological interest was in the social structures and practices of military life, it was also concerned with the *transition* from one type of society to the other. Sociological accounts of military society repeatedly emphasised the effects of this transition and the different 'worlds' of military and civilian society. These accounts frequently included descriptions of military social structures and practices contrasted with those of civilian society. The difference between them invariably implied an aberration, a deviation from the civilian 'norm.' Civilian society was usually represented as a given, as the normative and natural social condition against which the intrinsic 'deviance' of the military subculture was measured. The term itself suggests a culture with a complex relative position. As 'sub' denotes 'under,' it suggests a subordinate or subsidiary standing which borders on, or deviates from, 'mainstream' culture, defining a socio-cultural distinction. The subculture is marked out by its difference and situated in opposition to the 'dominant' (civilian) culture. This distinction is based on a dichotomy between a series of oppositions: superior and inferior, inside and outside, official and unofficial, and so on. Thus, the subculture is attributed with *contrary* status and often seen as resistant, subversive, and, explicitly or

¹¹⁶ See, for example, the symposium issue, 'Human Behavior in Military Society,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946).

implicitly, in contempt of the dominant culture.

From this sociological perspective, several issues arising from military service were seen to pose a threat to civilian society and made 'readjustment' such a pressing issue. Sociological accounts of military service were dominated by concerns with the institutional effects of what Erving Goffman has called 'total institutions.'¹¹⁷ Sociologists identified in the 'total' military organisation a series of predisposing factors seemingly designed to produce a culture of homogeneity and conformity. Military society, they found, was a regime of discipline, order and control, governed by orders, rules and regulations, administered through a strictly determined hierarchical model. It was structured as a 'command' society to produce obedience as an absolute condition. It was also, literally, a uniform society in which everything, and everyone, was subject to processes and procedures of standardisation and bureaucratisation in which the military role was impersonal and anonymous. Servicemen were often seen as cogs in the military machine. It was generally observed that military society disallowed the very notion of personal initiative, self-reliance and individual autonomy, effectively immobilising the capacity to think and act independently. The serviceman's individual identity was deliberately subsumed by the institutional determinants of military life and, subject to 'total' military socialisation, he was seen as vulnerable to 'total' institutionalisation. It was assumed that he had internalised the conformist tendencies of military culture and, consequently, become conditioned to a life of institutionalised dependency. It was further assumed that servicemen had been so thoroughly inculcated with the conformist tendencies of military life that they couldn't help but return home with them.

But sociologists also identified an obverse dimension to the military's 'official' regulation culture. If the military had produced conformist proclivities, it also saw the parallel development of an 'unofficial' culture suggesting opposite tendencies. Military socialisation operated not only through its official regime of regulation, but also through

¹¹⁷ That is, 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.' Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 11.

this unofficial 'counter-culture' of deregulation. It was here that servicemen were schooled in many of the informal aspects of military life which in other circumstances would be socially discountenanced. It was often noted, for example, that servicemen were notoriously profligate with their pay. Living, it seemed, only for the moment, they seemed careless and abandoned in their attitudes, and indifferent to the consequences of their actions. These informal aspects of military culture would often be seen to promote a casual disregard for the law, evidenced, for example, in accounts of the widespread practice of looting. There were considerable concerns that in addition to the conformist proclivities, servicemen were likely to return home with all manner of socially unsanctioned habits acquired overseas and even, perhaps, a predilection for delinquency

But if these 'anti' social practices seemed to demonstrate a reaction against the rules and regulations of official military culture, they were often seen as yet further confirmation of the military's general patterns of conformity. These 'disreputable' practices seemed like expressions of disaffection or dissent, subcultural gestures of insubordinate defiance in the face of official military authority.¹¹⁸ However, sociologists discerned in these unofficial social practices the same pattern of conformist tendencies which they had identified in official military culture. In both instances it appeared that individual identity had been nullified to be replaced by an homogenised collective identity constituted by small informal groupings formed from the serviceman's own unit or platoon. These groupings, characterised by a powerful sense of peer bonding, constituted the core of the military's highly developed 'buddy' culture where 'the outfit' was paramount. As individual status diminished, a group ethos became the focal point of identification. Sociologists, then, had identified two conterminous forms of military socialisation, both pointing towards the conformist tendency which, they anticipated, were imminently to be transported home.

As the issue of 'readjustment' loomed large, 'home' itself came under scrutiny. If servicemen were to be assimilated, what would they be assimilated *to*? If the critique of

¹¹⁸ Dick Hebdidge has characterised this kind of subcultural gesture as a 'refusal' (to conform). Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, new edn (London: Routledge, 1995).

military society had identified a subcultural deviation from a societal norm, what, then, was this norm? It had become axiomatic that for servicemen abroad, 'home' was what they were fighting for and where they wanted to be. But what was the 'home' to which they were returning? Despite sociologists' misgivings about the deleterious effects of military society, they had identified in military life social qualities which they found lacking in civilian society. Although often mistrustful about military society, sociologists nevertheless often found there a highly developed sense of social community which seemed absent at home. Military society, it seemed, could provide a more meaningful sense of 'social' than its civilian counterpart. Indeed, they often characterised civilian society by its 'social disorganisation' and feared that the social structures of 'home' were breaking down.

'Home' in wartime discourse was defensively constructed through the 'home front' as a focal point of national unity and purpose. But from a postwar perspective, sociologists were concerned about wartime disruptions to the traditional patterns of social development and continuity. Many wartime factors, especially those arising from separation, were seen to have fractured the postwar social order. Escalating rates of divorce, juvenile delinquency, crime and other instances of 'dysfunctional' behaviour were commonly cited as confirmation of proliferating 'social disorganisation.' If 'home' was to be constituted through the familiar social structures of marriage, family and community, these looked increasingly insecure. And, as servicemen abroad invested heavily in the notion of 'home,' what they would ultimately find there might turn out to be more uncertain than they had imagined. Moreover, as we shall see, many commentators and intellectuals became involved in debates about the constitution of 'home' in the context of America's politico-cultural identity and its formation in contradistinction to the totalitarian Other.

The Cultural Politics of The Vital Centre

Americans confronted by the devastating impact of the Depression were mindful of the Russian 'experiment.' A demoralised and disillusioned America, languishing *in extremis* in the ruins of its collapsed economy, could hardly ignore comparisons with an alternative system which, ideological differences apart, at least seemed to work. Irrespective of political differences, the Russian 'experiment' exercised the American imagination, and, to many, presented a comparative model of national planning which seemed dynamic and purposeful, offering an inspirational contrast to failed 'Americanism.' Moreover, the two countries may not have been as ideologically far apart as they may have seemed. Soviet propaganda, as Richard Pells points out, could often sound 'typically American' in emphasis: 'Both countries valued the material rewards of mass production, both respected the machine and its power to transform life, both celebrated industrialism and technology, both worshipped bigness as a sign of quality and progress, both preached the virtues of efficiency and physical growth.'¹¹⁹ Americans might meditate on their cherished national traditions of capitalism, democracy and liberalism, but the lengthening crisis of the Depression provided incontrovertible testimony of their failure to provide solutions to their problems. The Soviet Union, in contrast, seemed to be striving towards success, a nation which appeared to be forging a brave new world.

Later in the decade, however, disclosures about the Stalinist regime dispelled the 'attraction' of the Soviet Union. News of the Stalinist purges and the Moscow 'trials' began to expose, if only partially, a horrifying picture of the Soviet police state, a picture which disabused many of their fascination with the notion of any utopian experiment. Stalinism was revealed as a regime of institutional repression and persecution, brutality and terror. Moreover, with the signing of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Poland and Finland, the alliance between Communism and Fascism saw a collusion of totalitarian power. These developments had far-reaching political and cultural implications for American intellectuals who began to undertake a

¹¹⁹ Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Middletown, CONN: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 64. See also, 61-69.

drastic reappraisal of the cultural politics of Americanism.

For many commentators, the development of a new kind of national identity became imperative for the reformation of postwar 'Americanism.' This, they proposed, should be built on a new centrist alignment of reconstituted liberalism which Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. called 'the vital center.' This 'center' would be a defensively constructed position from which, in one of Schlesinger's frequent military metaphors, 'a democratic counter-offensive' would be strategically deployed against the threat of encroaching totalitarianism.¹²⁰ This was a tactical response to what many writers saw as a period of uncertainty, insecurity and fear, 'the age of anxiety.' If, 'anxiety,' as Schlesinger claims, 'is the official emotion of our time,' it was an existential prerequisite for democratic freedom.¹²¹ It represented proof of individualism in a free society as opposed to totalitarianism's 'non-individual' who was rendered incapable of feeling 'anxiety' at all.

That the 'center' should be 'vital' is significant because it suggests not only an essential position, but also one which connotes *life* against the condition of *unlife* attributed to the machine-like totalitarian state. This condition would be repeatedly represented by its association with industrial processes of automation and, by extension, a population resembling automata. The crucial dilemma in this culture of 'anxiety' was that existential freedom imposed on the individual a responsibility to make choices and decisions which had become too much of an ordeal. The existential self was constituted by the *use* of choice, but to exercise that choice demanded the acceptance of personal responsibility which it was preferable to avoid. Under the ever-increasing dominance of capitalism's enlarged organisation, the individual was in danger of being systematically overwhelmed by the power of organisational authority: 'Man longs to escape the pressures beating down on his frail individuality; and, more and more, the surest means of escape seems to be to surrender that individuality to some massive, external authority.'¹²² The individual, Schlesinger is saying, wants only 'to flee' from the responsibili-

¹²⁰ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 52.

¹²² *Ibid*, 53.

ties which freedom entails. The totalitarian state was dangerously alluring because it held out the promise of 'meaning and purpose,' 'security and comradeship,' relieving the individual of personal responsibility. Both Communism and Fascism similarly envisaged the individual as a component in the state apparatus.¹²³ If the self is subordinated to the state, individual expression becomes conceptually meaningless, jeopardising free discussion, criticism and dissent. This, says Schlesinger, 'is threatening to turn us all into frightened conformists; and conformity can only lead to stagnation.'¹²⁴ Hence, 'the vital center' would provide the means for the reconstituted 'integrity of the individual' to withstand the pressures of conformity, 'to help us recapture a sense of the indispensability of dissent.'¹²⁵

For the proponents of the neo-liberalist alignment, the 'center' represented a pluralist front in opposition to the ideological extremities of totalitarianism. The 'center' would be distanced from such extremities and characterised by its own ideologically 'neutral' stance. Advocates of liberalism believed that ideologically-based proposals for postwar America had become redundant and that ideology itself had come to a dead end. Postwar Americanism would be shaped by a repudiation of ideological doctrine and dogma. Ideology encouraged the abnegation of personal responsibility for asking questions by automatically providing answers. Daniel Bell, one of the preeminent 'end-of-ideology' apologists, described the conformist tendency implicit in ideological consumption. 'One simply turns to the ideological vending machine,' he says, 'and out comes the prepared formulae.'¹²⁶ The automat imagery is significant because it illustrates the assumption shared by many intellectuals of a people politically disengaged and mindlessly implicated in automated processes of ideological manufacturing. For the advocates of neo-liberalism, the 'center' was not an exclusively political position but a space which opened out to accommodate the cultural sphere. This conception of an open space is significantly associated with a view of a free, pluralistic society: 'Liberty,' as Schlesin-

¹²³ Ibid, 54.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 208.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Bell, 'The End of Ideology in the West: *An Epilogue*,' in *End of Ideology*, 400.

ger describes it, 'gets more fresh air and sunlight through the interstices of a diversified society than through the iron curtain of totalitarianism.'¹²⁷ The imagery serves to illustrate the kind of social variegation necessary for the expression of a libertarian culture, the antithesis of totalitarianism's overdetermined systems, enclosed by ideological rigidity.

Liberalism, in contradistinction, was unbound by prescriptive manifesto and restrictive dogma. Liberalism, for Lionel Trilling, 'is ... a large tendency rather than a concise body of doctrine.'¹²⁸ Trilling sought a wider definition of politics ('the politics of culture') to acknowledge the implicit connection between literature and politics. The role of literary criticism within liberalism's political culture should be 'to recall liberalism to its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty.'¹²⁹ The 'liberal imagination,' then, as the cultural wing of liberalism's political philosophy, would engender differentiation and heterogeneity.

The neo-liberalism of the postwar period sought to distance itself from the direct forms of socio-political 'statement' characteristic of 1930s' New Deal liberalism of the 1930s. The radicalism of prewar liberalism and the 'Old Left' often found expression in cultural forms which, from a postwar perspective, looked like propagandist exercises in state ideology. The new liberal 'center' was being constructed not only in opposition to the foreign threat of a totalitarian present, but also against its own indigenous 'proto-totalitarian' past. For Trilling and other cultural critics, a redefinition of 'culture' became indispensable to a reconstituted form of postwar 'Americanism.' He set out his precepts for a new cultural pluralism in a critique of V. L. Parrington's view of culture as a 'current.' 'A culture,' Trilling argues, 'is not a flow, nor even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate - it is nothing if not a dialectic.'¹³⁰ Parrington's 'current' implies cultural consensus and homogeneity whereas Trilling advocates contestation, variance and divergence. It is ultimately the dialectic quality within 'certain art-

¹²⁷ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 186.

¹²⁸ Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking, 1951), x-xi.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹³⁰ Trilling, 'Reality in America,' in *Liberal Imagination*, 9.

ists' and the cultural contradictions they intrinsically contain ('both the yes and the no of their culture') which ensure that they aren't enlisted by any party, movement or cause, 'and the sign of this is that they do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency.'¹³¹ Trilling is concerned here with the deficiencies of a traditional liberal criticism predisposed to accept the social relevance of Theodore Dreiser's explicit 'reality' while disdaining what it saw as the irrelevance of Henry James. Traditional liberalism had facilitated a 'protest' literature with overtly social and political concerns. Trilling opposed this tendency because it had produced little more than a dour and worthy (ideologically-determined) literature which lacked 'imagination.' In order to counteract this ideological tendency, Trilling sought a regenerated kind of liberalism to promote a renewed engagement with all the 'variousness and possibility ... complexity and difficulty' exemplified by the 'monumental figures' of European Modernism whose work remained free from any ideological commitment to received orthodoxies and doctrines.¹³² Trilling recognised that culture would play a strategically important postwar role. The novel, which was 'the most effective agent of the moral imagination,' would be especially important because of 'its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination.'¹³³ The novel, in other words, compelled the reader to engage in a process of critical self-analysis. So when Trilling laments the cultural decline of the novel, he is describing not only 'a waning form of art,' but also the 'waning freedom' to which it was inextricably tied.¹³⁴

As Stalinism was revealed to be politically indefensible, it also came to be seen as culturally reprehensible. Totalitarian art was discredited as a cultural manifestation of state *diktat*. Soviet artists, said Schlesinger, must 'eschew mystery, deny anxiety and avoid complexity.' As mere *apparatchiks* of a bureaucratised state ideology, they must 'create only compositions which officials can hum, paintings which their wives can deci-

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Trilling, 'The Function of the Little Magazine,' in *Liberal Imagination*, 98-9.

¹³³ Trilling, 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel,' in *Liberal Imagination*, 222.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

pher, poems which the Party leaders can understand.’¹³⁵ American intellectuals who had admired the Soviet ‘experiment’ were confronted with the grim realities of the Stalinist regime and consequently compelled to reappraise its cultural implications. Questions of what culture should (and shouldn’t) be became the focus of critical scrutiny leading to a reformulation of cultural principles for postwar Americanism. Under Stalinism (and Hitlerism), culture had become *official*, hardening in the monolithic mould of an official state art, invariably expressed in massive, uniform and intractable forms. The official state aesthetic was Socialist Realism. Its large-scale, ‘heroic’ depictions extolled collectivist labour, technological modernity, and industrial and agrarian productivity. American intellectuals became increasingly concerned with what they saw as American cultural Stalinism. Dwight Macdonald, for example, thought that ‘*Kulturbolschewismus*’ (cultural bolshevism) was already ‘here’ and detected indications of ‘that *official* approach to culture’ in America as ‘an ominous sign of the drift towards totalitarianism.’¹³⁶

Mass Society and Conformity Culture

The problem of veteran ‘readjustment’ saw concerns not only with the serviceman’s past military experience, where he was coming *from*, but also with the kind of society he was returning *to*. Veteran ‘conformity’ was linked to wider concerns with the ‘conformity’ inherent in America as a mass society with a mass culture and its quasi-totalitarian implications.¹³⁷ Intellectuals were disconcerted by what they saw as the intrinsic inferiority of a machine-age culture produced according to industrial, technological

¹³⁵ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 80.

¹³⁶ Macdonald, ‘Kulturbolschewismus Is Here,’ *Partisan Review*, 8 (1941), 442-51. Macdonald saw the ‘formula’ for state control of the artist as ‘an attempt to impose on the writer *from outside* certain socio-political values, and to provide a rationalization for damning his work *esthetically* if it fails to conform to these *social values*.’ Ibid, 450-1.

¹³⁷ Key texts in the critique of mass culture include Greenberg, ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch,’ *Partisan Review*, 6 (1939), 34-49; Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (New York: Random House, 1962); Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Free Press, 1957); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’ [1944], in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans., John Cummings (London: Verso, 1989), 120-167.

and commercial determinants, exemplified by the Hollywood studio system.¹³⁸ They identified in mass culture's standardisation of production not only an aesthetically de-based cultural form, but totalitarian cultural traits. Many shared Bernard Rosenberg's view of mass culture as a double threat which 'threatens not merely to cretinize our taste, but to brutalize our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism.'¹³⁹ The emergence of an American 'conformity culture' implied an ideological affinity with the totalitarian state which threatened the very notion of 'Americanism.' The significant issue for cultural critics was no longer simply a question of how to safeguard what they saw as declining cultural standards: this was now doubly imperative because mass culture was seen as a Trojan horse of incipient totalitarianism. The totalitarian implications of mass culture could no longer be seen as an external threat, as an alien characteristic of a foreign enemy: rather, the threat of mass culture as Other was becoming an *indigenous* phenomenon, increasingly manifest at home.

Clement Greenberg's influential essay, 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' was instrumental in setting out the terms of the critique of mass culture. His terms are significant in their provenance: '*Kitsch*' is culture-as-trash, an inferior cultural form with vulgar, mass appeal. The term, significantly of German origin, evokes an official national culture characteristic of the totalitarian state, utilised to support the demagogue's appeal to the 'baser' instincts of the masses. *Kitsch* was appropriated as an instrument of state ideology because its intrinsic pliability facilitated a propagandist function. Intellectuals like Greenberg championed the avant-garde against (*kitsch*) mass culture not only for the preservation of the implicit standards of 'high' culture, but also as a defence against totalitarianism. For Schlesinger, totalitarian regimes invariably outlawed the avant-garde because it was resistant to appropriation as an instrument of the state.¹⁴⁰ The term, as a quasi-mi-

¹³⁸ For studies of the period's intellectuals, see Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society Since the 1930s* (New York: Schocken, 1984); Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*, 2nd edn (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

¹³⁹ Rosenberg, 'Mass Culture in America,' in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ Schlesinger stressed the inherent 'intricacy and ambiguity' of Picasso and Stravinsky which 'make them hard for officialdom to control.' Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 79.

litary conceit, defines culture as the site of an ideological battlefield where the avant-garde would be enlisted in the battle against Fascist *kitsch*, providing a 'center' aesthetic to connect with a politics of culture correlated to Schlesinger's '*Politics of Freedom*' and deployed in defining cultural Americanism against cultural Stalinism.

For Dwight Macdonald, mass ('popular') culture was both exploitative and authoritarian, 'imposed from above.' Macdonald saw a connection between American culture and Fascist ideology, where 'everything and everybody are being integrated - "coordinated" the Nazis call it - into the official culture-structure.'¹⁴¹ Commentators frequently attributed to American culture and society the same type of conformist, uniform, mechanistic traits which they saw as symptomatic of the national culture of the totalitarian state and they widely assumed that the individual was being drawn into *total* systems in which individuality was systematically degraded. Irving Howe, for example, sees a mass culture which 'diverts the worker from his disturbing reduction to semi-robot status by arranging "relaxing" amusements for him.'¹⁴² Macdonald saw in modern industrial society ('whether in the USA or the USSR') a tendency 'to transform the individual into the mass man ... a solitary atom, uniform with the millions of other atoms that go to make up "the lonely crowd."'¹⁴³

A parallel critique of mass culture was developed by the Marxist Frankfurt School and exemplified in 'The Culture Industry' by Adorno and Horkheimer. Their study is concerned with an analysis of mass culture as a *system* conducive to the production of totalitarianism.¹⁴⁴ Thus, 'system' (as in 'industry') is the operative term and, here, the system is *total*, geared ideologically to the production of 'mass deception' through the political economy of Hollywood's studio system which controls every facet of production, distribution and exhibition. 'The Culture Industry' is powerfully inflected with the

language and imagery of functioning totalitarianism, 'envisioning' the Hollywood system

¹⁴¹ Macdonald, 'A Theory of "Popular Culture,"' *Politics* (February, 1944), 21.

¹⁴² Howe, 'Notes on Mass Culture,' *Politics* (Spring, 1948), 120.

¹⁴³ Macdonald, 'Masscult & Midcult' [1960] in *Against the American Grain*, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Culture Industry,' 120-67. Adorno and Horkheimer's project was derived from their experience as Jewish intellectuals in Nazi Germany who relocated in Los Angeles: it was informed by their experience of Fascism, their esteem for the values of European 'high' culture, and by their proximity to Hollywood on which they projected their concerns.

as the Fascist state where its 'ruthless unity ... is evidence of what will happen in politics.'¹⁴⁵ The system's standardisation of production predetermines its industrial narratives as predictable and formulaic: 'As soon as the film begins, it is quite clear how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished, or forgotten.'¹⁴⁶ Hollywood requires neither imagination nor reflection from its preprogrammed audiences: 'they react automatically.'¹⁴⁷ Moreover, these narratives negate any notion of individuated identity through the illusory contrivance of 'pseudo individuality,' a product of virtually undifferentiated industrial manufacturing, 'mass-produced like Yale locks, whose only difference can be measured in fractions of millimeters.'¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Leo Lowenthal identified in popular magazine biographies representations of 'pseudoindividualization' which characterised what he called the 'average man,' a figure drawn from 'the masses' and bound to 'a life of continuous adjustment.'¹⁴⁹ Lowenthal's 'average man' prefigures many of the subsequent representations of an 'other-directed' conformist type in the critique of conformity.¹⁵⁰

Radio was seen as another ideologically dangerous form of the culture industry's technology, especially given its crucial role in the Nazification of German culture and as the principal instrument of state propaganda.¹⁵¹ Unlike other mass media, radio had a uniquely omnipresent capability. Norman Corwin, for example, inadvertently described an almost Orwellian domestic technology which 'reaches into the home day after day, hour after hour. ... at his bedside, in his kitchen, under his automobile dashboard.'¹⁵²

Like the mass culture critics, Corwin was concerned with the formulaic mediocrity of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 123.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 125.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 127. A presumption comparable with what Macdonald called 'The Built-in Reaction' by which narratives 'included' the response of the audience often seen in itself as implicated in the processes of industrial automation. Macdonald, 'Masscult & Midcult,' 28-9.

¹⁴⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Culture Industry,' 154.

¹⁴⁹ Lowenthal, 'The Triumph of Mass Idols' [1944] in *Literature and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984) 222.

¹⁵⁰ This type of 'self-adjusting' figure was subsequently elaborated by several social commentators. See, for example, Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*; Whyte; *Organization Man*; Mills, *White Collar*.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Z.A.B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 50-52; Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 506-11; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (London: Arrow, 1998), 244-8.

¹⁵² Corwin, 'The Radio,' in Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone*, 375. See also, Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 223-33; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 269-70.

radio's commercialism and, in particular, with advertisers and sponsors who 'borrow, imitate, plagiarize, and perpetuate formulas which have been tested and proven by others.'¹⁵³ Adorno and Horkheimer, similarly concerned with cultural commodification, also identified an explicit parallel between America's commercial radio and Nazi state-controlled broadcasting. American radio, they held, often effaced its commercial structure by deceptively creating a sense of 'public service' which 'acquired the illusory form of disinterested, unbiased authority which suits Fascism admirably.' Radio, as 'the voice of the nation,' provided the state with the infrastructure for the national dissemination of state ideology.¹⁵⁴

In its sustained critique of America as a mass society, commentators debated what they saw as the totalitarian implications of a mass culture which seemed dedicated to the production and consumption of conformism. But their pathology of 'mass' works as a discursive formation.¹⁵⁵ As Raymond Williams has suggested: 'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.'¹⁵⁶ Definitions of 'mass' inevitably denote a category to be held in contempt as Other.¹⁵⁷ This distinction, as Andrew Ross has argued, has particular resonance in the context of a Cold War national identity. 'Mass culture, mass society, the masses. They have all come to sound "unAmerican," as if they suggested alarming foreign activities that surely "can't happen here."' For Ross, 'these terms often function either as external limits or boundaries against which the official idea of a national democratic culture is defined, or, when applied internally, to denote a critical, dystopian view of profoundly undemocratic features within that culture. ... In short, "mass" is one of the key terms that governs the official distinction between American/Un-American, or inside/outside.'¹⁵⁸ In other words, the concept of 'mass,' associated with 'foreign,' was becoming a threat to Cold War 'Americanism.' In this sense,

¹⁵³ Corwin, 'Radio,' 383.

¹⁵⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Culture Industry,' 159.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Bell, 'America as a Mass Society' in *End of Ideology*, 22-25.

¹⁵⁶ Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 289.

¹⁵⁷ As Williams also points out: 'Terms of contempt for the majority of a people have a long and abundant history.' Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (London: Fontana, 1988), 192. See also 192-7.

¹⁵⁸ Ross, *No Respect*, 42.

'mass' signalled a double danger because it suggested the anti-democratic forces of the totalitarian Other on two fronts, foreign *and* domestic. Many intellectuals subscribed to the idea of a 'center' alignment of consensual liberal pluralism which would provide the basis for a national postwar culture strategically deployed in opposition to the threat of totalitarianism.¹⁵⁹

Coming Home

'Coming Home' is a study of how the discourse of veteran 'readjustment' was refracted through postwar film narratives. The objective of my study is to reconceptualise meanings in these narratives in accordance with an understanding of the social factors which informed their production. Hence, the general objective of the study is to establish a bridge between social history and film narrative to provide for a (re)connection between them. I am reading 'social history' here as one kind of narrative and film as another: because both forms of narrative were engendered in the same historical moment, both were caught up in the same historical concerns. The specific objective of my thesis is to demonstrate how postwar film narratives were informed by the discourse of veteran 'readjustment' and my purpose is to 'recover' the meanings implicit in this discourse which have become 'lost' to us over intervening time. The reconnection of narrative to discourse, I argue, is indispensable to our understanding of these films and enables us to reconsider our readings of them in new and often surprising ways. I contend that we need to recontextualise these narratives with specific reference to the historical circumstances in which they were produced.

I have undertaken two principal areas of research in 'Coming Home' and these are reflected in the the study's two-part organisation. In Part One, I set out the sociological production of 'readjustment.' By drawing on the considerable body of sociological wri-

¹⁵⁹ Intellectuals, as Ross points out, would play an unprecedented role 'as national agents of cultural, moral, and political leadership' in the definition of postwar American culture. 'In fact, many of them helped to underwrite and legitimize the new rules of *consent*. ... The conditions under which many intellectuals were "recruited" for this task were determined by the new exigencies of a *national* culture, defensively constructed against foreign threats and influences, and internally strengthened by the declaration of a consensus, posed in the form of a common and spontaneous agreement about fundamentals.' *Ibid*, 42-3.

ting about 'the veteran problem,' I conduct an investigation into the sociological construction of 'the veteran problem.' I contend that social science 'diagnosed' a pathology of military conformism and, subsequently, wrote the agenda for 'readjustment.' Here, 'The Veteran' was constructed as a crucial figure in the discourse of America's postwar national identity, largely because the putative conformity of his 'militarised' self was perceived as having affinities with the totalitarian Other and, consequently, conformism was associated with a democratic Americanism at risk.

In chapter one, I begin with an investigation into the ways in which sociological studies of military society engendered concerns with the 'militarization' of social identity and, hence, with the institutionalised conformity of servicemen produced by the military's 'social machine.' My survey of these studies reveals how they were underwritten, explicitly or implicitly, by concerns with the totalitarian affinities of the military 'machine,' and how they set the agenda for ensuing concerns about 'readjustment.' These studies led to concerns about the social implications of demobilisation, especially as a socio-economic threat to civilian society. In chapter two, I examine how the returning serviceman, as the militarised product of institutionalised dependency, constituted an aggregate of social concerns assembled under the rubric of 'The Veteran Problem,' often in contradictory ways. The 'conformist' serviceman was constructed as a figure whose individualism had been systematically erased by the military and, consequently, 'readjustment' was seen as imperative for the reconstitution of the ex-serviceman as an independent, autonomous individual, the *citizen* indispensable to the functioning of a democratic society. In chapter three, I assess how the domestic impact of the ex-serviceman's homecoming was envisaged in terms of a seemingly unbridgeable distance between 'two worlds' of military and civilian society. Veteran 'readjustment' was seen as essential to the wellbeing of a postwar family life which had already suffered the debilitating effects of wartime and which was also seen as symptomatic of a more general deterioration of societal values. Moreover, domestic ideology was assigned a crucial role in

America's postwar national identity through a discourse in which 'home' was defensively constructed against what was seen as an increasing susceptibility to 'mass' society and, hence, its totalitarian implications. Chapter four demonstrates how 'readjustment' was linked to official discourses of an American wartime national identity constructed in relation to enemy and allied nations. Studies of military culture often identified disparities between official and unofficial attitudes towards foreign nations: military experience abroad was often thought to have destabilised the serviceman's 'American' sense of himself and engendered in him sentiments contrary to America's democratic interests. He was consequently seen as a politically dubious figure, bringing home questionable sympathies and antipathies, with a potential vulnerability to totalitarian influences. Finally, in chapter five, I set out the terms of a discourse in which 'The Veteran' was cast in the role of 'The Stranger,' an indeterminate and ambivalent category dislocated from 'home' by the 'other world' status of an outsider and, hence, the subject of fears and anxieties. The veteran-stranger became the generic figure in a discourse which attributed to military experience (especially combat) a sense of *difference*, the imputed difference of a 'militarised' self distanced from the domestic world of 'home.'

The second area of research in 'Coming Home' is a study of postwar films from the period, 1945-48. Part Two comprises an analysis of the ways in which the discourse of 'readjustment' and its ramifications can be traced through these narratives. My analysis focuses on the narrative meanings of 'home' which I realign with postwar discourses of 'home' and 'homecoming.' Hence, to return to my opening discussion of *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and *The Egg and I*, the Blandings' and the MacDonalds' aspirations to a new kind of life is negotiated through their investment in the different kind of home they want. But 'home,' as I have suggested, isn't necessarily a coherent term and my readings of postwar films repeatedly demonstrate how it is represented as an unstable category. These readings acknowledge the incoherence and instability implicit in the term through an approach which enables us to identify narrative inconsistency,

ambivalence and contradiction which works to disturb the notion of postwar social history as a stable, coherent narrative. Moreover, as my two 'comedy' examples illustrate, the narrative sense of 'home' as a destabilised space cannot be seen as the exclusive preserve of *film noir* (often a tacit assumption), but can be found in myriad narratives, irrespective of their generic classification. 'Coming Home,' then, draws on a generically diverse group of films, overriding claims for *noir*'s implicit status to articulate the predominant version of America's postwar national identity. Here, I am drawing on an approach to 1940s' film narratives which effectively collapses their generic boundaries and, hence, allows for new and unexpected juxtapositions of different types of narrative, extending the scope of their relation to social history. In 'Coming Home' I locate postwar films in their postwar historical context in order to examine how they problematise the discourse of 'readjustment' and its role in the construction of 'conformity.' Each chapter focuses on a given film text in relation to an aspect of this discourse.

Chapter six accounts for the production of the period's most explicit dramatisation of returning servicemen and their 'readjustment,' *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). The narrative is often read as an affirmative view of homecoming but my analysis shows how its purposeful sense of hope is often contradicted by implications of an unstable and uncertain postwar future. In chapter seven, I situate *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) in the context of postwar suburbanisation. The film is rarely connected with wartime discourses but I suggest it represents a 'home-front' version of the assimilation narrative which here deals with a case of civilian 'readjustment.' Often seen today (usually at Christmas) as a paean to small-town life, my reading demonstrates a narrative representation of family and community which is much more unstable than is usually allowed. Chapter eight takes up the problematic raised in critical readings of *Mildred Pierce* (1945) which have correlated the narrative with the 'readjustment' of wartime women workers and their 'compulsory' domestic relocation at the end of the war. Here, I recontextualise the narrative's concerns with material and cultural consumerism. In

chapter nine, I relate two 'period' narratives, *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1948) and *The Emperor Waltz* (1947), to debates about the 'reconstruction' of America's postwar cultural identity in relation to the ambivalent value of 'Europeanism.' Europe had often been seen as the source of a cultural tradition lacking in America, but postwar Europe was also seen as the site of physical ruination and cultural exhaustion, increasingly associated with decadence, obsolescence and militarism, and as the issuing source of totalitarianism. Chapter ten examines 'the organisation' in postwar crime narratives. With concerns about the increasing power of corporate organisation and the rise of the 'organization man,' postwar narratives often featured 'incorporated' individuals trapped within large-scale institutionalised systems. With a focus on *Force of Evil* (1948), I track the figure of the gangster from 1930s' representations to his postwar 'corporate' counterpart. Finally, in chapter eleven, I demonstrate how narratives like *The Stranger* (1946) illustrate concerns with a national susceptibility to 'invisible' totalitarian influences, especially through ordinary, small-town community life. With a comparative analysis of a prewar account of incursive Fascism, in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), I show how *The Stranger* exposes the vulnerability of 'home' to Fascist infiltration.

Part One

The Sociology of Veteran Readjustment

Chapter 1

'The Most Orderly Society in the Modern World' Military Culture and Society

When social scientists turned their collective attention to the study of military society, they were confronted by a social system which they viewed with considerable misgivings.¹ They identified two interrelated aspects of military culture which, they presumed, would have drastic consequences for postwar American society when servicemen returned home. Firstly, they became increasingly preoccupied with the notion of military conformity. Conformity, they found, was institutionally inscribed in the formal organisation of the military apparatus and informed every aspect of military life.² They consequently inferred that the experience of military life would engender a condition of conformity in servicemen. Secondly, they found an informal culture which seemed to suggest a countervailing tendency: servicemen in this 'alternative' culture were being schooled in various 'illicit' and 'immoral' practices, casually acquiring all manner of 'anti-social' attitudes and behaviour. But, paradoxically, even this subcultural 'deviance' seemed to confirm the same general trend towards conformity. Social scientists were concerned about the social effects of a military society which, on the one hand, subjected servicemen to a 'total' system of control while, on the other, enabled the emergence of a permissive sub-culture in which servicemen were seemingly *out* of control. Ultimately, they found in the patterns of military life what the sociologist Robert A. Nisbet described as 'the most orderly society in the modern world.'³

This overarching concern with military conformity, as Benjamin L. Alpers has pointed out, was linked to national anxieties about the role and influence of the military

¹ On military culture and society, see, John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II*, rev. edn (London: Pimlico, 1993); Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lee Kennett, *G.I. The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Scribner's, 1987); Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II*, repr. (New York: New Press, 1997); James Jones, *WWII: A Chronicle of Soldiering* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975).

² On the Army's formal structure and organisation, see George Forty, *US Army Handbook 1939-1945*, 2nd edn (Stroud: Sutton, 1995).

³ Nisbet, 'The Coming Problem of Assimilation,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 50 (1945), 267.

in a wartime democracy.⁴ America's wartime enemies were seen predominantly as military powers and militarism was often seen as a fundamental characteristic of the totalitarian state. For example, the militarisation of Nazi Germany and its aggressive expansionism produced a sense of national identity which seemed virtually synonymous with militarism. Moreover, as Alpers suggests, 'the military had begun to serve as a model for the larger organization of social life,' a model characterised by 'regimentation' as well as 'militarism' and exemplified by the Hitlerian objective of '*Gleichschaltung*' (the policy of 'total' co-ordination and conformity throughout all political, economic, social and cultural forms).⁵ There were anxieties that American servicemen had been drawn into the 'total organisation' of a military regime of 'regimentation' and control which looked suspiciously like that of the totalitarian enemy. Many sociologists saw the military as a social machine and frequently drew on the imagery of industrial machinery to express its totalitarian implications. The soldier, according to Nisbet, even came to see himself as little more than an insignificant component in the vast military apparatus, 'as the dependent cog of a gigantic mechanism.'⁶

In this chapter, I argue that social science, through a remarkably consensual literature, discursively dramatised and pathologised military conformity.⁷ It subsequently defined 'the veteran' as a social problem and set the agenda for his 'readjustment' as an issue of national concern. It is through this project, I suggest, that we can see the discourse of postwar conformity beginning to take shape before the end of the war. Social science became an extraordinarily influential voice in this discourse because it was in the process of becoming in itself a new form of social power. Indeed, we might say that the social sciences had a field day with the opportunities provided by wartime. As Terence

⁴ Alpers, 'This Is the Army: Imagining a Democratic Military in World War II,' *Journal of American History*, 85 (1998), 129-163.

⁵ *Ibid*, 132.

⁶ Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 263. See also, 265.

⁷ It would be difficult to argue with the proposition that *all* military systems are inevitably based on the presumption of conformity and are, therefore, necessarily antithetical to the principles of democracy, as military historians have pointed out. 'The basis of any army is discipline, unquestioning obedience of the orders of one's superiors. ... Deference to the commands of superiors has to be automatic and unquestioning, and any signs of democratic thinking or individualism that might threaten such a response must be ruthlessly stamped out.' Ellis, *Sharp End*, 191.

Ball has pointed out, these opportunities enabled the social sciences to emerge after the war with a greatly expanded power base, consolidated through their strengthened links with government, and as a prominent political force with a significant new role in the reconstruction of postwar American society.⁸

Many social scientists found that military society was, above all, an exceptionally ordered society, characterised by 'the orderliness of garrison life, the predictability of atmosphere, the whole aggregate of certainties that the soldier is heir to.' Within its 'cloistering atmosphere,' the soldier 'grows unconsciously to feel secure and sheltered.'⁹ But if this 'cloistering' environment provided shelter and security, it also fostered a culture of institutional dependency which immobilised the individual's capacity to think and act for himself, engendering 'perpetual docility' and 'a chronic incapacity for acting in any other way than under explicit orders.'¹⁰ Indeed, to do otherwise would be contrary to the army's *modus operandi* where every action was circumscribed by order and regulation. Moreover, 'chronic' implies a pathological condition. Many commentators stressed the ways in which the military deliberately set out to erase the serviceman's civilian sense of himself so that, beginning with induction and basic training, his individual identity was subjected to a systematic process of abnegation.¹¹ For Willard Waller, the soldier enters 'a world in which his private personality and his private will no longer count,' where 'the self-will of the soldier must be systematically eradicated.'¹² Sociologists were concerned about the implications of a military system which seemed to negate the very values and traditions which supposedly constituted what America was fighting for. Bowker, for example, saw the 'American-in-uniform' almost as a contradiction in terms because the 'very qualities of individuality, independence, and personal freedom of will and speech that he had been nurtured to consider his birthright became suddenly

⁸ Ball, 'Politics of Social Science in Postwar America,' 76-92.

⁹ Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 263.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹¹ On induction and training, see, for example, Ellis, *Sharp End*, 9-20; Kennett, *G.I.*, 24-65.

¹² Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 20.

inoperative.’¹³

Because the military demanded reflexive obedience, it relieved the serviceman of all personal responsibility: military identity necessitated ‘personal irresponsibility.’ Consequently, ‘all matters of food, clothing, and shelter are settled for the soldier in a way that leaves him unaware of them as processes, as responsibilities. Unconsciously he comes to take them for granted and indeed is encouraged to do so.’¹⁴ With his reliance on the military for the provision of all necessities, it was widely assumed that the serviceman could not help but develop a condition of institutional dependency on what was implicitly seen as a kind of ‘welfare state’ society in which, ‘whatever happens, the service will feed and clothe him.’¹⁵ Moreover, with every aspect of his existence subject to military prescription, the soldier ‘eats, sleeps, bathes, upon order and very often by the numbers.’¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, then, military society was often seen to promote a paternalistic culture.¹⁷ Several sociological studies focused on the ‘anti-democratic’ structure of military society and its effects on military culture.¹⁸ Arnold Rose, for example, identified three traditions which he saw as determinants in the Army’s social structure: firstly, a modern commercial tradition based on ‘business efficiency, self-interest, individualism, democracy, and equalitarianism;’ secondly, a ‘medieval’ tradition, structured according to ‘rigid separation of castes, of hierarchical control; and thirdly, military doctrine, ‘the

¹³ Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 60. Nevertheless, the ‘American-in-uniform’ didn’t necessarily signify uniformity and we should be mindful of meanings quite different from Bowker’s, particularly in the context of an American ‘citizen-soldier’ tradition characterised by a distinctive lack of soldierly appearance. Reid Mitchell has described ‘the notoriously unmilitary appearance of the GI’ which Leon C. Standifer sees as deliberately emblematic of American national values. ‘Our image was as carefully cultivated and as misleading as that of the Nazi-designed army,’ he says. ‘We were sons of the pioneers, railsplitters, mountaintainmen, cowboys, rednecks, and lumberjacks. Our image was, and still is, pragmatism.’ Quoted in, Mitchell, ‘The GI in Europe and the American Military Tradition,’ in Paul Addison and Angus Calder, eds., *Time To Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 314.

¹⁴ Nisbet, ‘Coming Problem of Assimilation,’ 264.

¹⁵ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 30.

¹⁶ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 20.

¹⁷ ‘Military society ... is, above all things, paternalistic and on so grand and ramified a scale that it defies description.’ Nisbet, ‘Coming Problem of Assimilation,’ 264.

¹⁸ For example, Arnold Rose, ‘The Social structure of the Army,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 361-4; Morroe Berger, ‘Law and Custom in the Army,’ *Social Forces*, 25 (1946), 82-7; Felton D. Freeman, ‘The Army as a Social Structure,’ *Social Forces*, 27 (1948), 78-83; Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, I, 212-3. A survey on the attitudes of enlisted men conducted by Stouffer in 1945 elicited considerable criticism of the Army which was described as ‘utterly out of keeping with our democratic ideals’ and as ‘a form of fascism in itself.’ Ibid.

formal body of rules known as Army Regulations.’¹⁹ Although the regulations ‘theoretically govern’ the army, Rose found its organisational structure determined largely by the medieval tradition. This was a tradition in which privileges were provided as a matter of right on the basis of status. An officer, by virtue of his position and status, was certainly able to take advantage of, or ‘get around,’ any inconvenient or uncongenial regulations. For Rose, the Army was structured on the lines of a feudal system in which officers exercised almost baronial power. Others emphasised the military’s feudal characteristics. Morroe Berger, for example, noted not only the stratification of rank, but also the rigidly enforced separation between officers and enlisted men.²⁰ Enlisted men, in contrast, were entitled to none of the rights and privileges which extended to officers.²¹ Moreover, the men often found themselves subject to the virtually indiscriminate exercise of power by officers who arbitrarily insisted on the enforcement of petty regulations which seemed to function largely to maintain the military’s *status quo*.²²

Sociologists’ accounts of military society often focused on its hierarchical structure and emphasised the serviceman’s place within the military system. Many found that, from his induction and basic training, the soldier was situated in a command society with a hierarchical organisation in which orders were executed strictly through each echelon in the chain of command. He learned that in the military environment, ‘military status is everywhere highly visible, clothed with unmistakable symbols, and armed with authority and privilege.’²³ Hierarchical gradations of rank were seen as a predominant characteristic in the visual culture of military society: ‘Variations in uniform indicate exactly the place of each individual in the hierarchy. ... The relationships of the various le-

¹⁹ Rose, ‘Social structure of the Army,’ 361.

²⁰ For example, ‘even under the most primitive field conditions one of the first jobs of any unit is the construction of separate latrines for officers and enlisted men.’ Berger, ‘Law and Custom in the Army,’ 83. See also, Freeman, ‘Army as a Social Structure,’ 80-81.

²¹ A survey on the attitudes of enlisted men conducted by Stouffer in 1943 concluded that the ‘overwhelming majority’ of criticism concerned, ‘special privileges of officers, their concern for their own prerogatives and welfare, and their indifference to the deprivations of enlisted men.’ Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, I, 369. For verbatim extracts, see 370-2. See also, Ralph Lewis, ‘Officer-Enlisted Men’s Relationships,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1947), 410-19.

²² Rose, ‘Social structure of the Army,’ 361-4. On the Army as a ‘caste-ridden organization,’ see also Robert Neville, ‘What’s Wrong With Our Army?’ *Life* (February 25, 1946), 104-14. Neville, a former editor of the Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, argues that the Army’s unpopularity was attributable to its undemocratic ‘caste’ system.

²³ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 34.

vels of the hierarchy are embedded in such ceremonies as the salute [and] the use of ... the word, "sir."²⁴ This type of societal organisation was seen as structurally planned to produce a culture of conformity which, having an obviously recognised value for the military establishment, was rigorously inculcated during basic training. 'Conformity,' according to Howard Brotz and Everett Wilson, 'often means doing no more than you are told. ... for self-assumed responsibility may conflict with established prerogative.'²⁵ In other words, if conformity is a military prerequisite and initiative is necessarily discounted as contrary to military interests, mindlessness inevitably follows. 'The army,' according to one veteran, 'teaches you not to think.'²⁶

In addition, Army control extended throughout both working and non-working conditions to a degree unprecedented in civilian life. There appeared to be no aspect of military procedure which wasn't subject to total prescription and control, and which, no matter how apparently small and insignificant, carried with it in each and every particular the full force of military law and authority. Moreover, the issuing source of such orders was usually remote and unidentifiable, likened, significantly, to an 'impersonal web,'²⁷ existing vaguely, somewhere beyond several successive stages of the hierarchy: 'the minutiae of the daily job were prescribed in detailed technical orders, manuals and directives, issued by higher headquarters and reaching the individual through a hierarchy of military authority. ... These orders came from a more or less anonymous "higher authority."²⁸ Off-duty hours were subject to the same kind of strict control and, again, none is unimportant enough to be overlooked by formal regulation. Thus, the Army has 'formal control over such matters as hours of sleep, hours of eating, ... hours during which latrines may be used, frequency of shaving' and so on.²⁹

Within the hierarchical structure of the chain of command, information tended to

²⁴ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 21. See also, Freeman, 'Army as a Social Structure,' 79-81.

²⁵ Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 372.

²⁶ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 29.

²⁷ Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 371.

²⁸ Anonymous, 'Informal Social Organization in the Army,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 365.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 366. See also, Freeman, 'Army as a Social Structure,' 79-83.

drift down slowly and haphazardly, creating a particular source of frustration. The rationale behind an order could become lost in the process and appear incomprehensible to those who had to carry it out: 'What finally remains of an order at the lowest echelon is often nothing more than a direct command, without apparent reason.'³⁰ Similarly, according to the uniform procedures of a command society, there is an obligation to do a job in a particular way - the *Army* way - even when it may be clear that this is by no means the best way of doing it.³¹ But the soldier has already been inculcated into that particular way as a matter of procedural necessity. When the military *modus operandi* is brought to bear on 'non-military' work details, this too is likely to create further difficulties and frustration: 'The hardest orders to obey are those that require civilian duties to be performed the Army way. The Army has its own peculiar way of washing windows.'³² There may also be occasions when preordained regulations take precedence over practical knowledge and experience gained in the field. Training programmes were required to adhere to field manuals, irrespective of whether the information they contained had become irrelevant or obsolete: 'Combat veterans who had been returned to instruct trainees complained that they were unable to teach their battlefield knowledge if it conflicted with the field manual.'³³ Furthermore, with the Army's particular insistence on uniformity, instruction from the manual is broken down into a series of numbered steps which renders the operation into an artificial exercise. Thus, 'emphasis on uniformity of method tends to become exaggerated, and "by the numbers" is a stock joke.'³⁴ In certain cases, basic training could also provide inappropriate preparation for an operation, largely in consequence of its preoccupation with the imperatives of tradition,

³⁰ Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 372. 'The mere existence of so many regulations ... has an effect apart from the force of any specific regulation in itself. Army officers become regulation-minded. They become concerned with complying with the letter of a decree and hardly at all with its purpose.' Berger, 'Law and Custom in the Army,' 85.

³¹ Or, according to Army folklore, 'there were two ways to do a job - the army way and the right way.' Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 30.

³² Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 372.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

conformity and discipline.³⁵

If, as was claimed, the structurally-determined nature of military society tended to produce a culture of conformity, it was also a bureaucratically-determined society which generated anonymity and impersonality. It is significant in this context that American soldiers should be known as 'GIs', that is, 'Government Issue.' American servicemen, as Henry Elkin has pointed out, were different in this respect from their other national counterparts: 'American men in this war did not think of themselves as "doughboys," "Tommies," "Poilus," or even as "soldiers" - terms which imply individual human qualities and positive values - but as "G.I.'s."³⁶ The designation for the private soldier in other national armies was usually personified, often in a way which implied national recognition of his ordinariness as a kind of military Everyman such as the British private, known generically as 'Tommy' ('Atkins') and the French, as '*Poilu*' ('hairy'). Although the American soldier was also personified, as 'GI Joe,'³⁷ it is noteworthy that the generic name 'Joe' (as an ordinary, 'regular' guy) was modified by the label of 'GI.' The status of the GI was consequently reducible to exactly the same commodified terms as the equipment with which he had been issued: 'The individual soldier thus saw himself as an item of mass-production along with G.I. clothing, rations, and other materiel.'³⁸ The basic status of the GI was perhaps symbolised by the 'dog-tag' which he wore around his neck, signifying, perhaps, his 'dog-status.'

But, as the soldiers' preferred term for themselves, it also suggested something of their own distinctive character, their bond of solidarity and kinship. It served to make their basic status into a source of collective pride. Something of this kindred spirit is also

³⁵ 'The carry-over of much peacetime Army tradition in a basic-training program does much to generate conformity, for that was its intent. The snap and polish of close-order drill, formal guard mounts, personal inspections, and other ceremonies depend for their success on precise unison. ... It is useless as a preparation for combat ... Yet the Army holds onto it under the idea that it strengthens discipline.' *Ibid*, 272-3.

³⁶ Elkin, 'Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 408.

³⁷ The term appears to have originated from within GI culture itself, coined in 1942 by the *Yank* cartoonist, Dave Breger. See A. Marjorie Taylor, *The Language of World War II*, rev. edn (New York: Wilson, 1948), 92. See also, Kennett, *G.I.*, 88.

³⁸ Elkin, 'Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,' 408. James Jones takes a similar view and sees the development of the soldier as a process designed for him to acknowledge his status as a 'chattel' of the state, as dispensable as his equipment. Jones, *WWII*, 54-5.

reflected in the 'buddy' culture engendered by the GIs' common status, role and experience. Thus, an unknown fellow-soldier would often be addressed familiarly as 'Joe,' a term which presumed comradeship on the basis of shared status. There was also an in-built sense in which 'GI' - as the soldier's chosen term for himself - functioned ironically. It served to mock both the Army's authority and the soldier's conception of his own standing within it. Ultimately, this conception of himself within GI culture appeared ambivalent: 'A soldier is a "GI," a "government issue," a standardized Army article like a pair of socks, a cake of soap, or a vehicle,' noted Frederick Elkin. But the soldier doesn't see himself like this: 'he has merely caricatured this image of how the Army authority views him. That he takes a certain pride in this characterization of himself, however, implies that he tends to accept readily the role of the "government issue," and he assumes with it some of the anonymity and irresponsibility which the term connotes.'³⁹ This sense of 'a certain pride' was especially evident in the branch of the services generally disdained as having the lowest status of all: the Infantry.⁴⁰ And yet the infantryman - the 'dogface' - took inordinate pride in what he considered the best and toughest outfit in the Army. He was special, not in spite of the Infantry's own particular 'dogface' reputation, but because of it.⁴¹

The status and identity of the individual GI, as defined by the military bureaucracy, was impersonal and anonymous. In a process which August B. Hollingshead has described as 'the militarization of the person,' the individual's name was replaced by a serial number. The name which formerly signified his individual identity no longer had any meaning.⁴² Henceforth, the civilian-turned-soldier 'rarely hears his own given name.'⁴³ This condition, however, was not necessarily unwelcome. Brotz and Wilson suggest that the anonymity provided by the 'numbers' could be of practical use. 'This

³⁹ Elkin, 'The Soldier's Language,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 422.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Anonymous, 'The Making of the Infantryman,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 376-9.

⁴¹ On Infantry culture and society, see Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945); Ellis, *Sharp End*, 52-116.

⁴² His serial number 'is more important to the War Department than his name.' Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 440-1.

⁴³ Waller, *The Veteran Comes Back*, 21.

impersonality, as evidenced in serial numbers, squad and platoon numbers, queuing up by alphabet, numbers designating main civilian occupation and main occupational specialty, tent numbers, and laundry numbers, is soon accepted by the G.I.' Brotz and Wilson are saying that the military environment is so vast and impersonal, its 'numbers' culture so inescapably pervasive, that the GI cannot resist being drawn into it. As he is absorbed into its system of numbered anonymity, he comes to accept the processes which efface his individual identity. 'He learns, somehow, that his new role will be easier if the anonymity of numbers is preserved - if ... his officers ... never identify his name or number with face and personality.'⁴⁴ Other observers took a similar view. Elkin, for example suggests that the soldier liked being a GI and found it comforting when 'his own self was submerged in the anonymity of the mass.'⁴⁵

Whilst military organisation provided a mechanism for control over the individual soldier, it was often noted that the soldier himself necessarily contributed to the maintenance of that mechanism. S. Kirson Weinberg, for example, identified a downward shift in the centre of authority from the higher echelons of command to the group, the unit. Military effectiveness, developed through training, depended on the recognition that 'control must arise and become sustained by the indigenous attitudes of the participant soldiers.'⁴⁶ As the unit was of paramount importance, its informal social structure and the attitudes engendered within it became a crucial instrument in the Army's *modus operandi*. The Army's objectives were more likely to be achieved when the men developed sufficient recognition that these were actually in the interests of the unit. The group consequently became an indispensable element in the military system and functioned, from below, to complement the command structure. It was here, in the social dynamics of the peer group, that Weinberg saw the most serious threat to the serviceman's individualism. He saw peer group pressure operating as a kind of self-regulating mechanism, its effects intensified in conditions of an 'isolated company' and 'work-habitat con-

⁴⁴ Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 375.

⁴⁵ Elkin, 'Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,' 408.

⁴⁶ Weinberg, 'Problems of Adjustment in Army Units,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 271.

tinuum,' where the trainee found that 'his military performance and informal conduct are exposed and readily weighed by the others.'⁴⁷ Weinberg is saying that individualism is necessarily *integrated* within the group and, consequently, *subordinated* to it as it evolves into collective identity.

Where an individual's attitude and behaviour 'deviated' from the prescribed norm, his peer group would act on him in various ways so that he regulated his conduct in accordance with them. Hence: 'The focus of group attention upon deviants places them in an awkward position and awakens the desire for conformity.'⁴⁸ An individual's attitude or performance which deviated from the group norm was categorised by the group according to type. These categories served to label the specific type of 'deviant' and operated to bring him into line with the group norm.⁴⁹ The individual would also be aware of additional hierarchical pressure exerted on him to ensure that his company performed well competitively. His own actions would reflect not only on the group, but also upwards, through each successive stage of the company's hierarchy, up to its commander. The individual was thus situated in a matrix of disciplinary power where he was subject to pressure both horizontally, from his peer group, and vertically, from the hierarchy of command.⁵⁰ Hence, it was assumed that the individual, bound by these external mechanisms of social control, would eventually learn to internalise them within himself.⁵¹

As the soldier underwent the transition from civilian to army life, social commentators became concerned as much with his role in the culture of the informal group as with that of formal military organisation. Many identified a highly developed sense of interdependence and *esprit de corps* which Waller, for example, described as 'the sense

⁴⁷ Ibid, 272.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ These types included the 'goldbrick' or 'goof-off' (one who shirks duty); the 'sadsack' (a timid, depressed or socially awkward soldier); the 'foul-up' (an incompetent type); and the 'G.I.' (one overzealously devoted to his duties, especially in the petty aspects of routine). Ibid, 276-8.

⁵⁰ On military discipline, see, for example, Linderman, *World Within War*, 185-234; Ellis, *Sharp End*, 190-270.

⁵¹ According to Stouffer, this meant, 'the development of a social climate in which one's *fellows* as well as one's *superiors* serve as checks on a tendency to infraction and, ultimately, the internalization of the controls such that an individual's "conscience" inhibits infraction.' Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, I, 410. See also, 410-15.

of belonging to an inclusive unity and of struggling for a common cause.’⁵² This informal group culture developed from an intense and inclusive environment. It produced unusually close physical and emotional proximity together with new, unfamiliar patterns of intimacy in an exclusive conglomeration of masculinity. In what Havighurst has called ‘the compulsory sociability of the military environment,’⁵³ it was a culture in which, ‘all members of the group lived in the same section of the barracks, ate together, used the same latrine, took physical training and drill together, worked together, went to the movies together, and shared almost every other aspect of army life.’⁵⁴ This new social experience was not necessarily as bad as it might have seemed: ‘Many,’ suggested Waller, ‘find something mysterious and rewarding in this comradeship of men at arms.’⁵⁵ Despite the obvious sense in which certain social patterns were seen to have a positive value, there was another sense in which the informal culture of military society was seen as more questionable. The soldier’s adjustment from the conventional social relations of civilian life to the new social arrangements of a military environment saw, as a common occurrence, the development of strongly forged ‘buddy’ relationships. The nature of such relationships could become, according to the vaguely coded expressions of the period, ‘maudlin,’ and, in the context of civilian society, likely to meet with suspicion and disapproval: ‘Soldiers,’ warn Brotz and Wilson, ‘acquire some very queer friendships, which would have a dubious future in a civilian background.’⁵⁶

Informal group culture enabled the individual soldier to share his feelings about his role within the formal military organisation. Any dissatisfaction which he may have felt

could find ready expression through the group, usually as a kind of institutional negati-

⁵² Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 38. See also, Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 130-49.

⁵³ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 31.

⁵⁴ Anonymous, ‘Informal Organization in the Army,’ 367.

⁵⁵ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 38. Or, ‘a kind of comradeship that one never found in peacetime, a closeness of shared experience that was not friendship, but true.’ Bolte, *New Veteran*, 26. On comradeship, see also, Linderman, *World Within War*, 263-99.

⁵⁶ Brotz and Wilson, ‘Characteristics of Military Society,’ 374-5. Male sexuality was awkwardly situated in the exclusively masculinised military environment and its homosocial culture became the focus of concern. Despite attempts to screen out homosexuals at selection and otherwise subject them to disqualification, the military contained a substantive number of gay servicemen. On homosexuality in the military, see Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1991); John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23-39. (A history of the military’s homosocial culture remains to be written.)

vism. This was often articulated through the common discourse of ‘griping.’⁵⁷ Elkin saw griping and negativism as ‘an earmark of social solidarity’ which functioned as ‘an almost universal mechanism’ to provide a permanent critique of military life. These were, he suggests, ‘symbolic affirmations of independence and strength, showing that the G.I. did not want to be considered a mere cog in the Army machine.’⁵⁸ Much of this griping was directed against what servicemen called ‘chickenshit’ (all the institutionalised forms of pettiness, small-mindedness, arbitrariness and harassment which were such a ubiquitous feature of military culture). ‘Chickenshit’ meant an insistent emphasis on the *unnecessary* aspects of military procedure which pointlessly worsened the conditions of military life.⁵⁹

The military environment was also seen to disrupt and destabilise conventional assumptions about ‘legitimated’ masculinity and many commentators focused on the ways in which a kind of ‘unregulated’ masculinity found expression. Certainly, there was a widespread perception that the military environment produced a generally ‘intemperate’ culture and that many servicemen were ‘schooled’ here in various forms of behaviour which they were unlikely to have encountered in other circumstances.⁶⁰ For Waller, amongst others, military culture contributed towards the development of the soldier’s ‘moral irresponsibility’ which led to a hedonistic concern with instant gratification and profligacy.⁶¹ But as the future assumed a different meaning for the soldier, today’s behaviour could be careless with tomorrow’s consequences. This was evident in the soldier’s attitude to his pay. As Brotz and Wilson have pointed out, ‘complete exhaustion of the monthly paycheck within a few days was comparatively common’ and the ‘soldier could squander his cash with equanimity, knowing that next month would see him “flush” again; while, in the meantime, there was always the assurance of food

⁵⁷ See, for example, Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, I, 395-401.

⁵⁸ Elkin, ‘Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,’ 409.

⁵⁹ See, for example, ‘Chickenshit, An Anatomy,’ in Fussell, *Wartime*, 79-95; Adams, *Best War Ever*, 81.

⁶⁰ Havighurst summarises the ‘intemperate’ curriculum as ‘to smoke, to gamble, to loot, to deal in stolen goods, and to pay for the attentions of prostitutes.’ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 31.

⁶¹ On profligacy, see Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 56-9.

and shelter.' Money, in these circumstances, had only 'immediate' value and 'was used or loaned or gambled with considerable abandon.'⁶² This may have looked like flagrant profligacy to others, but for the soldier, unconstrained by conventional responsibilities, there was no reason why he shouldn't do as he liked because the consequences were immaterial.

For other commentators, it was a culture which produced 'delinquency' on such a vast scale as to be commonplace.⁶³ There was a perception that military culture legitimated criminality. Looting, for example, was rife - even in Allied countries - where in any newly-occupied town, the first question was likely to be, 'How was the looting?' Black marketeering was also common. McCallum reports often hearing the sentiment that, 'a man was a fool if he didn't leave the port of Le Havre with at least \$1,000 in his pocket.' There was considerable concern that servicemen would return home with these 'casual' attitudes and, perhaps, criminal tendencies as well.⁶⁴

Language also functioned as a demonstrable element in this masculinised culture.⁶⁵ Informal discourse was characteristically loaded with profanity and obscenity, particularly in the multifarious use of 'fuck' and its variants. In virtually universal use, 'fuck' was seen to signify a generally rebellious and contemptuous attitude. In a distinctive military usage, 'snafu,' it appeared as the ubiquitous Army acronym used by soldiers to express what they thought of prevailing Army conditions (*situation normal, all fucked up*).⁶⁶ In contradistinction to the social niceties of polite society, the rampant use of 'bad' language was seen as an oppositional stance against the *mores* of civilian life, as a kind of celebration of its own unsanctioned, uncouth culture. Such expressions as 'fuck' could provide for the soldier 'stronger ways of saying things and so manifest the image of a stronger self.'⁶⁷ That the term should have suffused common language to the extent

that it did was seen, in the context of the masculine world, as an implicit expression of

⁶² Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 375.

⁶³ On gambling, 'promiscuous' sex, looting and blackmarketeering, see Malcolm R. McCallum, 'The Study of the Delinquent in the Army,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 479-82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 481-2.

⁶⁵ See Bowker, 'Full of Strange Oaths' in *Out of Uniform*, 117-35; Fussell, *Wartime*, 251-67.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Elkin, 'Soldier's language,' 419.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 418.

virility, contemptuously and defensively constructed as a kind of barricade against female sexuality and the feminine world associated with home. It implied a willing identification with what were often described as 'baser instincts' and signalled coarse, crude, primitive, attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, to many social commentators, it appeared to be nothing short of a frontal assault on the feminised culture which he had left behind. 'Moreover, 'by pronouncing those "dirty words" which he never dared to utter in the presence of "Mom" or his old-maid school-teachers, the G.I. symbolically throws off the shackles of the matriarchy in which he grew up.'⁶⁸

Commentators were often particularly concerned about the social effects of detachment from the feminine sphere of influence. But if military experience produced a tendency to degrade the feminine, it also suggested the development of rather more complex and contradictory attitudes. There was an apparently blunt and brutalised dimension to GI culture in its view of women: after all, the common GI term for women was 'cunt.'⁶⁹ For servicemen stationed overseas, the nature of sexual experience, and the means to it, had radically changed. For many in these new circumstances, prostitution became a generally available commodity: 'Fundamentally, the G.I. did not like or desire women other than as means of gratifying his self-respect and his primitive sexual desire.'⁷⁰ However, there was also a sense in which the GI could recognise in the 'prostitute' a condition not unlike his own, one with which he could have some affinity: 'frequently he regarded the prostitute with special affection, because, unlike other women who often were formal and reserved, she had the friendly smile and democratic ways which he had been accustomed to expect in social life. ... Her approach to sex was as direct and casual as his own.'⁷¹ He seemed to find in the 'prostitute' a kind of honesty and integrity which appealed to him: someone who shared, perhaps, his own denigrated status. Commentators could barely conceal their distaste for these aspects of mi-

⁶⁸ Elkin, 'Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,' 411.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 413.

⁷⁰ 'If animals could talk, their conversation about sex would doubtless be quite similar to that of ... G.I.'s.' Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

litary culture which seemed in direct contravention to their own assumptions about 'normative' social behaviour. Bowker, for example, concerned with the absence of a civilising, feminised *milieu*, describes how, for the serviceman, 'female company was ... acquired under conditions so sordid as to be repellent,' while Waller decries his 'furtive amourettes with quick and easy women.'⁷²

Social scientists found in both the formal and informal aspects of military society a culture of institutional conformity. Moreover, they found that military conformity was an unstable category which took different forms. Their studies often showed a deterministic perception of servicemen in the military system, a perception which was part social pathology and part victimology. The most significant aspect of this work, however, can be seen in its general proclivity to conceptualise the military as a 'social machine.' Waller, for example, sees this as 'a machine ... which enables a million men to act with a single will,'⁷³ an image more reminiscent of the *Wehrmacht* than America's wartime democracy, and one which clearly implies a Fascist potential in the 'regimentation' of the American military. Through these studies, social science effectively wrote the prologue to the ensuing discourse of postwar conformity. Moreover, as we shall see in the following chapter, the serviceman's place in this 'orderly society' would have further implications when he returned home as a veteran and the subject of 'readjustment.'

⁷² Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 145; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 128.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 19.

Chapter 2

'Like the Orphan and the Prisoner' The Problem of Veteran Readjustment

Having outlined the nature of military society and its effects on the serviceman, social scientists next began to consider the postwar implications of their findings and assess the ramifications of demobilisation. They now began to focus their attention on the ex-serviceman.¹ We can identify three areas of common concern in their studies. Firstly, there was a remarkably broad consensus that 'The Veteran' meant 'The Veteran Problem' and that 'readjustment,' as defined by social scientists themselves, constituted the social mechanism necessary to solve it. Few would have disagreed with Willard Waller's pronouncement on the magnitude of the problem. 'The veteran who comes home is ... certainly the major social problem of the next few years. ... *Unless and until he can be renaturalized into his native land, the veteran is a threat to society.*'² Secondly, 'The Veteran Problem' was seen as an aggregate of problems arising from the experience of military society. Indeed, an extraordinarily wide range of social, political, cultural and economic issues were lumped together under the rubric of 'The Veteran Problem,' often in absurd and contradictory ways.³ And thirdly, the culture of institutionalised conformity, identified as endemic in military society, emerged as the predominant concern. In

¹ For the official history of demobilisation, see Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army*. See also, Stouffer, et al, *The American Soldier*, 2 vols. The principal sociological studies of the veteran are: Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*; Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*; Bolte, *New Veteran*; Bowker, *Out of Uniform*; Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*. See also, Charles Hurd and Charles G. Bolté, 'How We Planned for the Veterans' Return,' in Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone*, 535-551. See also, Bill Mauldin, *Back Home* (New York: William Sloane, 1947). Other studies of the veteran include, Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*. On the returning veteran in American history, see, Severo and Milford, *Wages of War*, in particular, 281-314; Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*. Of general studies of the period, the most useful is Joseph C. Goulden, *The Best Years, 1945-1950* (New York: Atheneum, 1976). See also, Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade: America, 1945-1955* (New York: Knopf, 1956); Eisinger, ed., *1940's*; Cabell Phillips, *The 1940s: Decade of Triumph and Trouble* (New York: Macmillan, 1975); William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

² Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 13.

³ Bowker has nicely summarised a series of the contradictions implicit in the discourse of 'The Veteran Problem' whereby 'veterans had lost their moral sense in battle, but returned highly critical of the nation's peccadilloes; they had lost initiative in the routine of the services, yet they would organize so strongly that they would dominate the nation; they were physical and mental wrecks, yet they threatened to set up a reign of terror through brawny cunning; they vindictively hated the uniform, yet were planning to force universal military training upon their sons and brothers; they had gorged themselves on the "creature comforts" that had become short at home, yet they were returning to seize all remaining assets through communism; there were no atheists in foxholes, yet veterans were returning vicious and godless.' Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 27.

this chapter, I want to highlight the ways in which 'The Veteran' was constructed by social science as a 'product' of *militarisation*, a product with potentially damaging consequences for civilian society. I argue that the figure of 'The Veteran' was seen as a threat to the postwar socio-economic order. Readjustment, in this context, became a socio-economic issue in a discourse which linked the imperative of individualism to fears about the carry-over of post-military conformity into civilian society.

For many sociologists, the most immediate concern was with the economic effects of demobilisation. They feared that the postwar economy would be unable to cope with the massive influx of returning servicemen. The logistics of demobilisation looked formidable. A total of 16,353,000 men had been taken out of civilian life and put into uniform.⁴ When the Army began partial demobilisation on 12th May, 1945, its ground and air forces numbered approximately 8,290,000 personnel. The Navy began its demobilisation on V-J Day (2nd September, 1945) with approximately 4,060,000. Veterans began returning home at the rate of 200,000 to 300,000 per month.⁵ It was anticipated that an operation on such an overwhelming scale would have a damaging if not devastating impact on the economy. Economic forecasts were invariably pessimistic and polls confirmed a general sense of foreboding about the prospects for economic reconversion. Estimates varied, but none was encouraging. John W. Snyder, Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, reported in September, 1945 that the sudden termination of war contracts would precipitate 'an immediate and large-scale dislocation' of the economy and he predicted a rise in unemployment of 'five million or more' within three months. Government economists foresaw that figure rising towards ten million by the end of 1946.⁶ Other forecasts were even higher. Dixon Wecter, for example, cited a figure of twenty million.⁷ The end of the war signalled a sudden halt to an economy geared to wartime production and, of course, the instantaneous cancellation of military contracts. With civilian employment in August, 1945 at a record level of over

⁴ Phillips, *1940s*, 275, 279.

⁵ Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army*, 21-2.

⁶ Phillips, *1940s*, 276, 279. On economic reconversion, see also, Goulden, *Best Years*, 91-107.

⁷ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes marching Home*, 535.

53,000,000, and with over 12,000,000 members of the armed forces scheduled for rapid demobilisation, the economy appeared to many to be in imminent danger of collapse. The social impact was immediate and extensive.⁸ Servicemen also shared this concern. According to Stouffer, 'all surveys' indicated that future employment was the predominant concern of Army personnel and the first of their 'personal anxieties.' For example, a poll conducted in May, 1945 showed 79% of soldiers thought that most would find it 'very hard' or 'fairly hard' to obtain the postwar employment they wanted.⁹

Moreover, there was a prevailing view that the wartime economy had provided only a temporary respite from the Depression. This view, encapsulated in John Kenneth Galbraith's telling phrase - 'Depression Psychosis'¹⁰ - described a condition of deep-seated anxiety derived from the 'lasting imprint' of the Depression experience which informed the 'uncertainty and insecurity' of the postwar years.¹¹ There remained a lingering conviction that, with the sudden demise of an economy geared to wartime production, a slump would inevitably follow. Demobilisation, then, in the context of economic reconversion, indicated a reversion to the widespread unemployment of the Depression era and returning servicemen were consequently seen *en masse* to represent a massive threat to the wartime economic boom. Readjustment here was predicated largely on economic anxieties which, as Galbraith's phrase indicates, were seen as the basis of a pathologised national psyche. In this sense, the serviceman was *already* an economic problem and readjustment, therefore, was seen largely as an economic imperative.¹² Servicemen themselves often expressed a similarly dismal view of their postwar prospects. 'The saying, "I hope I don't have to sell apples,"' noted Wecter, 'has become a wry joke in the ranks.'¹³

There was another dimension to the Depression forecasts which concerned social

⁸ In the aircraft industry, for example, Boeing made drastic cuts to the workforce at its plants in Seattle and Renton. 'In a single day Boeing laid off 21,200 of the 29,000 persons employed in the two plants.' Curtiss-Wright, with sixteen plants, sent home 150,000. See Goulden, *Best Years*, 91-2.

⁹ Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 598.

¹⁰ Galbraith, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1952), 67-87.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 69-70.

¹² See also, Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, particularly 34-66; Severo and Milford, *Wages of War*, 283-97.

¹³ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes marching Home*, 510.

scientists as well as economists. George K. Pratt, for example, noted that substantial numbers of servicemen had grown up during the Depression and had become dependent on its 'program of vast public relief.' The New Deal had fostered a culture of 'dependency' in which the state, having assumed responsibility for providing 'the bare necessities of existence,' had also assumed the role of a surrogate parent. Many adolescents, suggested Pratt, 'began imperceptibly to endow the Relief Bureau - and more remotely the "Government" - with parental qualities of support and assumption of responsibility.' Because they were habituated to being 'taken care of,' they had become 'dependency-conditioned' and, consequently, would find it difficult - especially after military service - to assume for themselves the 'responsibilities of independent living' on their return.¹⁴ Sociologists' misgivings about a 'dependency culture' produced by New Deal programmes in the Depression were subsequently transferred to the imputed 'dependency culture' of the military.

Not all veterans, however, were seen as passive dependents on paternalistic state welfare. Other commentators foresaw more unpredictable attitudes and often quoted servicemen's remarks to suggest the threat of more uncompromising reactions. Wecter, for example, quotes a sergeant's warning: "If this generation of soldiers returns home to a collapsed and chaotic economic system due to inflation ... we shall not stand docilely on street corners selling apples; we shall not ashamedly wait in line to receive bread."¹⁵ Wecter's sergeant represents a particularly ominous threat here because he isn't speaking solely about his own resentment and disenchantment but, rather, he has assumed the role of spokesman for *all* soldiers: he is serving notice on their behalf of a defiant refusal to be relegated to a meagre place in any postwar depression economy. The voice of the *organised* veteran, as a politicised force, was seen as particular cause for concern.¹⁶

But even if the widely-predicted postwar depression failed to materialise (which,

¹⁴ Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 31-2.

¹⁵ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 510.

¹⁶ The collective figure of the veteran was often viewed as a potential political threat, especially as constituted through veterans' organisations. (The political implications of 'The Veteran Problem' are discussed in Chapter 4).

of course, it didn't), many social scientists saw the veteran's civilian employment as a crucial factor in his readjustment. Many of their concerns centred on the veteran's attitudes which, they anticipated, would create various socially-disruptive problems. Pratt, for example, described some of the 'typical examples' already evident: 'Job restlessness - a year or two of tramplike drifting from job to job ... near-neurotic choosiness in job selection ... touchiness or even actual insubordination to industrial authority.'¹⁷ This is effectively a defence of the industrial *status quo* against the threat of returning servicemen who, following their military experience, weren't necessarily going to accept the terms and conditions which employers had to offer. Moreover, for some veterans, the workplace was seen to constitute the focal point for other problems encountered elsewhere and, in these cases, they would 'carry over into the shop ... the grievances and disillusionments they are encountering in the outside community.'¹⁸ The 'restlessness,' 'choosiness,' 'touchiness' and all the other reactions listed by Pratt were often seen as expressions of dissatisfaction, a reluctance to fit readily into what were often unsatisfying jobs and, for some veterans, an outright abandonment of the socio-economic order.

In some instances, the 'restlessness' of the footloose veteran was seen as a direct result of his military experience. The inability to 'settle down' and the drive to keep 'moving on' were attributed to what Robert J. Havighurst has called the 'unusual mobility' of the military environment where servicemen were 'almost continually "on the move."' One 'Midwest' veteran explains his own compulsion to keep moving on: 'I guess it's just a habit I got into in the service. You get the urge to keep going, even if it's only to another town.' In this mobile environment, servicemen had 'a fast-moving introduction to diverse ways of life' whence 'the inclination to keep moving persisted long after the termination of their service careers.'¹⁹ Many social scientists similarly defined 'readjustment' in terms of a recalcitrant work force, unable or unwilling to fit into avail-

¹⁷ Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 149.

¹⁸ Ibid. See also, Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 534-5.

¹⁹ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 26-7. According to one 'Midwest' girl, 'running around' was endemic: 'It's "Let's go here" and "Let's go there." That's all you hear - "Let's go here," "Let's go there."' Ibid, 77. See also, 76-8.

able postwar employment. There were, however, occasional exceptions. Waller, for example, took a more cynical view of the veteran's employment opportunities: 'the prospect of thirty years of ill-rewarded work at a dull job.'²⁰

Many social scientists stressed employment as a crucial factor in the readjustment to civilian life. They were concerned, however, that the ex-serviceman could be incapable after military service of undertaking a civilian occupation successfully, and that he might be unwilling to undertake it at all. Surveys indicated high levels of reluctance by veterans to return to their prewar jobs.²¹ There were widespread concerns that if, as predicted, up to seven out of ten veterans wouldn't want their old jobs back, the economy would be further destabilised. (These widely-publicised forecasts significantly contradicted the popular view that servicemen had a nostalgic regard for their old jobs).²² Many others didn't want to take up work of any kind on their return. In Havighurst's 'Midwest' study, for example, few veterans wanted immediate employment. Havighurst reported a prevailing attitude that veterans 'were entitled to "take it easy for a while - just relax and get used to things."²³ This period was often 'calculated' as recompense for military service. "All the time I was overseas," said one veteran, "I was promising myself I'd spend two days on the front porch here at home, doing nothing but sit, for every day I had to spend on that damned island."²⁴ Unemployed ex-servicemen were entitled to a 'readjustment allowance' of \$20 per week for fifty-two weeks and, consequently, found no immediate necessity to find work. Claimants were known as members of the '52-20 Club' and, in 'Midwest,' as 'rocking-chair vets.' According to Havighurst, 'most of the

²⁰ 'He has a chance to keep the books of a dingy little furrier's shop on a back street. He can work in the box-factory, forever pounding little nails into orange crates. He can be a clerk for the railroad, working in a great room with several hundred others under the watchful eye of the boss ... He can deliver groceries, press pants, solicit laundry business, sell subscription books. He can start a little garage or filling station with his demobilization pay and probably lose it all. He can get a job selling insurance; he can sell things on commission.' Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 145.

²¹ 'Usually, he did not want "just a job." Very often he did not even want his old job - if he had had one - back again. He wanted a better job. And if he could afford to do so he was willing to wait stubbornly, for many months if need be, for this "better job" to appear.' Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 94. See also, Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 534-5;

²² See, for example, Edith Efron, 'Old Jobs, or New Ones, for the Veterans?' *New York Times Magazine* (March 18, 1945), 11, 41-2.

²³ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 90.

²⁴ *Ibid.* See also, 117.

rocking-chair veterans *weren't* in a hurry.²⁵

The readjustment allowance was one of several provisions in the GI Bill of Rights designed to assist returning servicemen and facilitate their assimilation.²⁶ Although the Bill was widely seen as pragmatic and necessary, the readjustment allowance was sometimes seen as a licence for malingerers.²⁷ Several studies highlighted a distinction between appropriate support and undue largesse. Some saw the provision as a 'relief' programme and, moreover, one likely to encourage a dilatory attitude to employment. Havighurst's study, for example, cites an interview with a veteran (Bill Harter) who expressed a strong disinclination to seek employment while remaining entitled to draw his weekly allowance. This, he found, was sufficient to live on and preferable to working: 'Why should I take a job?' he asks. 'I'll get a job when the time comes. ... I'm in no hurry.'²⁸ Walter H. Eaton, a contributor to the Havighurst study, was concerned about Bill's chosen social position *outside* civilian society because 'since his return from service [he] has apparently been perfectly satisfied to take almost no part in the social or economic life of the community.'²⁹ The testimony of veterans themselves was sometimes utilised to endorse criticism of the readjustment allowance and its perceived tendency to discourage self-motivation and self-sufficiency. According to one, "'this rocking-chair money is causing a lot of trouble. It's ruining a lot of these guys. They're sitting around on their dead asses forgetting what a day's work is like.'³⁰ Social scientists would often acknowledge the veteran's right in principle to a well-earned rest while seeking, as it were, to usher him towards a more *integrated* role which Eaton describes as 'a usefully participating member of his community.'³¹ The 'problem' with Bill was seen

²⁵ Ibid, 117. On 'rocking-chair veterans,' see also 111-18; Goulden, *Best Years*, 50-3, 130.

²⁶ On the GI Bill ('The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944'), see Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*; Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 89-124.

²⁷ During the passage of the Bill, Congressman John E. Rankin, Chairman of the House Veterans Committee, attacked the readjustment allowance as 'a tremendous inducement to certain elements not to try to get employment.' Quoted in Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 108. Rankin was vociferously opposed to any social legislation in the Bill. See also, Severo and Milford, *Wages of War*, 286-9; Bennett, *When Dreams Came True*, 154-80.

²⁸ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 116-7.

²⁹ Eaton, 'Alternative Meanings of Adjustment,' *American Sociological Review*, 12 (1947), 78.

³⁰ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 117.

³¹ Walter H. Eaton, 'Research on Veterans' Adjustment,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 486.

as his easily-adopted 'do-nothing' lifestyle of 'just fooling around' or having 'a few beers' and, moreover, attending 'all the veterans' meetings.'³² The socio-economic role of the veteran - a *citizen* role - became for social scientists a significant criterion in the 'measure of adjustment' which depended on the extent to which he was able to cast off his veteran identity.³³

The perception of the veteran as a socio-economic liability with an impaired capacity to take up a civilian occupation was attributed to his military experience. Commentaries on the veteran often emphasised the all-encompassing nature of a military socialisation based on processes deliberately designed to ensure that the serviceman was thoroughly inculcated not only with the military's rules and regulations, but also with those standards, values and attitudes which were seen as prerequisites for the attainment of its military objectives. These processes, as we have seen in chapter one, were often viewed by social analysts as all-pervasive, as *total*. As the civilian was reconstituted as a soldier, virtually all aspects of his civilian identity were effaced and replaced by military ones. These processes forced what Brotz and Wilson have called a 'lapse of civilian occupations and avocations.'³⁴ 'Civilian background is cast aside in a leveling-off process, and new values begin to emerge.'³⁵ The principal criterion to determine the effectiveness of military socialisation was, ultimately, the *total* displacement of civilian identity. 'The perfectly trained soldier,' suggested August B. Hollingshead, 'is one who has had his civilian initiative reduced to zero.'³⁶ The social problem of readjustment was predicated on what social scientists saw as the virtual *metamorphosis* of the serviceman's social identity, whereby the militarisation of the individual involved a corresponding process of what might be termed 'decivilianisation.' These processes were often seen to have severed, with deliberate ruthlessness, the serviceman's connection with his civilian past.

³² Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 116.

³³ The key questions in the 'measure of adjustment,' suggests Eaton, were: 'How long does the veteran continue to think of himself as a veteran? How long does he continue to rely upon veterans for moral ... support? How long does it take him to re-enter into the associational and clique relationships which are available in the community?' Eaton, 'Research on Veterans' Adjustment,' 486.

³⁴ Brotz and Wilson, 'Characteristics of Military Society,' 374.

³⁵ Weinberg, 'Problems of Adjustment in Army Units,' 272.

³⁶ Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 441.

From induction and basic training, these processes were instrumental in what Brotz and Wilson describe as ‘the knifing-off of past experience.’³⁷

There was also a perception that the serviceman’s military experience would be of little use in any civilian occupation and that his training, skills and expertise would have no useful application outside their specific military purpose. Hollingshead, for example, concluded that servicemen ‘are bringing back to civilian life nothing that has economic value’ and consequently, ‘may find the readjustment to civilian life difficult because the skill they learned in the army has no civilian counterpart.’³⁸ Moreover, because social scientists had a tendency to view the serviceman as the subject of military institutionalisation, they readily inferred that he had become so comprehensively adjusted to a condition of institutional dependency that he would be unable to readjust to the requirements of any civilian occupation. A prospective employee who was perceived to be lacking in self-reliance and resourcefulness - one with ‘zero’ civilian initiative - was hardly a viable prospect in a commercial environment.

Sociologists also foresaw problems in what they took to be veterans’ attitudes to how they were entitled to be regarded at home. If the serviceman felt there would be at least some degree of recognition for his wartime endeavours, he may well have discovered on his return that his achievements were soon disregarded. He might have been momentarily ‘special’ at his homecoming and, perhaps, the subject of some preeminence in the discourse of wartime heroism. Soon after the the end of the war, however, he was often seen as little more than an anachronism. Goulden, for example, draws attention to ‘the rapidly diminished novelty of the “ex-serviceman,” who by the end of 1945, in general public opinion, had been home long enough not to be considered anyone special.’³⁹ His wartime experience didn’t necessarily have much meaning in the context of post-war society and wasn’t necessarily worth much when, according to the prevailing interests of the time, it was the ‘wrong’ kind of experience. And when such experience was seen,

³⁷ Brotz and Wilson, ‘Characteristics of Military Society,’ 374.

³⁸ Ibid, 446. On ‘useless’ military skills, see also Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 92-5.

³⁹ Goulden, *Best Years*, 50.

after the war, to have produced little more than the residue of memory, the worth of that memory had already become devalued. Moreover, a civilian society newly released from wartime anxieties might regard the nature of military experience not only with indifference, but also with an implicit sense of antagonism. Hollingshead, for example, saw 'heroic' wartime representations as already obsolete and irrelevant: 'industry is not going to pay,' he says, 'for the rich personal pride a veteran carries because he helped storm the beaches on D-Day or for the skill a turret gunner on a multi-engined bomber gained in combat with the *Luftwaffe* four miles up in the sky over Europe.' These experiences, he contends, will be 'of little value in making a living in our society.'⁴⁰ There is an implication here that civilian society may find itself confronted not only by the returning serviceman's 'wrong' type of experience, but also by his 'undue' preoccupation with the past. There were concerns that a 'backward-looking' veteran wouldn't easily readjust to a 'new' homeland which liked to see itself as a forward-looking nation. It was also beginning to seem as if his wartime experience already belonged to another world, a world of comic book heroism.

'The Veteran,' in this sense, was an ambivalent figure. On the one hand, he was a figure who, by definition, signified the past. He was known, after all, as an *ex-serviceman*, defined in terms of what he *was*. Moreover, he remained emblematic of a past which many preferred to forget. 'Veterans,' Bowker claimed, 'were reminders of the universal tedium of the war' which, in the popular imagination, was already being consigned to the past.⁴¹ The *ex-serviceman* was often seen, then, in terms of what we might describe as a presence without present meaning. Many commentators noted his own preoccupation with the past, often shown in his preference to 'retreat' into the company of fellow veterans and his typical allegiance to veterans' organisations. Both were seen as impediments to his readjustment.⁴² On the other hand, he could also be seen

⁴⁰ Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 446.

⁴¹ 'And "the war" was quickly rejected by the American public in its magazines, books and motion pictures.' Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 21.

⁴² See, for example, Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 72; Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 504; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 42-3, 176-80.

very much in terms of his wartime role. Here, he was drawn as a romanticised figure, the subject of what Charles G. Bolté has described as ‘sentimental forces’ exemplified in the popular sentiment, “‘Nothing’s too good for our boys.’”⁴³ Bolté was wary of the ‘hand-out’ implications of the phrase and the misplaced ‘sentimental’ discourse which it represented.⁴⁴ Once again, there is distrust of any implication of state *relief* which may ensue: ‘the kind of institutionalized pampering that made mendicants out of too many veterans of the last war.’⁴⁵

It was widely assumed that servicemen had been changed in various ways, perhaps irrevocably, by their experience of the military world, an experience which had made them *different*. Partly, they had changed in obvious ways which distanced them from society at home. Hollingshead, for example, described them as having ‘grown older ... traveled widely, seen new lands and peoples, and gained a new viewpoint on life and the world. They have learned new ways of doing things and frequently ... forgotten much that was once familiar and routine.’⁴⁶ Hollingshead’s description suggests an ambivalent view of a contradictory experience. On the one hand, military life seems to have had a positive value. It suggests that ‘travel’ has provided new opportunities for a different kind of ‘education’ - what Pratt describes as a ‘Cook’s tour of the world’⁴⁷ - creating a more cosmopolitan outlook.⁴⁸ On the other hand, there is a sense in which the ‘new’ had displaced the ‘familiar and routine’ and, perhaps, destabilised the old conventional order of home. The serviceman’s transition from military to civilian society would be difficult because he had ‘adjusted to military life’ where, it was assumed, he had become dependent on the ‘institutional protection’ which the military provided. With the sudden loss of the military’s structural support, he had become ill-equipped to undertake responsibility for himself and assume his designated role as breadwinner. He would

⁴³ Bolté, *New Veteran*, 146.

⁴⁴ ‘The patriotic orators, the institutional advertisements, the pronouncements of the self-appointed guardians of “veterans’ rights” ... and all the Moms of America contribute to these sentimental forces.’ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* On the tendency to view the veteran ‘through a haze of sweetness and light,’ see Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 28. On the veteran-as-hero, see Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 139-40.

⁴⁶ Hollingshead, ‘Adjustment to Military Life,’ 445.

⁴⁷ Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 59.

⁴⁸ Servicemen constituted the most widely travelled category of Americans. See, for example, Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 62-7.

consequently be ill-prepared for the socio-economic role it would be necessary for him to assume, particularly in a potentially unstable postwar economy.⁴⁹

Moreover, this emphatic sense of the *new* in his military experience could create in the serviceman not only a sense of remoteness from the more conventional aspects of civilian life but also, from this geographically and culturally distanced vantage point, a sharpened critical perspective from which he may come to view society at home. From this perspective, homecoming didn't unequivocally mean a welcome return to any nostalgic conception of 'home-sweet-home.' Indeed, home could begin to look 'old' and take on a prospect of disenchantment. The experience of war, according to Robert E. Nisbet, had a tendency to cause in the soldier 'a restlessness of spirit and a pervading dissatisfaction with the things he left behind him - old values and old aspirations.'⁵⁰ These feelings, Nisbet suggests, were attributable to his 'mobile and rootless existence during wartime, of seeing new places, of contemplating new values, and ... of having been ... absent from normal life.'⁵¹ In these circumstances, 'home' could become unstable, undependable and, consequently, the object of hostility, resentment and disillusionment. 'Not a few men will return to civilian life with antagonisms pre-established, cynicism already crystallized.'⁵² The dissociation from 'normal' society, Nisbet is saying, had produced 'abnormal' disaffection towards home.

Social scientists were also preoccupied with the ex-serviceman's conformist tendencies. They were concerned with his individualism which they saw as having been put 'at risk' through his experience of military society.⁵³ They were particularly concerned with the effects of demobilisation which, they assumed, would dismantle the institutional framework which had structured the serviceman's life. As we have seen from their accounts of military society, they repeatedly stressed the military's 'total organisation,' its function as a 'social machine' and the 'militarisation' of the serviceman's identity.

⁴⁹ Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 445-6.

⁵⁰ Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 262.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 267.

⁵³ See, for example, Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 35-41.

They assumed that the serviceman had been institutionalised within the military structure which had inevitably engendered in him a conformist tendency; that it had rendered him passive, apathetic, and altogether dependent on the military's command society and its culture of regulation, regimentation and routine. Because military society was based on the abnegation of personal responsibility, the military apparatus had assumed responsibility for virtually every facet of the serviceman's existence. He made no decisions for himself because they were made by the military authority on his behalf. He was, in absolute terms, *catered for*, provided more or less automatically with all necessary goods and services which required on his part no thought or action whatsoever.⁵⁴ It was fundamental to the military authority's *modus operandi* that the serviceman should be required not to think about, nor to question, its procedures and that he should necessarily become institutionally dependent.

Several social scientists believed that this state of dependency functioned to undermine the adult status of the serviceman. Hollingshead, for example, saw the military as 'a substitute parent for an adult who has been reduced to infancy by the training it has given him' and which aims 'to keep him in this infantile state by the use of psychological and institutional devices.' For Hollingshead, the military seemed designed for the production of conformity in soldiers, 'men conditioned to institutional requirements, defined situations, and explicit expectancies who will neither think for themselves nor make demands on the institution for needs that are not identified with institutional ends.'⁵⁵ The serviceman, as the subject of military institutionalisation, was often characterised as a subjugated inmate, incapable of readjustment to the 'outside' world. 'Like the orphan and the prisoner,' suggested Waller, 'the soldier has been institutionalized and thereby to some extent incapacitated for any life but the soldier's.'⁵⁶

Clearly, if the military 'objective' of institutional dependency had been achieved

⁵⁴ Many studies of military society showed concern with the social effects of the serviceman-as-recipient, systematically dependent on military provision as a kind of social welfare entitlement. See, for example, Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 142-3; Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 264; Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 446-7; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 56-7.

⁵⁵ Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 442.

⁵⁶ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 119.

to any degree, then the conformist implications for both the demobilised serviceman and for the society to which he was returning were of considerable importance. Here, the discourse of conformity was linked specifically to issues of maturity or, more specifically, with immaturity. There was a perception of the serviceman as having been 'reared' in a kind of nursery environment in what appeared to be a deliberate attempt to foster in him a condition of infantilism. Demobilisation, according to Nisbet, looked like 'an invasion by a race of overgrown children.'⁵⁷ And, contrary to the popular sentiment that military training produces self-discipline, it was becoming increasingly evident to sociologists that the culture of dependency fostered within the military environment had rendered the serviceman incapable of assuming the 'normal' civilian requirements of mature responsibility. 'Far from developing self-discipline,' argues Nisbet, 'the continued effect of the army must be to weaken it in the individual.'⁵⁸ The notion of mature responsibility was widely promoted in the discourse of readjustment. Several 'advice' articles in the popular press gave sympathetic coverage to the problem of the returning serviceman who seemingly found himself in a state of virtual paralysis when called upon to take decisions for himself. Arch Soutar, for example, described the problem of readjustment to civilian employment where he must learn to deal with personal responsibility. 'I didn't feel prepared, mentally, to tackle work; couldn't make a decision, because for more than a year the Army had made all my decisions for me. I was frightened by mounting confusion and indecision.'⁵⁹

We can see here the development of an ideology which gave rise to what Barbara Ehrenreich has called the 'breadwinner ethic.' That is, 'a firm expectation ... that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives' and an assumption that 'a man would be less-than-grown-up if he shirked the breadwinner role.'⁶⁰ Although Ehrenreich

⁵⁷ Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 266.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Soutar, 'Home Coming Isn't Easy,' *Saturday Evening Post* (December 16, 1944), 36. It is noteworthy that the article should be described in the *Post* as 'A returned soldier with a mature viewpoint describes the inner struggle your serviceman will have in readjusting and shows how you can help.' Ibid, 35.

⁶⁰ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 11, 18.

is writing here about the 1950s, I would contend that the origins of the discourse which linked postwar masculinity to issues of conformity and maturity can be found earlier, in the ideology of readjustment, constructed principally by social scientists.⁶¹ The ex-ser-viceman who had failed to 'grow up' and assume his responsibilities as 'breadwinner' would be seen to have serious socio-economic implications for the postwar family, as we shall see in the next chapter.

⁶¹ 'Sociologists in particular volunteered to serve as the critical conscience of the decade, periodically assessing the blandness of middle-class life and offering themselves as scientific experts on the penumbra of conformity that engulfed (other) white-collar males.' Ibid, 32.

Chapter 3

When Dreams Came True

Marriage and Family on the Postwar Home Front

In the wartime discourse of national unity, the 'home front' was socially constructed as a focal point of collective national purpose. It became axiomatic that for servicemen abroad, home was what they were fighting for and where they wanted to be. What constituted home was signified in myriad ways but, ultimately, it was the American home which made worthwhile all the anxieties, uncertainties and privations of wartime. An affirmative discourse of 'home' was constructed, often through evocative lists of the serviceman's favourite things, lists which both particularised and universalised the quality of American life through his personalised testimony.¹ For many social commentators, homecoming held out the promise of marriage and family as the means to happiness and fulfilment. Historians, too, have often represented the period through narratives which seemingly confirm a postwar realisation of the wartime dream of domestic longing: as a period in which, as the historian William O'Neill puts it, 'what men and women alike wanted was home, marriage, family. In the postwar world their dreams would come true.'²

But to many social scientists, the 'dream' of a postwar future constituted by this version of domestic ideology appeared destabilised. They were concerned about the social implications of wartime separation which had fractured the traditional patterns of social development and continuity. Separation had disrupted the 'natural' order of socialisation through which societal stability was established and maintained. Societal equilibrium was based on the 'balanced' interdependency between employment, marriage and family: but, in wartime, this traditional order had been interrupted and, consequently, the processes of socialisation had been curtailed.³ Here, 'The Veteran Problem'

¹ See, for example, W. Edgar Gregory, 'The Idealization of the Absent,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 50 (1944), 53-4; John Morton Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1976), 64-70.

² William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 266.

³ See, for example, Edward C. McDonagh, 'The Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 451.

represented *discontinuity*, a dislocation in ‘appropriate’ social development. Hence, ‘The Family’ (a traditional area of anthropological and sociological concern) provided social scientists with a unique opportunity to consolidate and develop ‘their’ specialised field. ‘The Family’ was invested with new significance as the structuring mechanism indispensable for the ‘realignment’ of society as the matrix of postwar reconstruction.

Following their studies of wartime military society, social scientists subsequently began to set out their vision of postwar civilian society. Social science, as Terence Ball has pointed out, was emerging as a significantly new form of social and political power with increasingly strong links to government. At the same time, he says, ‘the state’ was being reconceptualised as ‘the social system’ and social science - in a role often likened to social engineering - assumed responsibility for ‘social policy,’ effectively on behalf of the state.⁴ Social scientists were concerned with the impact on civilian society of servicemen inculcated with an ideology of militarisation. Their studies contributed towards a ‘two worlds’ discourse of separation and discontinuity in which, as they saw it, wartime conditions had destabilised social relations and jeopardised the prospects for the domestically-centred ideology of ‘home’ which they envisaged. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which these studies highlighted divisions between the ‘two worlds’ of military and civilian society, divisions which were seen to have a critical impact on ‘home’ and family life. I argue that social science was the principal agent in a discourse which saw the deterioration of the family not simply as a social problem, but one which threatened American national identity through what was seen as the erosion of its democratic principles and an increasing susceptibility to the incursive characteristics of a mass society.

Social scientists identified a complex of problems, a catalogue of anxieties and uncertainties which had arisen from the ‘two worlds’ of wartime separation.⁵ Mail, for example, took on extraordinary significance in wartime, not least as the essential conduit

⁴ Ball, ‘Politics of Social Science in Postwar America,’ 76-92.

⁵ See, for example, McDonagh, ‘Discharged Serviceman and His Family,’ 451; Edward and Louise McDonagh, ‘War Anxieties of Soldiers and Their Wives,’ *Social Forces*, 24 (1945), 198; Rose M. Rabinoff, ‘While Their Men Are Away,’ *Survey Midmonthly*, 81 (1945), 110.

which linked servicemen to their families, wives and sweethearts.⁶ But although mail was seen as indispensable to wartime morale, its symbolic connection with 'home' didn't always fulfil its intended 'good news' function. Letters from home could sometimes spell out bad news or imply it.⁷ For many husbands and wives, the long physical separation could cause a sense of growing apart and letters could confirm the demise of a relationship. A soldier might hear via the mail of his wife's infidelity. Even when there was no reason to suppose unfaithfulness, he may still be inclined to look for signs of it.⁸ Irrespective of whether it was true, he would be aware of new 'opportunities' at home, particularly those arising from women's employment in the war industries.⁹ Sexual infidelity, real or imagined, was a constant cause of worry.¹⁰ Many servicemen were notified by letter that their wives intended to divorce them and The 'Dear John' letter was common.¹¹

Sociologists were concerned about the social implications of changing perceptions of sex. Wartime engendered increased sexual permissiveness both at home and abroad. Venereal disease was increasing.¹² Some husbands who contracted VD from their wives were shocked to discover that infection could be a two-way process.¹³ Men abroad and women at home had to contend with their distanced relationships in the context of these shifting 'moral' perceptions of each others' world. Sex was increasingly seen as the cause of misgivings, of mutual suspicion and mistrust. Many social commentators feared that extra-marital sex, invariably defined as a moral issue, would undermine the stability

⁶ See, for example, Kennett, *G.I.*, 73-6; Linderman, *World Within War*, 302-4.

⁷ 'Soldiers attempt to read between the lines.' McDonagh, 'War Anxieties of Soldiers and Their Wives,' 197.

⁸ The soldier 'searches her letters for clues that someone might be taking his place.' Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 499.

⁹ See, for example, J. O. Reinemann, 'Extra-Marital Relations With Fellow Employee in War Industry as a Factor in Disruption of Family Life,' *American Sociological Review*, 10 (1945), 399-404.

¹⁰ McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' 453.

¹¹ Jilted soldiers formed clubs such as the 'Brush-Off Club' and the 'Jilted G.I. Club' (admission by 'Dear John' letter). If this 'club' response seemed rather whimsical, a 'Dear John' could have devastating consequences not only for the man who received it but also on company morale. Such letters often provoked a collective loathing for the women who sent them. See, Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 499; Kennett, *G.I.*, 75-6; Linderman, *World Within War*, 310-11. For a fictional account of the effect of a 'Dear John,' see, Robert Lowry, *Casualty* (New York: New Directions, 1946), 56-68.

¹² See, for example, Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 42. See also, Adams, *Best War Ever*, 94, 107, 124-5.

¹³ See, for example, McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' 453.

of the postwar family.¹⁴ The changing nature of sexual relations between women and servicemen was perceived as a general problem on the home front as well as abroad.¹⁵ Moreover, in the context of intense national concern with the rise of 'juvenile delinquency,' wartime sexual relations between servicemen and 'Victory Girls' - sometimes in their early teens - were viewed with consternation. According to at least one account, there existed a subcultural world of quasi-prostitution in which these 'patriotutes' were sexually involved with servicemen in what was seen as tantamount to a culture of paedophilia.¹⁶

The returning serviceman, particularly one who married prior to going overseas, could also find some disparity between the quality of home life he had imagined and how it actually turned out to be.¹⁷ His military life had been conducted exclusively in the absence of the family and many aspects of this life were, in fact, contrary to any sense of family values. Whenever off duty, for example, he could do as he liked: he could act without responsibility because he had none.¹⁸ But his return to family life could necessitate family responsibilities for which he was unprepared.¹⁹ McDonagh cites the case of a private who 'found himself adjusting to his wife in the new and unfamiliar role of mother to a child he had never seen, and to a mother-in-law he had not expected to see in his home.'²⁰ There was a view that many such wartime marriages had been undertaken prematurely and without benefit of 'maturing' courtship. Certainly, wartime preci-

¹⁴ See McDonagh and McDonagh, 'War Anxieties of Soldiers and Their Wives,' 197.

¹⁵ See, for example, Austin L. Porterfield and H. Ellison Salley, 'Current Folkways of Sexual Behavior,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1946), 209-16.

¹⁶ Roger Butterfield, 'Our Kids Are In Trouble,' *Life* (December 20, 1943), 100, 102.

¹⁷ There was a limit to the degree of idealisation and the number of superlatives which 'home' could bear: 'The most beautiful wife, the grandest mother, the finest house in the best town in America, may be hard put to live up to their rôle, when he comes home.' Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 502.

¹⁸ On the problem of readjustment to 'twenty-four hour responsibility,' see Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 77-8.

¹⁹ Indeed, 'to be kept at home by family responsibilities may not be the dream he indulged in when overseas.' McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' p. 452. Consequently, he may be inclined in turn to idealise the conditions in the Army which could begin to look relatively more attractive: 'Once released from the Army and faced with the necessity of planning his own life, he looks with nostalgia on the regular paydays, the lack of responsibility, the freedom and anonymity that was his. Saddled with the responsibility of a wife and family, he thinks with longing of his carefree days.' Gregory, 'Idealization of the Absent,' 54. In other words, wherever the soldier was, he would rather be somewhere else. See also, Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 237-9.

²⁰ McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' 452.

pitated a sharp increase in the marriage rate.²¹ Wartime marriages were often seen as impulsive and irresponsible, undertaken with only immediate or short-term interests in mind.²² Marriages contracted on this basis were not expected to last.

However, there were also other instances of long-standing relationships unable to survive wartime separation. McDonagh cites the case of an Infantry sergeant, married for sixteen years and with two children, who received a letter from his wife stating that she did not want him back. 'He believed that she had managed better without him than with him.'²³ Other women similarly discovered that unmarried life could be a preferable alternative, but one which deviated from a family-orientated society and, as such, from national interests too. Here, as Elaine Tyler May has suggested, 'single women were often seen as a threat to stable family life and to the moral fiber of the nation at war.'²⁴ Conversely, military service was seen to provide opportunities for husbands to 'escape' married life.²⁵

Homecoming could cause other marital anxieties. A wife might worry about her appearance which may have changed in the interim, and come to dread the 'second appraisal.' In her anxiety to 'please' her husband, she may invest emotionally in the reconstruction of a too perfect past. McDonagh and McDonagh identify this reaction as a kind of 'preservationist' syndrome which they describe as 'a pathetic eagerness on the part of many war wives to "keep things exactly as they were" so that their husbands will not be disappointed and feel strange when they return.'²⁶ Husband and wife may present to each other a figure altogether different from the one remembered. If absence, time and distance had created a romanticised picture of the loved one, the actual reunion would necessitate having to take into account the intervening changes. Social scientists

²¹ See, for example, Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 163-5.

²² See, for example, Constantine Panunzio, 'War and Marriage,' *Social Forces*, 21 (1943), 442-5.

²³ McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' 453.

²⁴ Elaine Tyler May, 'Rosie the Riveter Gets Married,' in Erenberg and Hirsch, eds., *War in American Culture*, 133.

²⁵ See, for example, Rabinoff, 'While Their Men Are Away,' 110.

²⁶ McDonagh and McDonagh, 'War Anxieties of Soldiers and Their Wives,' 198.

frequently voiced concern with what Havighurst has called the 'nostalgia effect,'²⁷ where actual homecoming failed to live up to the 'remembered' one.²⁸

Social scientists were particularly concerned with the destabilised condition of the postwar family which they increasingly defined as the family under threat. Debates about the family focused on its perceived capability to function on behalf of society as its primary agent of socialisation.²⁹ According to one perspective, the standard indices of family decline (the increasing divorce rate and declining birth rate) couldn't be taken at face value because the modern family, in fact, was demonstrating its adaptability in a period of social transition.³⁰ This wasn't, however, the prevailing view. For many sociologists, the family was incontrovertibly in decline and incapable of discharging its function as the primary agent of socialisation. Moreover, there were fears that the family was becoming increasingly unstable in relation to a more general social decline. Many saw the family becoming a beleaguered 'unit,' struggling to hold out against the threat of increasing social and cultural instability.³¹ Margaret Park Redfield, for example, blamed various aspects of modernity for the decline of the family and its relationship with society at large.³² For her, 'the modern world is characterized not only by the breakup of families but also by the weakening of community life.'³³ The family couldn't be expected to function adequately as the primary agent of socialisation when the wider culture in

²⁷ That is, 'a sentimental overvaluing of everything the serviceman ... had left behind.' Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 26. See also, Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 31; Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 143-4; Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 113-6, 123-6; Donald Becker, 'The Veteran: Problem and Challenge,' *Social Forces*, 25 (1946), 97-8.

²⁸ 'Some are rudely disillusioned when they meet their wives at the depot. The separatee's wife may be several years older; she may have a few more wrinkles, and perhaps some sign of gray hair or of efforts to camouflage it. And many a wife greets not a prince charming, but an older, tired man, with a most unusual vocabulary and strange attitudes toward some of life's values.' McDonagh, 'Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' 453-4.

²⁹ The young serviceman was seen as having been prematurely uprooted from a conventional social environment prior to the completion of his 'natural' socialisation and with only an insufficiently developed sense of 'natural' maturity. The 'alternative' socialisation of military society was seen as being not merely different from, but in opposition to, the interests of civilian society. See, for example, Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 262.

³⁰ See, for example, Ernest W. Burgess, 'The Family in a Changing Society,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (1948), 417-22; Reuben Hill, 'The American Family: Problem or Solution?' *American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (1947), 125-30.

³¹ See, for example, Lawrence K. Frank, 'What Families Do for the Nation,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (1948), 471-3; Carle C. Zimmerman, 'The Social Conscience and the Family,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1946), 263-8.

³² Redfield, 'The American Family: Consensus and Freedom,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1946), 175-83.

³³ *Ibid*, 177.

which it was situated was itself no longer capable of providing a secure framework of commonly accepted social values. Family culture and community culture were mutually dependent and operated in relation to each other in the processes of socialisation. But this role of culture had been rendered ineffectual in the transmission of those social values seen as fundamental to a generally accepted (American) way of life.³⁴

Many social scientists were convinced that traditional cultural patterns had previously allowed for a more highly developed sense of community. This, they believed, was largely derived from the notion of a rural heritage in which families had 'roots in the soil' and 'a stake in the land.'³⁵ These communities appeared settled, producing their own distinctive cultural identity and the means for its continuity. But modern society, in contrast, had become increasingly urbanised. The city was frequently demonised as the site of social 'disorganisation' and as a destabilising social force. Following a long intellectual tradition which viewed the city with distaste, distrust and fear,³⁶ the postwar city was widely blamed for its corrosive effects on the integrity of family values. Redfield, for example, described cities as 'wildernesses' with 'little to reinforce family ties and much to break them down and to weaken the mores which sustain them.'³⁷ Several sociologists made concerted appeals for decentralisation of the 'abnormal' city.³⁸ In these circumstances, home ownership was often seen as a means of providing stability, security, and a way of withstanding the debilitating effects of the city on family life.³⁹ However, home ownership could hardly be seen as a realistic prospect for most city 'cliff-dwellers.' Redfield's 'ideal' of American family life - 'having a home of one's own with a yard and vegetable garden' - represented a nostalgic appeal to the rural tradition, but it was difficult to evoke in an urban environment. 'A city apartment,' she says,

³⁴ Several studies of military society emphatically noted the positive value of its community culture which, as they repeatedly stressed, was virtually absent in civilian society. See, for example, Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 266-7, 269-70.

³⁵ On 'one foot on the soil' ideology, see, for example, Louis Bromfield, 'To Clear the Dross,' in Elmer T. Peterson, ed., *Cities Are Abnormal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 183-98.

³⁶ See, for example, Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and MIT Press, 1962).

³⁷ Redfield, 'American Family,' 176.

³⁸ See, Peterson, ed., *Cities Are Abnormal*.

³⁹ See, for example, Lillian Cohen, 'Family Characteristics of Homeowners,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 55 (1950), 565-71.

'cannot even be sentimentalized about.'⁴⁰

Moreover, it was feared that 'family values' were being subsumed by the 'pseudo values' of mass culture and that the family, situated in an urbanised mass society, was - or should be - the first line of defence against the encroaching effects of mass culture. In order to withstand these 'commercialized' effects, the family needed to maintain its 'organic' structure and 'healthy' values. Where 'sterile' modernity was blamed for undermining these values, sociologists like Redfield often evoked a picture of the family which hearkened back to a bygone era, a pre-industrial pastoral idyll in which family life could be typically illustrated by 'singing around the piano, walking in the woods, reading a well-loved book.' This perspective suggested a dichotomy between those values associated with a *Gemeinschaft* type of rural tradition against those of a *Gesellschaft* modern urban environment: in other words, traditional community values against the impersonality and alienation of urban existence, 'the *anomie* and loneliness of the city.'⁴¹

Many social commentators saw the city as an increasingly malign and monolithic space which seemed to personify social estrangement and alienation.⁴² As their studies often indicate, the city seemed to negate the very possibility of 'home,' especially through inadequate and overcrowded living conditions. Indeed, it looked as if the city was becoming a repository for an increasingly displaced and 'unattached' population.⁴³ The city *itself* seemed to express the degraded quality of modern urban life. Social commentators became increasingly concerned about its loss of neighbourhood and community, especially as structures of localised democracy. 'Without them,' suggests Peterson, 'democracy operates haltingly and often by remote control, which really means no democracy at all.'⁴⁴ In a discourse which linked the failure of 'home' to the *unheimlich*

⁴⁰ Redfield, 'American Family,' 176, 179.

⁴¹ See, Redfield, 'American Family.'

⁴² A view not necessarily shared by returning servicemen themselves, for whom the urban *milieu* might well represent the acme of American civilization and *their* definition of 'home.' For example, a Navy lieutenant (A.J. Fillingim), wrote in *Shipmate* (March, 1945), "I don't never want to see no more scenery, mountains, palm trees, sunsets, historic monuments, ancient ruins, nor nothing. All I want to see is taxicabs and sidewalks and neon lights and people with shoes on!" Quoted in Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 138.

⁴³ See, for example, Arnold M. Rose, 'Living Arrangements of Unattached Persons,' *American Sociological Review*, 12 (1947), 429-35.

⁴⁴ Elmer T. Peterson, 'Cities Are Abnormal,' in Peterson, ed., *Cities Are Abnormal*, 11.

city, the demise of neighbourhood and community was linked to the perceived decline of social and cultural structures through which *grass-roots* democracy - the term itself assumes particular significance - should be enacted. In order to counteract the 'anti-democratic' tendencies of urbanism, 'home' would be realised through home-ownership which would be distanced from the city and planned through suburbanisation.⁴⁵

As the discourse of wartime unity had promoted the social values of community and neighbourhood, the wartime home was itself enlisted as a symbol of collective national purpose.⁴⁶ Similarly, the postwar suburban home would be invested with symbolic purpose and strategically deployed as an emblem of America's democratic freedom, individualism and independence, defensively constructed against Cold War Soviet totalitarianism.⁴⁷ As Jackson has pointed out, both government and industry 'played up' the prospect of the suburban house to the families of absent servicemen and, subsequently, the GI Bill 'gave official endorsement and support to the view that the 16 million GI's of World War II should return to civilian life with a home of their own.'⁴⁸ Moreover, it would be constructed as an *American* home. The earliest of the new housing developments was built by the property developer William Levitt, progenitor of 'Levittown' suburbanisation. These developments significantly featured *detached* housing with plots, practically designed for family living. They were mass-produced and generally affordable, providing the means for home ownership on a hitherto unimaginable scale. Levitt home-ownership, moreover, was explicitly linked to national security. 'No man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist,' Levitt famously proclaimed. 'He has too much to do.'⁴⁹ Suburbanisation, Levitt is saying, provided an expression of Americanism grounded in its agrarian tradition and protestant work ethic *and* a domestic de-

⁴⁵ On suburbanisation, see, Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 231-45.

⁴⁶ An Office of Civilian Defense pamphlet advised how 'home' could be converted into a demonstrable expression of the family as 'a fighting unit in the home front' and, subsequently, certificated as a 'V-Home.' See, 'What Can I Do?' (1942), repr. in Richard Polenberg, ed., *America at War: The Home Front, 1941-1945* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 8-11.

⁴⁷ On the ideological connection between The Family and the Cold War, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1988).

⁴⁸ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 232-3.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Eric Larrabee, 'The Six Thousand Houses That Levitt Built,' *Harper's Magazine* (September, 1948), 84.

fence network to protect Americanism from Soviet totalitarianism. Housing was a practical necessity, but 'home' had become an ideological imperative. Suburbanisation would provide for the reconstitution of 'The Family' in the national interest.³⁰

If the family was seen to be in decline, so too was marriage. And marriage was, by common sociological consent, *the* social prerequisite. John Sirjamaki, for example, asserted that 'married life is the normal, desired condition for all adults, that it brings the greatest personal happiness and fulfilment, and that it permits the proper exercise of sex for the procreation of children and for individual satisfaction.'³¹ The alternative, remaining single, meant an 'empty and barren' life as a social outsider. This social definition - part-description, part-prescription - suggests that where marriage provided the means towards 'happiness' and 'fulfilment,' it also provided a licence which legitimated (heterosexual) sex.³² Marriage, then, had a regulatory function: where premarital and extramarital sex were socially discountenanced as immoral, marriage invested it with moral ('proper') legitimacy.³³

But marriage was predicated on a series of problematic assumptions about the respective roles of husband and wife. The gendered differentiation of these roles was clearly designated, with the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker. This gendered division of roles was culturally elaborated and reinforced. Marital *inequality* was naturalised, both culturally and biologically, as normative.³⁴ The pressure on hus-

³⁰ There were also increasing fears that densely populated metropolitan areas would be especially vulnerable as primary targets in the event of an atomic bomb attack. Dispersal of the urban population through suburbanisation also served the strategic purpose of reducing the risk to civilians. See, for example, William Fielding Ogburn, 'Sociology and the Atom,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 270-3; Warren S. Thompson, 'The Atomic Threat,' in Peterson, ed., *Cities Are Abnormal*, 226-38. Several 'documentary' accounts realistically envisaged such attacks on American cities. See, for example, 'The 36-Hour War,' *Life* (November 19, 1945), 27-35, which 'illustrates' the atomic destruction of Manhattan.

³¹ John Sirjamaki, 'Culture Configurations in the American Family,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (1948), 465.

³² A connection between family 'demoralisation' and homosexuality was often reported and widely feared. See, for example, Zimmerman, 'Social Conscience and the Family,' 263; Frank, 'What Families Do for the Nation,' 472. In a discourse which equated communist subversion with sexual 'perversity,' homosexuality represented both 'antifamilism' *and*, as a perceived threat to national security, unAmericanism. See, May, *Homeward Bound*, 94-6.

³³ 'Sex may thus be legitimately expressed only within marriage, and the speaking of marriage vows makes highly moral sexual behaviour which before then had been grossly immoral,' *Ibid*, 468. There is an implication here of an imperative to clamp down on the 'unlicensed' sexual conduct of wartime.

³⁴ See, for example, Margaret Mead, 'The Contemporary American Family as an Anthropologist Sees It,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (1948), 455; Hill, 'American Family: Problem or Solution?' 129; Sirjamaki, 'Culture Configurations in the American Family,' 469.

bands and wives to conform to their respective roles was powerfully maintained as a social and cultural norm. According to Margaret Mead, their 'performance' in these roles was indexed to the notion of success. Divorce, then, meant failure. Consequently, marriage was fraught with anxieties arising from the performance of these gendered roles. To be demonstrably successful, therefore, became a safeguard against the fear of failure. In the feminine role, of wife and mother, there was particular emphasis on the need for a well accomplished performance: 'a wife's maintaining her attractiveness, in the face of the domestic routines, the sick bay, the broken drain, the unwashed coffee cups after last night's party, is felt to be a test of her adequacy and her sense of responsibility.'⁵⁵ The masculine role, of husband and father, was subject to similar pressure. Here, masculine identity, built on the notion of 'maturity' and linked to the role of breadwinner, was also vulnerable to the potential of failure, where 'job insecurity, the fear that his maturity, which is based on his ability to earn his own living and provide completely for his family, may be taken from him by personal failure or by a depression.'⁵⁶

Gender roles were also subject to the inconsistent and often contradictory demands of differing cultural norms.⁵⁷ Women, Sirjamaki suggests, were 'caught in a process of social change, in which the cultural configuration restrains them to traditional roles, while new ones are proffered by economic and social forces.'⁵⁸ It is significant, however, that an analysis concerned with these cultural contradictions should still presuppose marriage and foreclose the obvious alternative. Clearly, there was no question *about* marriage, which was taken for granted. But if marriage was supposed to be a universal life-goal, it was becoming a questionable and paradoxical one, as Hill succinctly points out: 'Marriage in America has never been more popular, nor decisions to divorce more numerous.'⁵⁹

The integrity of the family was being threatened in other ways, too, not least by

⁵⁵ Mead, 'Contemporary American Family as an Anthropologist Sees It,' 457.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Mirra Komarovsky, 'Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1946), 184-5.

⁵⁸ Sirjamaki, 'Culture Configurations in the American Family,' 469.

⁵⁹ Hill, 'American Family: Problem or Solution?' 125.

the proliferation of professional agencies which were beginning to advise on a wide range of issues. A plethora of 'how to' guides offered professional advice and instruction on such matters as nutrition, paediatrics, home management, sex, 'mental hygiene' and - not least - veteran readjustment.⁶⁰ The figure of 'The Expert' became central in an emergent culture of professional expertise and was seen to have appropriated responsibility for virtually every aspect of daily life. There was concern that family issues such as child care, previously matters of parental responsibility, had become professionalised ('taken over') by outside experts in the various fields. This development was seen to undermine parental authority and, in particular, the 'natural' role of the family as the primary agent of socialisation. Irrespective of the professional value of these agencies and their contribution to family life, an increasing degree of professional specialisation was seen to have adverse effects on parents, especially when they found themselves subject to such a bewildering diversity of advice, some of it conflicting. Parents, it was assumed, were liable to be placed in an awkward and contradictory position as they were exhorted to be self-reliant and trust their own judgment while being simultaneously advised that they needed the intervention of professional expertise.⁶¹ We can see a telling illustration in one of the best known 'how to' guides of the period, Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*.⁶² While Spock advocated care as the 'natural' province of parental 'instincts' and 'common sense,' he was simultaneously laying claim to the (medicalised) professional authority which established paediatrics as a field of professional specialisation and expertise.⁶³ Moreover, as William Graebner has pointed out, Spock featured prominently

in a discourse which linked the social psychology of child care as a form of social engin-

⁶⁰ In addition to sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists were amongst the 'expert' contributors to the discourse of readjustment and instrumental in the medicalisation of 'the veteran problem.' See, for example, Herbert I. Kupper, *Back To Life: The Emotional Readjustment of Our Veterans* (New York: Fischer, 1945); Howard Kitching, *Sex Problems of the Returned Veteran* (New York: Emerson, 1946). Much of their expertise was aimed at women through both professional and popular channels, and effectively directed the crucial role they were expected to play. See, Susan M. Hartmann, 'Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans,' *Women's Studies*, 5 (1978), 223-39.

⁶¹ See, for example, Frank, 'What Families Do For the Nation,' 473; Redfield, 'American Family,' 182; Mead, 'American Family as an Anthropologist Sees It,' 459.

⁶² Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1946).

⁶³ Spock's tone of avuncular reassurance mediates between the spheres of professional and parental expertise. See, in particular, 'TRUST YOURSELF,' *Ibid*, 3-4.

earing to a national 'democratic' imperative.⁶⁴ Spock's 'democratic' model of child care, says Graebner, was 'conceptualized against a background of European dictatorship' when, it was feared, the 'unstable' child might be drawn towards totalitarianism, 'whether as a timid follower or a charismatic leader-dictator.'⁶⁵

The 'professionalisation' of the family was seen as a regulatory mechanism necessitated by the 'dysfunctional' family which, left to its own devices, seemed incapable of fulfilling its function. Several aspects of family life were seen to be at risk. For example, widely reported accounts of neglected children were seen to provide irrefutable evidence of 'collapsing' family life.⁶⁶ This neglect was often cited as a consequence of mothers' wartime employment.⁶⁷ There were also concerns that the nature of children's upbringing was an inadequate or inappropriate preparation for adult life. Boys were seen to be especially vulnerable to an upbringing considered to be excessively maternal. Mothers were indicted for 'Momism,' where boys were subjected to an upbringing of over-weaning dependency which smothered masculine development and stunted maturity.⁶⁸

The perceived need for professional intervention was linked to a discourse in which the postwar role of women was seen as increasingly uncertain and unstable.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁴ Graebner, 'The Unstable World of Benjamin Spock: Social Engineering in a Democratic Culture, 1917-1950,' *Journal of American History*, 67 (1980), 612-29.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 613.

⁶⁶ See Redfield, 'American Family,' 176.

⁶⁷ There were 'reports from all over the country of neglect of small children, locked in the house, the apartment, or the trailer during the hours the mother is employed in war industry.' Ernest W. Burgess, 'The Family,' in William Fielding Ogburn, ed., *American Society in Wartime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 22. The working mother, it was suggested, had effectively 'orphaned' her children. See for example, Grace Thorne Allen, et al, 'Eight-Hour Orphans,' *Saturday Evening Post* (October 10, 1942), 20-1, 105-6; Vernon Pope, 'Eight-Hour Orphans,' *Saturday Evening Post* (April 20, 1943), 24-5, 82. Some children in Portland, whose mothers worked in the shipyards, were known as 'shipyard orphans.' See Butterfield, 'Our Kids Are In Trouble,' 102, 105. The 'collapsing' family could therefore be attributed to the working mother.

⁶⁸ For the founding fathers of 'Momism,' see, Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*; Edward A. Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1946). Strecker, a former consultant to the Secretary of War, suggested that 'Momism' had a debilitating effect on military effectiveness. The high levels of neuropsychiatric cases rejected at induction (1,825,000), or later discharged (600,000), together with draft-dodgers (500,000), were attributable, he claimed, to 'Momism.' Hence, the role of the mother could be seen as instrumental in undermining national security. Ibid, particularly, 13-22.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press, 1981); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change* (New York: Meridian, 1988); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

exigencies of war saw women impelled by government, industry and media to take jobs vacated by men. An unprecedented number of women entered industrial employment which, for many, provided new opportunities for achievement and success together with first-time experience of financial independence and personal autonomy. Wartime women workers, personified by the figure of 'Rosie the Riveter,' undertook a wide range of 'men's' work, often confounding assumptions about women's capabilities and disrupting traditional expectations of gendered work roles.⁷⁰ But despite the concerted exhortations which made women's wartime employment a mandatory undertaking, the continuing prospect of working women was widely discountenanced. In the discourse of wartime unity, 'Rosie the Riveter' was socially constructed as a figure of strategic national importance: as a home front version of 'GI Joe,' she was as indispensable to the collective war effort as he was. She also represented, as he did, a narrative of America's wartime democracy *at work*. The war had brought about a radical transformation in the lives of millions of women, but only as a consequence of wartime demands, and only for the duration. The end of the war, then, raised fundamental questions about the postwar role and 'place' of women. Here, in what we can see as a parallel process to veteran demobilisation and 'readjustment,' women found themselves peremptorily compelled to relinquish their wartime jobs and return forthwith to a domestic role at home.

The family-centred suburban home would subsequently become the focal point for a domestic ideology which, to its critics, provided evidence of a national disposition towards conformity and uniformity. But the conception and realisation of 'home' represented a national response to fears about the 'demoralisation' of 'The Family' which was seen as increasingly vulnerable to the effects of a mass society. The reconstitution of The Family was seen as a core element in an infrastructure of national ideology, a 'unit' of national defence in Cold War Americanism, where 'home' was invested with the traditional 'American' characteristics of individualism, self-reliance and democratic freedom in order to withstand the threat of *mass*, from within and without, and all its

⁷⁰ See, for example, William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 137-8.

totalitarian implications.

America's postwar national identity, in this sense, was defined through a reinvigorated sense of its own traditional values, defensively constructed against those of its totalitarian enemies: but the official discourse of America's global role, legitimated through its credentials as a democratic power, didn't necessarily coincide with the unofficial views of many with ground-level experience abroad and at home, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Democracy at War Enemies, Allies and Others

Wartime produced a discourse in which the demarcation between allies and enemies was sharply defined. It necessarily simplified the distinction between 'us' and 'them' so that it was seemingly obvious that Americans would be unequivocally for the one and against the other. But wartime discourse simplifies the meanings of national identity and works to produce a sense of the national 'self' which is coherent and cohesive. Nations at war produce authorised versions of themselves so that 'who' they are and what they stand for are clearly and conspicuously identifiable. At the same time, other nations become subject to relative forms of representation and national stereotypes - of enemies *and* allies - become consolidated. A sense of national wartime identity is characteristically inscribed in national military systems and represented by flags, uniforms and other national insignia, by weaponry, vehicles, *matériel*, and all the other emblematic paraphernalia of the military apparatus. The national self is also constructed partly through the rhetorical expression of its own national ideology, drawing on an appeal to nationalistic conceptions such as 'Americanism' or 'home' (what we're fighting for). Moreover, the national self is constructed not only according to how it sees itself, or wishes to be seen, but also against the antipathetic construction of its enemies as Other (what we're fighting against). The war, in this sense, was discursively drawn as a Manichaeian conflict between democracy and totalitarianism. The discourse of wartime 'Americanism' consistently invoked democratic principles to characterise America's role (initially, for example, as 'the great arsenal of democracy').¹ The imagery and rhetoric of democratic natio-

¹ On America as a wartime democracy, see, for example, O'Neill, *Democracy At War*; Alpers, 'This Is the Army,' 129-163; Blum, *V Was For Victory*. America was primed for entry into the war through FDR's appeal for national recognition of this role with the introduction of Lend-Lease. For the text of FDR's 'arsenal of democracy' radio broadcast (December 29, 1940), see Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy, eds., *FDR's Fireside Chats* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 164-73.

nalism were writ large both at home and abroad.²

But the actualities of wartime experience often engendered more paradoxical and ambivalent responses. Returning servicemen brought home with them the experience of foreign societies and foreign cultures which involved various kinds of interaction with both allies and enemies throughout the world. What they found there, and how they felt about it, didn't necessarily conform to simplistic forms of national representation, nor did they necessarily subscribe to a wartime ideology conceptualised in terms of an absolute dualism between 'us' and 'them.' Moreover, while the rectitudinous ideal of American democracy was being assiduously promoted as *the* defining characteristic of American nationalism, many social commentators feared that wartime conditions were beginning to threaten that very quality intrinsic to its wartime national identity. In this chapter, I highlight some of the discrepancies and ambiguities of national representations in the official discourse of democratic Americanism. Here, I argue, the problem of 'readjustment' was linked to the veteran's putative status as a politically questionable figure whose military experience was seen to have destabilised his 'American' identity.

According to many sociological accounts of the serviceman's wartime experience, any presumption of a straightforward polarisation between 'us' and 'them' was confounded. Daniel Glaser, for example, found the returning soldier 'less favorably inclined toward his allies and possibly more favorably inclined toward his former enemies than those who have remained in the United States might expect.'³ Glaser's observation points to an inversion of the assumptions behind the simplified distinction between al-

² War and democracy were inextricably linked in the myriad narrative of wartime America. We can trace an illustrative example through representations of the combat unit, a core component in the visual culture of the war. These small groups of GIs personified democracy-in-action at ground level. Already a familiar trope in photographs, films and war reports, what we might call the 'unit ethos' would ultimately become an icon of America at war. Joe Rosenthal's famous photograph of Marines raising the flag on Mount Suribachi uniquely signified this ethos. I would argue that the expressive power of the *tableau vivant* derives from its configuration of the group. The narrative demonstrates *collective* effort and endeavour, *unified* strength and purpose. The faces of the Marines are obscured in the action and we cannot identify any individual in the group. The sense of victorious heroism is generated not by any one individual - although each is indispensable - but constituted collectively by the 'unit ethos' of the group itself. On the historical and cultural significance of Rosenthal's photograph, see, Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenthal, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³ Glaser, 'Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 438.

lies and enemies. It also indicates a disjuncture between the respective viewpoints of servicemen abroad and civilians at home. Similarly, Willard Waller saw problematic implications for veteran 'readjustment' when the serviceman had apparently become more sympathetically inclined towards the enemy. It was a civilian prerogative from the distance of home to subscribe to a view of 'the enemy' represented as a clear-cut generic category which could be readily traduced and demonised. But the serviceman's own first-hand experience could lead him to an altogether different view of the same enemy as a more empathetic figure, as 'a soldier like himself,' for whom he could have some professional respect. He may even come to speak 'almost affectionately' of his German counterpart 'as Jerry.'⁴ Moreover, the enemy soldier, situated like himself in the 'vast impersonality' of the war machine, could be seen as a kindred spirit - 'a fellow sufferer' - with whom he shared a special affinity. Consequently, 'the soldier may begin to feel that he has more in common with the enemy soldier than with the people back home'⁵

As sociologists noted 'pro-enemy' sentiments in the serviceman, they also noted his 'anti-ally' attitudes. The serviceman's disenchantment with the Allies was partly attributed to his contact with the devastation and deprivation of a war-ravaged Europe, especially in France. Seeing 'Europe at its worst,' he found 'shattered buildings; rubble-littered streets; damaged means of transportation; dismal fortifications and air-raid shelters; inadequate public food supplies; poor sanitation; shabbily clothed civilians; ... expanded vice enterprises; and an often cynical, too long disappointed populace.'⁶ Europe had been reduced to a degraded and demoralised war zone which could scarcely bear comparison with America's modernity, sophistication and material standard of living. Nevertheless, for the servicemen stationed there, Europe was inevitably contrasted

⁴ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 46-7. 'Jerry,' the generic nickname for German soldiers, derived from the jerrican developed for the *Africakorps* (subsequently copied by the Allies). 'Jerry,' like 'GI,' personified the soldier through his equipment, often respected and admired by GIs. Significantly, the GI's German counterpart was designated in similar terms to himself. 'There was nothing particularly pejorative in the terms "Jerry" and "Kraut."' Kennett, *G.I.*, 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶ Glaser, 'Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,' 433-4. The description can't adequately convey the sense of national demoralisation which afflicted occupied France. On the physical and psychological effects of malnutrition in wartime Paris, see Ian Ousby, *Occupation: The Ordeal of France 1940-1944* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 124-5; on food shortages and rationing, see, 117-20, 123-4, 126-8.

against what Benjamin Bowker called 'an American standard.' Their 'tourist' conception of Europe, Bowker contends, made them thankful they were American.⁷ Measured against the implicit superiority of an 'American standard,' many of Europe's cultural differences became liable to interpretation as evidence of cultural inferiority which provoked Americans' 'ethnocentric disdain.'⁸

American perceptions of cultural difference were linked to a symbolic conception of France which, in a military context, served to underline the distinction between American superiority and French inferiority. Surveys conducted by Samuel Stouffer in 1945 indicated increasingly negative attitudes towards the French. 'France as a symbol,' Stouffer contends, 'was weak, defeated, inadequate, ... anything but admirable.'⁹ Attitudes of American soldiers were further linked to their perceptions of the Allies and their respective roles in the collective war effort. In surveys designed to ascertain the degree of 'respect' for the Allied war effort, Stouffer found that a substantial majority of soldiers thought America was 'doing more than her share' (78%), and the remainder that she was 'doing her share' (22%). A substantial minority thought that France, in contrast, was 'not doing her share' (36%), while few thought she was 'doing more than her share' (2%).¹⁰ Many servicemen were sufficiently mindful of the magnitude of America's contribution that they begrudged the recognition accorded by Allied nations of their own military achievements. Servicemen were seen as particularly suggestible to allegations of the Allies' military incompetence and misconduct, particularly in the Army's 'scuttlebutt' culture.¹¹

The perception of France here was at least partly based on a sense of national

⁷ Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 67.

⁸ Examples such as 'French sidewalk urinals (*pissoirs*)' and 'primitive plumbing' could make these countries seem to Americans, "'fifty years behind the times.'" Glaser, 'Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,' 434.

⁹ Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 578.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 624-30.

¹¹ Frenchmen were frequently accused of being 'pro-German,' of firing on Americans, of flagrant infractions of military law, and all manner of unprofessional and unsoldierly conduct: 'the French were said by the Americans to be donning pieces of American uniform, wearing whatever French insignia of rank they desired, and sporting any number of medals.' Americans also objected to Lend-Lease, especially when they encountered French soldiers with American uniforms and jeeps. Glaser, 'Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,' 436.

identity legitimated by the degree of 'respect' awarded for 'doing her share.' This perception needs to be considered in a wider context and, I would argue, in relation to the symbolic significance of what is commonly described as the fall of France. Historians significantly speak of the *fall* of France, a term which registers the complex of meanings inscribed in her defeat.¹² The fall of France represented in military terms the abject failure of European democracies to defend themselves against Nazism. France offered little resistance and the Nazis entered Paris without a shot being fired in her defence. Commentators were concerned with the implications of the fall of a city which was seen by many American intellectuals as the virtual capital of Western culture. Harold Rosenberg, for example, identified Paris as the 'International' of culture, seeing the city as culturally and intellectually significant because it was unbound by any nationally-determined values and ideologies. The fall of Paris in this sense signalled the demise of a Parisian cosmopolitanism which represented to Rosenberg and others a 'free' centre of cultural pluralism which should have been resistant to nationalistic ideologies and cultural totalitarianism.¹³ The fall of France, then, represented military, intellectual and cultural failure. Worse was to come, and military historians would recount the dismal narrative of occupied France under the rubric of national shame and humiliation, where appeasement and collaboration became bywords for national ignominy. The degree of 'respect' which American servicemen had for France was linked to their perceptions of these circumstances and, consequently, to the role they themselves were called upon to play in her (belated) defence.

American perceptions of the differing cultural particularities and military characteristics of Allied countries crystallised into stereotypical national categories, often provoking distaste, distrust and disrespect. Nationality categorised social and cultural difference: it provided an all-inclusive derogatory label which designated foreign inferiority. Consequently, 'Americans formed the habit of calling all British "god-damn Limies" and

¹² Other European countries were invaded: France *fell*.

¹³ Harold Rosenberg, 'On the Fall of Paris,' *Partisan Review*, 7 (1940), 440-8.

all French “dirty Frogs.”¹⁴ There were fears that the prevalence of these attitudes within GI culture would be likely to have a detrimental effect on the Allied war effort. Henry Elkin, for example, suggested that this ‘negativism’ would impair international relations as the Allies were becoming ‘the primary scapegoat for the G.I.’s need for self-assertion.’¹⁵ Moreover, in the context of American ‘superiority’ over European ‘inferiority,’ the GI adopted not only an inappropriately negative attitude towards the European Allies, but also an inappropriately positive one towards those who were supposed to be his enemies: ‘so the G.I. “took it out” on “damned Limeys” and “dirty Frogs,” but *not* ... on the Germans and southern Italians who directly gratified his self-esteem by behaving toward him as a conqueror.’¹⁶

The American occupation of postwar Germany gave rise to concerns about fraternisation as servicemen found themselves with new administrative responsibilities for the jurisdiction of the civilian population.¹⁷ Fraternisation was prohibited and penalties were severe (GIs were liable to a \$65 fine merely for speaking to a German girl). All association with Germans, except on official business, was strictly proscribed and the instruction, ‘Don’t Fraternize,’ was posted everywhere. The policy was rationalised as a security measure. For example, servicemen were issued with a *Pocket Guide to Germany* which warned how former members of the Gestapo, no longer identifiable by uniform, would ‘disappear’ into civilian anonymity. There were also misgivings about serviceman-civilian relations which, in the aftermath of hostilities, would violate non-fraternisation regulations and, consequently, undermine military authority. Nevertheless, servicemen did make frequent contact with civilians, both on or off duty, and non-fraternisation

¹⁴ Glaser, ‘Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,’ 436. On American attitudes to the British, see, Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 573-6, 627-30. See also, David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 168-77, 195-9, 244-5, 257-61.

¹⁵ Elkin, ‘Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 409. When G.I.s bragged about ‘beating hell out of a Frog,’ they drew on the ready-made category of ‘damned foreigner,’ cast in the role of all-purpose scapegoat. Ibid, 410.

¹⁶ Ibid, 409. In a dichotomy between the French ally and the German enemy, ‘dirty’ and ‘clean’ were commonly attributed as criteria of value according to the prevalent national stereotypes. Servicemen often expressed approval for Germans because they were ‘clean’ and disapproval for the French because they were ‘dirty.’ See, for example, Glaser, ‘Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,’ 437; Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 578.

¹⁷ See, Ibid, 564-73; Kennett, *G.I.*, 211-18.

orders proved difficult, if not impossible, to implement. The policy, as Kennett has pointed out, was so unpopular that it was likened by some servicemen to Prohibition: 'massively violated from the outset and doomed to eventual repeal.'¹⁸ (The policy was ultimately recognised as unenforceable and abandoned in July, 1945). However, the ban on fraternisation wasn't simply concerned with issues of security and discipline: it was also an ideological measure, designed to prevent American servicemen from being drawn towards defeated enemy nationals and, hence, to *their* perspective. There were concerns about what Stouffer describes as 'some tendency to identify with the Germans and ... an increased receptivity to the German point of view.'¹⁹ Many sociologists were particularly concerned about the postwar implications of the serviceman's apparent preference for German women, with whom he seemed to share a special affinity.²⁰

Although the official meaning of fraternisation was (unauthorised) association with enemy nationals, the term was appropriated and redefined in the Army's unofficial sub-culture. In GI parlance, 'frattin'' meant close, usually sexual, relations with a female 'enemy' national ('fraterbait').²¹ GIs opposed the regulation not least because they saw it as a spurious measure to prevent them from having (sexual) relations with German women. But they also saw it as an infringement of their right to talk with whoever they chose and, moreover, they resented any implication that they were too gullible or naive to be trusted to do so.²² We can see here in the almost universal repudiation of the Army's non-fraternisation policy a dissenting stance in the face of official regulation which, to the men, lacked legitimacy. In other words, their attitudes to postwar Germany and its people wasn't a matter of Army regulation but a matter for them.

Wartime invariably generates a discourse which defines 'the enemy' through the

¹⁸ Ibid, 215-6.

¹⁹ Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 564.

²⁰ 'G.I.'s would show a marked preference for German girls.' Elkin, 'Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life,' 413. "German women are considered by many separatees as "just like American girls." Edward C. McDonagh, 'The Discharged Serviceman and His Family,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 451. German women, in comparison with those in formerly occupied countries, were generally seen as cleaner, healthier, better dressed, and used to a higher standard of living. See, for example, Glaser, 'Sentiments of American Soldiers Toward Europeans,' 437.

²¹ See, Taylor, *Language of World War II*, 86-7.

²² See, YANK Staff Correspondents, 'Fraternization,' in *Highlights from YANK* (New York: Royal, 1953), 256-9.

attribution of national or nationalistic characteristics. In wartime, national stereotypes abound.²³ Germans ‘were’ cold and unfeeling, methodical and systematic, brutal and sadistic; stiff-necked, heel-clicking, fanatical devotees of order and discipline, technological efficiency and fetishised militarism. Their predominant characteristic, according to Paul Fussell, was ‘thoroughness,’ an attribute which here implied machine-like inhumanity. ‘German soldiers,’ Fussell observes, ‘were said to have a passion for straight lines and rigid postures.’²⁴ Postwar stereotypes included the alluring *fräulein*, seducing the hapless GI with murderous intent, and the bereaved mother, transformed by maternal grief into a demented sniper.²⁵ But American servicemen, as we have seen, would often find some disparity between how Germans were supposed to be and how they found them. Many commentators found it possible to make a distinction between the German people who, by and large, were not *hated* as such, and Nazism, which emphatically was. Allan Nevins, for example, suggests that ‘the German *system* was detested,’ in contrast to the people themselves.²⁶ (Although *who* implemented this ‘system’ remained open to question).²⁷

Such a distinction may have been a convenient way for those at home to rationalise the conflict abroad, but it didn’t necessarily mean much to GIs on the front line. Indeed, for Bill Mauldin, ‘Nazi’ seemed a largely irrelevant label. ‘Our army,’ he says, ‘has seen very few actual *Nazis* ...’ The *Germans* they had seen, however, they found a ‘ruthless, cold, cruel, and powerful enemy.’ Furthermore, ‘It makes the dogfaces sick to read articles by people who say, “It isn’t the Germans, it’s the Nazis.”’²⁸ The American

infantryman, Mauldin contends, could hate *and* respect his German counterpart. His re-

²³ See, for example, Svend Riemer, ‘Individual and National Psychology: A Problem in the Army Area Study,’ *Social Forces*, 22 (1944), 256-61.

²⁴ Fussell, *Wartime*, 121.

²⁵ For these and other typical instances, see, for example, Ferdinand A. Hermens, ‘The Danger of Stereotypes in Viewing Germany,’ *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9 (1945-46), 419-20. See also, Clifford Kirkpatrick, ‘Sociological Principles and Occupied Germany,’ *American Sociological Review*, 11 (1946), 67-78.

²⁶ Allan Nevins, ‘How We Felt About the War,’ in Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone*, 14.

²⁷ Reporting from occupied Germany in 1945, the *Collier’s* war correspondent, Martha Gellhorn discovered unanimous public disavowal of any personal Nazi connection. ‘No one is a Nazi,’ she found. ‘No one ever was.’ Gellhorn, ‘Das Deutsches Volk,’ (April, 1945), repr. in *The Face of War* (London: Virago, 1986), 155-63.

²⁸ Mauldin, *Up Front*, 50. ‘G.I.s,’ notes Kennett, ‘rarely referred to German soldiers as Nazis.’ Kennett, *G.I.*, 156.

spect for the 'very professionalism of the krauts' also makes him hate them even more. 'The dogface ... hates and doesn't understand a man who can, under orders, put every human emotion aside, as the Germans can and do.'²⁹ This front line view suggests a much more problematic conception of the German enemy. Mauldin's infantrymen were certainly antagonistic to any 'abstract' formulation which claimed a demonstrable distinction between (good) Germans and (bad) Nazis. We can also see here the problem of a wartime discourse which assiduously promoted - often at a considerable distance from the front - a simplified stereotype of the German enemy. As Mauldin shrewdly acknowledges, the sentiments of his fellow GIs to the German enemy were complex and paradoxical. Their attitudes, based on their own direct experience, were resistant to simplistic, stereotypical definitions.

The Japanese, however, were *different*: they were seen fundamentally as a race apart.³⁰ The construction of Japan as an enemy nation was subject to processes altogether different from those which produced the German enemy. Japan became uniquely a different category of enemy. The Japanese enemy was represented in a discourse of intense racial hatred. Dixon Wecter, for example, provides a summary of 'Japanese' typically instrumental in this discourse: 'Still greater hatred boils against the Japanese, with their studied Oriental sadism and refusal to pay even lip-service to the rules of the game,' he asserts. 'The death-march on Bataan, execution of flyers in Tokyo, beheading of prisoners, killing of medics trying to help the wounded, and machine-gunning of life rafts, add up to a rancor that generations are not likely to forget.'³¹ Wecter's account, drawing on typical press coverage, indicates not only a different degree of hatred for the enemy, but a different *kind* of hatred. The Japanese are characterised here by a catalogue of atrocities which became *per se* the terms by which they were defined. It was an enemy which, according to media reports and associated punditry, existed outside any (Western) notion of 'civilisation.' It is significant that Wecter's account refers to

²⁹ Ibid, 51-3.

³⁰ See, John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, rev. edn (New York: Pantheon, 1993). Dower brilliantly reconceptualises the Pacific war in *racial* terms.

³¹ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 488.

'studied Oriental sadism.' In one sense, the phrase implies that 'sadism' is already racially inscribed in the Japanese as an intrinsic 'Oriental' characteristic; but in another, this sadism is 'studied,' suggesting that it has been willingly learned, culturally inculcated. Thus, 'sadism' is both racially and culturally determined by 'Oriental.'

It is also significant that the Japanese should be represented by Wecter in terms of *American* attitudes. We can see in this dichotomy between America and Japan the Western discourse of the East which Edward Said has theorised as 'orientalism.'³² 'Orientalism,' according to Said, is constituted by a European (Western) conceptualisation or 'invention' of the Eastern Other.³³ Within this conceptual framework, the Japanese Other - as the subject of fascination, fear and loathing - became a contemporary manifestation of an execrated archetype which was embedded in a long historical tradition which more recently had taken the form of a 'Yellow Peril' discourse.³⁴ If Germans could be seen as ideologically recuperable once separated from the Nazi '*system*,' the Japanese, as a 'species,' were irretrievably beyond the pale.³⁵

American hatred for the Japanese was based on, and legitimated by, an aggregate of representations of *dehumanisation*.³⁶ It exploited through language and imagery a rhetorical strategy which characterised the Japanese as non-human, insistently comparing them with apes, dogs, reptiles, insects, rats and other vermin.³⁷ In a discourse which repeatedly contrasted the Japanese with the German enemy, Germans seemed at least relatively human.³⁸ 'In Europe,' wrote the war correspondent Ernie Pyle, 'we felt that our

³² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

³³ That is, 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient ... the systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.' Ibid, 3.

³⁴ See Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 9-10, 37, 155-63.

³⁵ Attitudes towards the German enemy allowed for recognition of the category of the 'good German' in a way that was inconceivable for the Japanese. The very notion of a 'good Japanese' was a contradiction in terms. See, for example, Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 8, 78-9.

³⁶ See, for example, Linderman, *World Within War*, 161-73. Linderman traces several categories of dehumanisation imputed to the Japanese. They were incomprehensible, crazy, indifferent to, or contemptuous of, the value of human life, including even their own. There was, after all, no national counterpart to the suicidal imperative in Japanese military culture: the *banzai* charge and *kamikaze* mission, the suicidal tendency in the face of defeat. Even in the treatment of their own wounded, often abandoned or killed, there seemed incontrovertible evidence of unfathomable inhumanity.

³⁷ See Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 81-93; Linderman, *World Within War*, 168-73.

³⁸ Hatred of the Japanese far exceeded that of the Germans. See, Dower *War Without Mercy*, 8, 33-7, 48-52, 77-81.

enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But ... the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman or repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.³⁹ 'Japanese' became a correlative for the inhuman and the inhumane signifying a people who were seen to be without the faculty for human emotion. Stereotypical representations of the dehumanised, emotionless 'Jap' became standardised throughout popular culture.⁴⁰

At the same time, the Japanese state was represented as a form of national totalitarianism which seemed even more 'total' than that of Nazi Germany. Accounts of Japanese nationalism often attempted to 'explain' the Japanese soldier as a product of state culture. This was frequently represented as the antithesis of Americanism, as the apotheosis of a state of *unfreedom* and conformity. Hanson W. Baldwin, for example, provides a representative illustration of this view. He typically saw Japanese soldiers drawn from a feudalistic tradition, 'accustomed to absolute obedience, stoicism and repression,' and inculcated with a quasi-religious nationalism with 'spiritual training' and 'loyalty to the emperor-god' together with 'a blind obedience to customs, traditions, duties and orders.' Here, in a contrast between the Japanese and American soldier, 'the Japanese equivalent of GI Joe' is reducible to componentry in a totalitarian state culture, 'a regimented soldier, one trained to unquestioned obedience to authority, but without the same initiative, sense of humor or gift of improvisation which is the strength of the American soldier.'⁴¹

As the American soldier found himself up against a subhuman, animalistic enemy, he also found himself caught up in the enemy's own terrain and, in the Pacific theatre, that terrain was usually the jungle. In an analysis which links jungle topology to national identity, Linderman argues that this was a uniquely awful kind of terrain for GIs, especially

fearful and forbidding.⁴² Many who experienced it have testified to the strange,

³⁹ Ernie Pyle, *Last Chapter* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), 5. See also, for example, E. B. (Sledgehammer) Sledge, 'Tales of the Pacific,' in Terkel, "*The Good War*", 61-2.

⁴⁰ For example, in *Destination Tokyo* (1944), Captain Cassidy (Cary Grant) reiterates this stereotype. 'The Japs don't understand the love we have for *our* women,' he says. 'They don't even have a word for it in their language.'

⁴¹ Baldwin, 'This Is the Army We Have to Defeat,' *New York Times Magazine* (July 29, 1945), 5.

⁴² Linderman, *World Within War*, 170-3.

dark, sinister power of a space which seemed to have an identity of its own. Moreover, it was often seen as the 'natural' habitat of the Japanese soldier, one which lent itself to concealment and invisibility, and to his preferred 'sneak' tactics of 'underhand' traps and tricks. We might say that the 'unreadable' jungle was possessed of an 'inscrutability' often imputed to the Japanese themselves. As jungle terrain provided the Japanese with a 'natural' military advantage, it also appeared to represent the nature of Japanese national identity. Conversely, Americans preferred ridges, 'grassy heights' and 'open spaces' as their 'natural terrain.' These, according to John Hersey, were 'American.'⁴³ The primeval jungle seemed to nullify the codes of conventional warfare and repudiate the very notion of (American) civilisation. It also served to corroborate the mythologised Japanese soldier as a 'jungle animal.'

When Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbour on 7th December, 1941, both the time and the place became uniquely inscribed in American consciousness. The act was memorialised in FDR's famous phrase, by its 'infamy.'⁴⁴ The 'unprovoked and dastardly attack' was seen as *prima facie* evidence of a monstrous, vile and treacherous enemy. Following Pearl Harbour and throughout the war, the meaning of 'Japanese' would be inscribed with the vestigial memory of this 'infamy.' In the aftermath of Pearl Harbour, 'Japanese' was sharply abbreviated to 'Jap' which would become the universal designation of the Japanese aggressor. It was a term which conflated 'enemy' and 'race' and crystallised national sentiments against the Japanese racial Other. But the term also applied to Japanese-Americans. National outrage, frustration and hostility, unable to find outward expression against the Japanese enemy abroad, turned inwards upon its own Japanese-American population. With the advent of war, Japanese-Americans were vicariously identified with the enemy without and immediately stigmatised as 'the enemy within.' Here, as the sociologist Robert Redfield has suggested, Japanese-Americans were conspicuously identifiable by the 'label' of their racial difference and 'find themselves regarded not merely as aliens of another race but as enemy aliens of another

⁴³ Quoted, *ibid*, 170.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Phillips, 'Day of Infamy,' in *1940s*, 44-70.

race.’⁴⁵ In other words, where ‘race’ was equated with ‘enemy’ and ‘Jap’ in general signified ‘enemy’ in particular, Japanese-Americans became a home-front correlative for the ‘infamy’ and ‘atrocities’ of the Japanese enemy abroad: ‘The pain we suffered at Pearl Harbor and on Bataan turns again within us when we see a face or hear a name that stands for our Japanese enemies.’⁴⁶ These national sentiments were encapsulated in the phrase, ‘A Jap’s a Jap,’ which ‘explained’ the problem of the racially unregenerate enemy alien at home and ‘justified’ the policy for dealing with it.⁴⁷

That policy was internment.⁴⁸ Within a few months after Pearl Harbour, over 110,000 Japanese-Americans (largely centred on the West Coast) had been peremptorily removed from their homes and communities and compulsorily interned in what were euphemistically described as ‘relocation centers’ but which we can more accurately call concentration camps.⁴⁹ The policy was rapidly formulated and implemented in circumstances which made it seem a matter of unquestionable necessity. Internment meant that Japanese-Americans *en masse* were stripped of their civil rights and subjected to imprisonment without trial. All suffered losses of their property and belongings. They were housed in ‘relocation centers’ which resembled prison camps where living conditions were grimly inadequate and unsatisfactory.⁵⁰ These were the consequences of a policy which effectively disavowed the constitutional basis and democratic structure which supposedly constituted the central principles of America’s wartime ideology. It was a policy which led directly to the wholly unconstitutional and undemocratic treatment of

⁴⁵ Robert Redfield, ‘The Japanese-Americans,’ in Ogburn, ed., *American Society in Wartime*, 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁷ The phrase, ‘A Jap’s a Jap,’ was coined in 1942 by General John L. DeWitt of the Western Defense Command. Senior military figures were often prominent in ‘Jap’ diatribes and, consequently, their utterances were legitimated by the authority of their military status. The most militant and virulent practitioner of ‘Jap’ phraseology was Admiral William F. Halsey, Commander of the South Pacific Force, whose pronouncements included ‘Kill Japs, kill Japs, kill more Japs’ (a rallying cry in the Pacific) and ‘The only good Jap is a Jap who’s been dead six months.’ See, for example, Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 157-61; Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 36, 55, 79, 85.

⁴⁸ On internment policy and the wartime treatment of Japanese-Americans, see, Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York: Penguin, 1980), 78-85; Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 155-67; Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 79-82.

⁴⁹ Wartime invariably produces a discourse in which euphemism is enlisted in the service of the state. Here, the ‘War Relocation Authority’ (WRA) and ‘relocation center’ are deployed in this way. By ‘concentration camp,’ I mean a prison in which persons, generally civilians, are unlawfully arrested, removed, segregated and held without trial, usually on the basis of their race or ethnicity, by a government authority more usually associated with the most extreme forms of totalitarian state repression.

⁵⁰ See Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 160, 161-2; Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible*, 79, 82-3.

American citizens in whom, it was readily assumed, the presumption of guilt was racially inscribed. It seemed, Polenberg surmises, 'as if the Bill of Rights had been repealed.'⁵¹ Moreover, it was a policy predicated exclusively on a discourse of racial differentiation in which 'Jap' was, in itself, sufficient explanation to justify any 'retaliatory' measures. 'Japanese Americans,' as Edgar C. McVoy notes, 'were shocked by what appeared to them an unceremonious abrogation of their citizenship rights - deprivation of liberty and property without due process of law. They ask ... "Why were we singled out for this treatment?" The layman has his pat answer. "A Jap is a Jap," has become a byword.'⁵²

The policy of internment was implemented through an official discourse involving the highest echelons of the newly-constituted wartime administration.⁵³ The policy was sustainable because national sentiment favoured it. A national mood of the most virulent animosity to 'Japs,' was sustained and normalised through the channels of popular culture, mass media and everyday life. These channels served in the orchestration of a national consensus which was so pervasive that there was little room for criticism or dissent. Sociologists often appeared to be awkwardly situated in this discourse. From a sociological perspective, the 'relocation centers' offered opportunities to study the social processes of 'new' social formations. Sociological studies of these centres often demonstrated a degree of 'scientific' detachment and objectivity which allowed them to focus on traditional areas of sociological concern while retaining a 'neutral' distance from the political circumstances in which they were produced. Here, they were interested in such areas as the factors of 'adjustment' to 'center' society and family life, especially the inter-generational relations between the *Issei* (first generation) and *Nisei* (second generation) internees.⁵⁴ One of the major problems arising from these studies is that the disinterested perspective of social science which allowed for the study of family and community often failed to take into account the circumstances in which these 'relocation'

⁵¹ Ibid, 80.

⁵² Edgar C. McVoy, 'Social Processes in the War Relocation Center,' *Social Forces*, 22 (1943), 188.

⁵³ See Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 79-80.

⁵⁴ John H. Provinse and Solon T. Kimball, 'Building New Communities in War Time,' *American Sociological Review*, 11 (1946), 396-409. See also, Leonard Bloom, 'Transitional Adjustments of Japanese-American Families to Relocation,' *American Sociological Review*, 12 (1947), 201-9; McVoy, 'Social Processes in the War Relocation Center,' 188-90; Redfield, 'Japanese-Americans,' 143-64.

societies were created. One of these studies, for example, was called 'Building New Communities in War Time,' a title suggesting an agreeable social enterprise. The principle of 'community' invariably connotes a positive value, at least until the *raison d'être* of these 'communities' is recalled.⁵⁵

At the same time, these studies occasionally provided some of the rare instances of disapproval for the 'relocation' policy which brought these 'communities' into being.⁵⁶ Indeed, against the prevailing discourse of a wartime 'Americanism' vituperatively constructed against the Japanese, such studies could posit a counter-discourse which described the processes of 'relocation' in terms which repudiated the very notion of a democratic Americanism. Here, an American racial minority group 'was uprooted from its homes and businesses, transported under military guard hundreds of miles inland, and set down in new, strange, un-American and isolated surroundings behind barbed-wire fences patrolled by military police.'⁵⁷ Clearly, such a description is more suggestive of America's totalitarian enemies and evokes conditions to be found in, say, occupied Poland rather than in America. The line of demarcation between American democracy and German Fascism wasn't, then, as clearly defined as it needed to be. Moreover, there were fears about the effects on American attitudes of a policy which lent itself so readily to comparison with totalitarian state repression. Redfield, for example, raised questions about the postwar implications of a government policy which could be seen to legitimate unconstitutional and anti-democratic measures and, consequently, to establish the conditions for right-wing extremist organisations.⁵⁸ Quasi-Fascist groups such as the 'Native Sons of the Golden West' campaigned for the annulment of citizenship rights of Japanese-Americans on racial grounds. 'This time,' Redfield points out, 'this is being advocated not in Nazi Germany but California, U.S.A.'⁵⁹

⁵⁵ 'Community,' writes Raymond Williams, is 'the warmly persuasive word' which 'unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society, etc.*) ... seems never to be used unfavourably.' Williams, *Keywords*, 76.

⁵⁶ For a particularly astute and cogent summary of the background factors, see Provinse and Kimball, 'Building New Communities in War Time,' 398.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 396.

⁵⁸ Redfield, 'Japanese-Americans,' 158-63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 159.

In the context of these concerns with America's democratic future, returning veterans were often seen as politically dangerous and particularly suggestible to right-wing extremism.⁶⁰ Donald Becker, for example, saw the veteran as a social force potentially capable of being 'agitated and directed toward self-aggrandizement by possible neo-totalitarian interests.'⁶¹ For Waller, the 'highly organizable' veteran was susceptible to Fascist demagoguery and vulnerable to exploitation by such groups as the Ku Klux Klan (then operating covertly as the 'United Sons of America') which recruited ex-servicemen under the guise of veteran employment services. Bolte similarly highlights the dangers of 'Klannish' groups with 'hidden alliances' and cites the 'St. Sebastian's Brigade' (associated with Father Charles Coughlin) which had enrolled 'hundreds of thousands of servicemen.'⁶² Although Waller takes a patronising view of the veteran's political acumen ('the ready tool of the demagogue'), his fear of the disaffected ('sullen') ex-soldier, steeped in martial ideology and primed for a 'cause,' was widely shared. As social commentators often emphasised the historical connection between German veterans and the rise of Fascism, the prospect of a parallel development in postwar America seemed dangerously credible to them, a 'warning,' suggested Bolte, 'of what *could* happen.'⁶³ They feared that irrespective of the magnitude of America's victory, there remained the 'danger of a Fascist or ... a totalitarian victory' in the sense that America may have become inadvertently vulnerable to what Kirkpatrick called 'a subtle and devious borrowing from the enemy.'⁶⁴

As these concerns with America's democratic future were being debated, the 'politically dangerous' veteran was linked to another potentially dangerous figure, 'mass man.' The influx of returning servicemen was conducted on a vast scale and 'the veteran' was often seen as a metonymical representation of the category at large. After all, the veteran didn't return individually, but *en masse*. Moreover, the serviceman was now an

⁶⁰ See, for example, Bolte, *New Veteran*, 147-52; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 183-91; Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 253.

⁶¹ Becker, 'Veteran: Problem and Challenge,' 99.

⁶² Bolte, *New Veteran*, 151.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Kirkpatrick, 'Sociological Principles and Occupied Germany,' 77-8.

ex-serviceman. In other words, he was subject to a social definition not in terms of what he is or will be, but of what he *was*, a figure constituted by a militarised form of social identity. Consequently perceived as being without civilian bearings in the postwar world, he collectively constituted a new kind of threat to the social order. The 'mass man' was constructed in political, social, economic and cultural terms, but it was as a political force that he was seen as especially dangerous. Nisbet warned of impending chaos if assimilation failed to deal with 'the threat of the mass man, the disinherited creature in whom restlessness becomes sullenness, flaring finally into open rebelliousness. The mass man, being no longer a part of society, becomes its enemy.'⁶⁵ With considerable sociological interest in the rise of Germany's 'mass man' and a preoccupation with the social psychology of Fascism, many feared that the preconditions giving rise to these developments could be reproduced in America. Nisbet identified social displacement and marginalisation as a key factor in the rise of German Fascism, where the dispossessed and disaffected, 'on the margins and in the shadowy interstices of society,' became especially vulnerable to Fascist ideology.⁶⁶

In the context of these concerns, the returning veteran was often cast in the role of a stranger, a figure which loomed large as the subject of considerable scrutiny and speculation and the focus of widespread fear and anxiety. As we shall see in the next chapter, the veteran's return home, seemingly from another world, would be configured through a discourse of 'The Stranger.'

⁶⁵ Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 267.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 267-8.

Chapter 5

Between Two Worlds The Veteran and The Stranger

The social construction of 'The Veteran' as the 'Veteran Problem' had been predicated to a large extent on sociological concerns about the effects of military culture and society. These concerns, as we have seen, derived from assumptions that military experience had produced an aggregate of social, political and economic problems which coalesced in the figure of the 'conformist' veteran. At the same time, the 'Veteran Problem' was predicated on the assumption that military and civilian societies were two different 'worlds' and that the distance between them - often described as a 'gulf' - was so great as to be seemingly unbridgeable. The veteran was often seen to be returning from a world which, by definition, was remote, unpredictable and, ultimately, unknowable to those at home. We can identify here the emergence of a discourse in which the veteran, being of this world, was cast in the role of 'The Stranger.' A product of military culture and society to which he now no longer belonged, nor yet assimilated into civilian society at home, sociologists often saw the veteran as a dislocated, marginalised figure, as an outsider. The veteran-as-stranger became the generic figure in a discourse which characterised veterans as an indeterminate and ambivalent category.

In an obvious sense, the returning veteran was a figure of welcome: the long-awaited fiancé, husband, father, son or friend, home at last after an anxious and uncertain absence. But, at the same time, the veteran-stranger became the focus of widespread fears and anxieties because of his imputed *difference*. Having been away, he had also been outside the 'domestic' world and removed from its familiar terms of reference. Because his own world was unknowable to civilians, his experience there seemed to have rendered him strange and incomprehensible. In sociological terms, 'the veteran' was readily associated with models of 'the stranger' and many sociologists would insist on defining the veteran in accordance with this figure. The social configuration of the veteran-stranger

subsequently became, implicitly or explicitly, a complex and unstable figure in national debates concerned with the problem of his 'readjustment.' A phenomenal outpouring of opinion, underwritten by sociologists, effectively contributed towards the construction of the veteran as 'the stranger.' The processes of this construction can also be seen as an 'episode' in what Michael Rogin has called 'political demonology.' Rogin uses the term to describe a 'countersubversive' strategy which deploys 'the creation of monsters' by means of 'the inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization' of political opponents.¹ In this chapter, I chart the 'demonologised' configuration of the 'subversive' veteran-stranger with reference to some of the more divisive aspects of the discourse of wartime unity. And, with particular emphasis on combat, I highlight the ways in which an ideological rift was created between the civilian and military worlds.

Homecoming veterans 'were arriving as strangers,' suggests Bowker, 'being met with the wary suspicion universally accorded strangers.'² Even prior to demobilisation, a sense of growing apart had already begun to appear. According to Wecter, even the furlough, that crucial physical connection with home, seemed to prefigure a sense of spatial estrangement and alienation which set the veteran at a distance, where 'on leave, outside his home town, the G.I. often has had the sense of being essentially a stranger.'³ As sociologists had voiced concerns about the effects of the military as a 'total institution,' they now found the ex-serviceman so comprehensively institutionalised that he often couldn't relate to home at all. The testimony of servicemen themselves was frequently enlisted to 'authenticate' this view. Waller, for example, cites a letter from a soldier to his wife in which he explains that even when home on furlough, the locus of 'home' for him was the Army base where he felt he *belonged* ('You don't feel you belong anywhere else - you can't, when you're in a uniform'). "The army seemed strange

when I first got into it," he wrote, "but now everything else *but* the army seems

¹ Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), xiii.

² Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 24.

³ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 503. The distance between the serviceman and his home could be revealed prior to demobilisation when even the most eagerly anticipated visit was often found to cause disappointment and disillusionment, a condition known as 'furlough syndrome.' See, Kennett, *G.I.*, 74-5.

strange.”⁴ One of the veterans in Havighurst’s study similarly emphasised the ‘total’ effect of his military experience: “‘It seemed to me like I’d been in the army fifty years,’” he says. ‘Once accustomed to the military environment,’ Havighurst noted, ‘servicemen often tended to think of civilian life as strange, distant, and unreal.’ It seemed as if the veteran had become so far removed from the civilian world that he didn’t, and perhaps couldn’t, belong there. As Havighurst observes, ‘the serviceman seldom used even the term “civilian life.” He spoke, rather, of being “on the outside.”’⁵

The veteran’s point of view often seemed to provide irrefutable confirmation of his ‘outsider’ status, especially through the ‘confessional’ candour of many first-person accounts of the problems of homecoming. The veteran war correspondent, Edgar L. Jones, for example, found himself consigned to a kind of limbo, an indeterminate, intermediate space (‘lost between two worlds’) in which it was difficult to relate emotionally to home, ‘to regain those lost emotions which enable a man to take his place in civilian life.’ Jones is describing a sense of emotional anaesthesia which set him apart from everyday life. ‘I actually feel like a stranger in my own home,’ he says, ‘because everyday living in America requires emotional responses which I am incapable of giving.’⁶ The veteran was typically characterised by this condition of displacement and separation which situated him *outside* civilian society. For Pratt, the veteran had been so comprehensively changed by his experience of the military world that he had been rendered ‘different’ in virtually every aspect of his existence and consequently seemed to his family to be ‘almost a stranger.’⁷ For Waller, the rift between the two worlds could not be more extreme. ‘Civilians do not understand the veteran. ... He has become an alien.’⁸

As these sociological accounts repeatedly demonstrate, ‘The Veteran’ was becoming insistently reproduced as ‘The Stranger.’ Like the stranger in Georg Simmel’s description, the veteran was seen as a paradoxical figure, as ‘the man who comes today and

⁴ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 31.

⁵ Havighurst, et al, *American Veteran Back Home*, 23.

⁶ Jones, ‘The Soldier Returns,’ *Atlantic Monthly* (January, 1944), 42.

⁷ He was ‘different in hundreds of little ways from the man his family knew before he went away; different in his outlook on life; different in his manner of doing things; different in his sense of values; different in his likes and dislikes.’ Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 7.

⁸ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 193.

stays tomorrow,' representing a 'structure ... of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement.' For many sociologists, the veteran was seen in terms of an intermediate status comparable with Simmel's stranger, as 'near and far *at the same time*.'⁹ Zygmunt Bauman has theorised the stranger as Other, a configuration of ambiguity and incongruity who 'brings into the inner circle the kind of difference and otherness anticipated and tolerated only at a distance.' The stranger is dangerous, says Bauman, because of the 'ambiguity of his status' which threatens the integrity of 'native identity.' He is discredited through the inscription of stigma to some innocuous feature of his outward appearance which comes to signify 'an *imputed* iniquity or moral turpitude.' When 'the problem of the "domestication" of the stranger' is defined according to the question of his 'assimilation-through-acculturation,' it betokens acceptance of his 'inferiority, undesirability or out-of-placeness.' For the stranger, like the veteran, 'readjustment' is made necessary by the presumption of a 'disreputable' past. And, once designated, he is indelibly marked by the stigma of that past: 'The stranger cannot cease to be a stranger. He can only become a *former stranger*; a person constantly under pressure to be someone other than who he is.' Moreover, 'The Stranger' is not known as an individual but according to the generic category by which he is defined: his individuality, like that of 'The Veteran,' becomes 'dissolved in the category' so that an 'individual stranger is cast metonymically as a microcosm of the category at large.' For Bauman, 'it is not the failure to acquire native knowledge that constitutes the outsider as a stranger; it is the existential constitution of the stranger which makes the native knowledge unassimilable.'¹⁰ The veteran-stranger isn't a foreigner as he is for Simmel and Bauman, but one constituted domestically by his difference as a prototypical American.

The veteran-stranger was constructed partly on the basis of a more general and longstanding sociological interest in models of social displacement, with dispossessed figures situated outside, in between, or on the margins of 'home' society. This type of

⁹ Simmel, 'The Stranger' [1908], in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed., Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 143, 145, 148.

¹⁰ Bauman, 'Strangers: The Social Construction of Universality and Particularity,' *Telos*, 78 (1988-89), 9, 11-13, 15-16, 18-19.

marginal figure, can be found, for example, in Everett V. Stonequist's prewar study, conceptualised as 'Marginal Man.' Robert E. Park has characterised this figure through a model in which the 'marginal man' is situated uncertainly in two mutually incompatible and antagonistic societies: 'The fate which condemns him to live, at the same time, in two worlds is the same which compels him to assume, in relation to the worlds in which he lives, the rôle of a cosmopolitan and a stranger.'¹¹ 'Marginal Man' was continually applied as a conceptual figure to define the condition of the veteran. Nisbet, for example, saw the difference between the two worlds as being so great that the veteran would find himself belonging in neither, adrift in a 'chartless and unnavigable' homeland, 'a marginal figure, no longer a part of military society, nor yet a member of civilian society.'¹²

The veteran, as a 'marginal man,' was perceived increasingly as the subject of social estrangement and alienation. This was partly attributable to the remote nature of his experience which, by definition, could not be known by the civilian. Also, because of the nature of this experience, the veteran was often unwilling, or unable, to talk about it. As Christopher La Farge has suggested, 'he cannot tell a man or a woman who has not been in combat what it is like; it is an incommunicable experience.' Consequently, between the veteran and the civilian, 'there will be a huge gulf of unshared experience.'¹³ It was a 'gulf of experience' rendered 'unbridgeable,' claimed Hollingshead. 'It will be impossible for [combatants] to communicate their inner sense of accomplishment in the fine art of killing to civilians.'¹⁴ Waller similarly emphasised this aspect of difference between them as 'the soldier is likely to discover that there is much in his life and his attitudes - whole systems of values - that he cannot share with civilians. ... The difficulties of com-

¹¹ Park, 'Introduction,' in Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* [1937], 2nd edn (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), xv, xvii. For further discussion of the term, see, Julian L. Greifer, 'Attitudes to The Stranger,' *American Sociological Review*, 10 (1945), 739-45; Alfred Schuetz, 'The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 49 (1944), 499-507; Alfred Schuetz, 'The Homecomer,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 50 (1945), 369-76.

¹² Nisbet, 'Coming Problem of Assimilation,' 263. The problem of the soldier's 'marginal position,' Nisbet is saying, derives from a fundamental incompatibility between the two societies. Because civilian society had no equivalent for the 'paternalistic security' of the Army, the soldier would be unable to find any sense of 'certainty' there. His 'marginal position' - *between* these societies - was therefore one of stasis, 'one from which he cannot and will not wish to go back, and from which advancement is difficult.' *Ibid*, 268.

¹³ La Farge, 'Soldier Into Civilian,' *Harper's Magazine* (March, 1945), 344.

¹⁴ Hollingshead, 'Adjustment to Military Life,' 446.

munication between civilians and soldiers symbolize the gulf between their two worlds.’¹⁵ It was widely assumed that this ‘gulf’ - this divide of incommunicability - would set serviceman and civilian apart and, consequently, pose a major problem in the veteran’s ‘readjustment.’ Pratt, for example, presupposed that the serviceman would have a ‘conviction that no one who had not been “over there” possibly could understand how he feels about things’ and anticipated ‘resulting loneliness, insecurity, and a sense of isolation.’¹⁶

There was considerable concern that the serviceman’s experience of combat would have been so extraordinarily awful, so far outside the terms of ordinary civilian reference, that he couldn’t possibly have endured it without becoming irrevocably changed. It was an experience, suggests Pratt, ‘so intense, so horrible, so ghoulish that no human being can adjust to it.’¹⁷ There was also concern about the disparity between the actualities of combat and generalised perceptions of them. ‘Battle action,’ suggests Bowker, ‘was so vivid and dramatic and stark that it properly overshadowed the war picture as reported to those at home by letters, war correspondents, photographs, and movies.’¹⁸ In this sense, the experiential ‘world’ of combat and its realities - fighting, killing, dying - were incommunicable to those who weren’t there. Civilian perceptions of combat were vicariously speculative, necessarily mediated through ‘official’ war narratives and authorised within the permissible limits of military and governmental restrictions.¹⁹ For example, when George Strock’s famous photograph of three dead GIs on the beach at Buna appeared in *Life* magazine, it was the first to provide visual evidence for those at home that *American* deaths had become an incontrovertible fact of combat.²⁰ Its publication seemed to confirm a commitment to convey to the American public an uncompro-

¹⁵ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 32. See also, 35.

¹⁶ Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁸ Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 68.

¹⁹ The ‘war picture’ was, of course, ideologically drawn and organised according to a wide-ranging system of restrictions and controls. On the censorship of servicemen’s letters, see, for example, Kennett, *G.I.*, 118; of war reporting, see, Frederick S. Voss, *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 19-39; of visual images, see, George H. Roeder, Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); of films, see Koppes, ‘Regulating the Screen,’ 262-81.

²⁰ ‘Three Americans,’ *Life* (September 20, 1943), 34-5.

mising sense of the 'realism' of combat.²¹ But, at the same time, all three figures are shown to retain their bodily integrity and seem *fallen* rather than killed. Moreover, the men are eulogised in the editorial which invokes a vivid iconography of the Americana for which they had stood as 'three fragments of that life we call American life.' The men, whose faces we cannot (and may not) see, are symbolically memorialised as 'three units of freedom' and, accordingly, they retain a sense of dignified integrity commensurate with the grave inscription of 'freedom' which they bear. But here, as in other official narratives, American servicemen never suffered evisceration or dismemberment and casualties were only ever 'decently' killed. Representations of this kind collectively produced for domestic consumption what we might describe as a *cleanly* version of combat.

Many servicemen, especially those with combat experience, resented what they saw as the anodyne or gung-ho representations of combat which were in circulation at home.²² They also resented civilian perceptions of the war front which such misrepresentations produced and maintained. Wecter, for example, noted how soldiers objected to press reports which treated the war 'as if it were a kind of Rose Bowl game.'²³ Moreover, as Wecter and other commentators often suggested, there were already many other aspects of the civilian world which the soldier disliked, especially when they seemed to him contrary to the war effort. He disliked 'to hear of "the gravy train" in civil life. ... black market, gas-stranded tourists in Florida, lavish spending in night clubs. ... Rumors of chiseling, profiteering, indifference to the war.'²⁴ He was, suggests Waller, 'contemptuous of civilians and 4Fs and all who are not doing their bit in uniform' and contemptuous, too, of the 'slackers' and 'swivel-chair heroes ... *embusqués*' at home. 'The soldier is bitter,' says Waller, 'because civilians see the glamor of war and gloss

²¹ Publication of the photograph, justified in an accompanying editorial, was only made possible by authorisation at the highest levels of state. FDR, Elmer Davis [Head of the Office of War Information] and the War Department, reported *Life*, 'decided that the American people ought to be able to see their own boys fall in battle.' *Ibid*, 34.

²² For example, the *Time* war correspondent, Robert Sherrod, concluded his account of the Tarawa campaign with an indictment of the 'vivid' press coverage of the Pacific Theatre which may have 'impressed the reading public' at home, but not 'the miserable, bloody soldiers in the front lines.' So falsely was the war reported, Sherrod suggested, 'it was no wonder that our soldiers spat in disgust.' Sherrod, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 149-51.

²³ Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 505.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

over its ugliness.’²⁵ For Jones, the GIs’ perspective of ‘home’ was becoming uncompromisingly rancorous as they showed their ‘bitter contempt for the home front’s abysmal lack of understanding, its pleasures and comforts, and its nauseating capacity to talk in patriotic platitudes.’²⁶ Although ‘home’ was assiduously promoted in the discourse of national unity, we can see here the consolidation of an altogether oppositional discourse in which ‘home’ was becoming for many servicemen the target of resentment and contempt, attitudes precipitated by the civilian tendency to ‘gloss over’ *their* wartime experience. Here, as Fussell has conjectured, the typically subversive and contemptuous attitudes of troops were attributable to their ‘conviction that optimistic publicity and euphemism had rendered their experience so falsely that it would never be readily communicable.’ Its representations of their world ‘to the laity,’ Fussell contends, were ‘systematically sanitized.’²⁷

But the narratives of veterans themselves would come to tell a different story and only much later would historians begin to reassess the conventional narratives of ‘the good war’ when they began to challenge the validity of the ‘sanitized’ accounts of combat.²⁸ Of these, I want to draw on a memoir of the Pacific war by the Marine veteran, Eugene Sledge, in order to illustrate the kind of GI experience of combat - *their* experience - which, hitherto, had failed to find expression in the master narrative of ‘the good war.’²⁹

²⁵ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 20, 98-101.

²⁶ Jones, ‘One War Is Enough,’ *Atlantic Monthly* (February, 1946), 49.

²⁷ Fussell, *Wartime*, 267-8.

²⁸ Wartime’s ‘gloss-over’ combat narratives were subsequently reaffirmed by postwar historians who contributed retrospectively to the conceptualisation of ‘the good war.’ Fussell usefully catalogues a series of ‘unofficial’ wartime narratives under the rubric of “‘The Real War Will Never Get in the Books’” and effectively demythologises the ‘official’ discourse of ‘the good war.’ See Fussell, *Wartime*, 267-97. See also, Adams, *Best War Ever*; Richard Polenberg, ‘The Good War: A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society,’ *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 100 (1992), 295-322. For the most useful work on combat, see Ellis, *Sharp End*; Linderman, *World Within War*; Jones, *WWII* (which also provides an exceptional anthology of war art and the visual culture of combat). See also, Kennett, *G.I.*, 127-90; Adams, *Best War Ever*, 94-113. See also the four-part television series, ‘Hell in the Pacific’ (‘Inferno,’ ‘Purgatory,’ ‘Armageddon,’ ‘Apocalypse’). Director/Producer: Jonathan Lewis. Channel 4 (UK) (June, 14, 21, 28, July, 5, 2001). There has been a tendency amongst military historians to eschew treatment of what was, after all, the *raison d’être* of combat: *killing*. See Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-To-Face Killing In Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999).

²⁹ E. B. Sledge, *With The Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Sledge’s haunting account is indispensable for an understanding of combat in the Pacific theatre. Sledge is also a contributor to Terkel’s oral history, “*Good War*,” 59-66. (The quotation marks around the title highlight what Terkel sees as the incongruity of the phrase). See also, William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

Some commentators at home had already alluded to grim wartime practices, especially in the Pacific war. Waller, for example, noted how ‘soldiers knock the [gold] teeth out of the mouths of dead Japanese and keep them for souvenirs.’³⁰ The description, however gruesome, is quite generalised. Sledge is more specific and, indeed, more mundane. Such episodes were quite routine, as he recounts: ‘The way you extracted gold teeth was by putting the tip of the blade on the tooth of the dead Japanese - I’ve seen guys do it to wounded ones - and hit the hilt of the knife to knock the tooth loose.’³¹ The matter-of-fact description suggests a kind of orthodox military procedure which might almost be found in a training manual. The practice was legitimated because the ‘rules’ of combat scarcely applied in the Pacific war and it was countenanced through a powerful group sanction.³² In any ‘civilised’ context, the desecration of a corpse is a social taboo and universally regarded as a barbaric act because the treatment of the dead is governed by strict protocols of ceremonial dignity and respect. In the Pacific, however, there were no protocols whatsoever. Sledge recounts an incident in which a Marine officer - ‘a decent, clean-cut man’ - went to painstaking lengths ‘to blast off’ the head of a corpse’s penis and, on other occasions, habitually urinated in the mouths of the Japanese dead.³³ Here, the values of a ‘civilised’ society no longer had any commonly accepted meaning. The ‘civilised’ world had been superseded by what Sledge calls ‘a nether world of horror’ which ‘eroded the veneer of civilization and made savages of us all.’³⁴ Thus, even for soldiers who had experienced the worst of combat, there remained an-

³⁰ Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 51-2.

³¹ Sledge, in Terkel, *“Good War”*, 62. Soldiers used their K-bar (a seven-inch fighting knife) for this purpose.

³² “‘All the other guys are doin’ it.’” Ibid. Even prior to their landing at Guadalcanal, there was a sense of anticipation among marines of this aspect of the Pacific war. Richard Tregaskis quotes from the Marine ritual of pre-combat bravado: “‘They say the Japs have a lot of gold teeth. I’m going to make myself a necklace.’” Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York: Random House, 1943), 15. For a fictional account of a ‘souvenirs’ expedition, including a description of the extraction of teeth from a Japanese cadaver, see Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* [1948], new edn (London: Flamingo, 1999), 212-22.

³³ Sledge, *With The Old Breed*, 198-9.

³⁴ Ibid, 121.

other remote and unknown dimension of 'up there,' a world of inconceivable savagery.³⁵

Within the grim 'souvenir' culture of the Pacific, body parts became valued 'collectors' items.³⁶ Skulls were prized as ornaments and trophies. If these macabre practices emerged from the specific cultural determinants of the other world 'up there,' it might be thought that knowledge of them would be confined to that region as a space with its own discrete and secret knowledge shared only by its own fraternity. Knowledge of these practices *outside* would allow the 'civilised' world illicit entry into its 'forbidden' territory and to glimpse its unspeakable depravity and horror. But if the hellish world of these remote Pacific regions seemed to offer confirmation of the disintegration of civilised values, it is significant that knowledge of it did not remain there with its perpetrators. News of the GIs' 'souvenir' culture spilled outwards from the Pacific and soon reached home. As Linderman has pointed out, 'Japanese body parts became prized souvenirs, preferred trophies of the war coveted ... from war front to home front.'³⁷ In what might be seen as a 'cultural' bridge between the two fronts, many of these 'souvenirs' were dispatched home.³⁸ The practice received public acknowledgement with the publication in *Life* magazine of Ralph Crane's well-known photograph of a sailor's sweetheart with a Japanese skull ('Arizona war worker writes her Navy boyfriend a thank-you note for the Jap skull he sent her').³⁹ The photograph shows the woman in contemplative pose, gazing uncertainly at the 'souvenir.' The image, obviously staged for the camera, depends for its effect on the whimsical juxtaposition of the elegant woman and the macabre skull. If the image is shocking, it also appears 'entertaining'

³⁵ Sledge provides numerous instances of such savagery. 'I saw this Jap machine-gunner squattin' on the ground. One of our Browning automatic riflemen had killed him. Took the top of his skull off. It rained all night. This Jap gunner didn't fall over for some reason. He was just sitting upright in front of the machine gun. His arms were down at his sides. His eyes were wide open. It had rained all night and the rain had collected inside of his skull. We were just sittin' around on our helmets, waiting to be relieved. I noticed this buddy of mine just flippin' chunks of coral into the skull about three feet away. Every time he'd get one in there, it'd splash. It reminded me of a child throwin' pebbles into a puddle. It was just so unreal. There was nothing malicious in his action. This was just a mild-mannered kid who was now a twentieth-century savage.' What makes this incident especially horrific is the sense of the young soldier as having been rendered so *passive*: distracted, indifferent, remote, vaguely childlike, scarcely mindful of what he saw and did, inured to the circumstances of his environment. *Ibid.*, 62-3.

³⁶ On 'souvenir' culture, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 61-6, 70-1; Linderman, *World Within War*, 77-8, 180-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁸ 'Servicemen mailed home home a variety of body parts.' *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁹ *Life* (May 22, 1944), 35.

and, while it hints at 'something' atrocious about the Pacific war, this can only be referenced obliquely via an almost surrealistic representation. The narrative image raises several questions about the skull - How did he get it? Why did he send it to her? What did he think she would make of it? What did she really make of it? What did she think of him for sending it? - which necessarily remain unanswered. If the picture suggests the possibility of a connection between serviceman and sweetheart, between the awful world of combat and the domestic world of home, it also implies the absurdity of any kind of mutual understanding across the 'gulf of unshared experience.' Indeed, it raises another question. As Jones puts it: 'What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway?'⁴⁰

Sociologists were also concerned about civilian perceptions of the serviceman's experience of combat which, they believed, created a further dimension to 'the veteran problem' and raised yet further questions about his 'readjustment.' Because of the incommunicable nature of such experience, it remained an unknowable region of the veteran's former world and, in this sense, he was seen as an unknown quantity. Here, as the *post-combat* veteran, he came to be viewed as a dangerously strange and unpredictable figure. The figure of the veteran-as-stranger was produced to a large extent through a discourse of what can be seen as media opportunism. The media exploited wartime terms of reference to define demobilisation as a cataclysmic social phenomenon and, consequently, to mythologise 'the veteran' as an epically catastrophic figure. Demobilisation, according to a media survey conducted by Bowker, was widely reported as an 'invasion' by a new kind of 'enemy' - servicemen themselves - who, having fought abroad, would now turn against the 'PFCs' ('Poor Fucking Civilians') at home.⁴¹ In a discourse which insistently linked the already newsworthy veteran with criminality, a proliferation of sensationalist crime stories, usually involving violence, invariably defined the crime ac-

⁴⁰ A question to which Jones provides this (unglossed) answer: 'We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers.' Jones, 'Soldier Returns,' 49.

⁴¹ Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 25,

according to a veteran perpetrator. So many press reports made an implicit connection between the veteran and violent crime that the veteran-as-criminal became an immediate postwar stereotype. Headlines such as 'Former Soldier Charged in Wife's Bolo Knife Death' became a newspaper staple. Other accounts made a more explicit connection between combat experience and an imminent crime wave. For example, there was a perception that veterans had been trained by the Army to be reflexive, cold-blooded killers and that is what they would remain when they came home. Bowker cites a report in the *Boston Post* from February, 1945, which warned of the dangers of those soldiers 'educated to kill' who 'cannot ... readjust themselves to the ways of normal life' and who, consequently, 'will lean to a life of crime.' In addition, both the police and the FBI were reported to be concerned about the criminological implications of the combat-trained veteran.⁴²

Amidst these fears and anxieties about the psychological effects of combat experience, the veteran's readjustment became subject to a discourse of medicalisation in which 'the veteran problem' was increasingly defined in terms of psychopathology. In what can be seen as a parallel development to sociology's emergence as a new 'scientific' discipline, psychological science, especially psychiatry, was also beginning to consolidate an increasingly influential position as a newly professionalised 'field' and, hence, as a newly constituted form of social power. Psychiatry was in the process of becoming a new form of *inflective* social power, increasingly providing the perceptual terms of reference for social analysis which were becoming more generally assimilated in wartime society at large. Sociological studies of the veteran were similarly concerned with the psychological effects of combat.⁴³ As wartime had provided opportunities for the development of social science, it also provided psychological science with the means

⁴² Ibid, 25-30. These stories employed a standard technique by which the assault weapon was precisely specified, often as the service-issue weapon which the veteran had brought home with him or, as here, as an 'exotic' acquisition which often signified a residual connection with the Pacific war. Another example which typically illustrates the headline formula: 'VETERAN BEHEADS WIFE WITH JUNGLE MACHETE.' Ibid, 25. See also Goulden, *Best Years*, 37-8.

⁴³ See, for example, Bowker, *Out of Uniform*, 32-6, 80-85; Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 165-9; Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 545-8; Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 81-112; Shirley A. Star, 'Psychoneurotic Symptoms in the Army,' in Stouffer, et al, *American Soldier*, II, 411-55.

to acquire influential military standing. Wartime also provided the opportunity to raise the professional profile of psychiatry with the publication of several major studies by military psychiatrists.⁴⁴ Like sociology, psychiatry played a significant military role throughout the war, a significant *medical-military* role. Psychiatrists became extraordinarily influential from the outset, playing a preeminent part in the military's Selective Service processes. Here, at induction, they administered one of a series of medical examinations with the authority to determine, on the basis of a cursory psychiatric evaluation, the inductees' psychological suitability for military service.⁴⁵ If, as William C. Menninger himself admitted, the examination was 'misunderstood' by servicemen, civilians and the medical profession at large, it nevertheless contributed towards a discourse of what we might call military 'psychiatrisation' which produced an essentially pathologised view of servicemen's wartime experience. The examination certainly 'revealed' extraordinarily high numbers of men deemed psychologically deficient and unfit for active service (approximately two million were rejected on psychiatric grounds).⁴⁶ Amongst combatants, there were approximately half a million psychiatric casualties.⁴⁷

Returning servicemen who had been diagnosed as 'neuropsychiatric' ('NP') cases were also returning with the *label* of the diagnosis. The term was relatively new but in general circulation (having superseded the obsolete 'shell shock' from World War I).⁴⁸

But it was a diagnostically imprecise term and served as something of a catch-all cate-

⁴⁴ See, for example, Edward A. Strecker and Kenneth E. Appel, *Psychiatry in Modern Warfare* (New York: Macmillan, 1945); Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *Men Under Stress* (Philadelphia: Blackiston, 1945); William C. Menninger, *Psychiatry In a Troubled World: Yesterday's War and Today's Challenge* (New York: Macmillan, 1948). For a synoptic account of the role of wartime psychiatry, see William C. Menninger, 'Psychiatry and the War,' *Atlantic Monthly* (November, 1945), 107-14. Military psychiatrists also wrote several 'primers' on the emotional problems of 'readjustment.' See, for example, Kupper, *Back To Life*.

⁴⁵ Menninger accurately described these examinations as 'sketchy' and, in the few minutes (or less) available for inspection, as little more than an exercise in 'crystal gazing.' Menninger, 'Psychiatry and the War,' 108. Ellis notes how the 'examinational procedure' of at least one psychiatrist was based on 'four rapid-fire questions. "How do you feel", "Have you ever been sick?", "Are you nervous?", "How do you think you will get along in the Army?"' But as Ellis also points out, 'this would have constituted a lengthy cross-examination' in comparison with the standard Army query: "'Do you like girls?'" Ellis, *Sharp End*, 10-11.

⁴⁶ A quite extraordinary figure which represented 32% of the total number of rejections and which, as Ellis points out, 'caused considerable alarm in both military and civilian circles.' Ellis, *Sharp End*, 10. For a psychiatrist's account of the psychological screening process at induction, see, for example, Carl Binger, 'How We Screen Out Psychological 4-F's,' *Saturday Evening Post* (January 8, 1944), 19, 75-6.

⁴⁷ Psychiatric cases accounted for the largest category of casualties in the Pacific Theatre. See, Menninger, 'Psychiatry and the War,' 109.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Ellis, *Sharp End*, 69-71, 247-55.

gory.⁴⁹ An 'NP' condition was not necessarily 'identifiable,' nor did it readily lend itself to convenient forms of clinical classification. It was also liable to misapprehension and there remained a general sense of unease about any kind of 'psycho' terminology. The label of 'neuropsychiatric' consequently implied social stigma. At the same time, the label attached to the (combat) veteran the status of Other - as a 'case' - placing him within the field of psychiatry. This was a relatively little known and understood discipline, especially in wartime applications. A seemingly obscure and 'enigmatic' branch of medical science, psychiatry was being publicly presented with what Pratt described as a 'strange and mysterious' terminology as yet unfamiliar to a public for whom 'psycho' remained largely associated with 'crazy.'

There was also a perception of the neuropsychiatric veteran which produced a civilian tendency to efface or conceal the nature of his illness. After all, its symptomatology was often disconcertingly unpredictable and unstable. For example, S. Kirson Weinberg's description of the physiological symptoms of combat syndrome encompasses 'confusion, apprehension, impaired attentive facility, irritability, restlessness, apathy, aversion to noise, battle dreams, and nightmares.' The syndrome also included a series of socially debilitating symptoms such as 'loss of confidence, self-condemnation, diminution of sociability as manifested in an aversion for crowds, an inability to sustain conversation or to meet strangers, and an intensified craving for affection and for "familiar" persons and environs.'⁵⁰ The neuropsychiatric veteran could present to civilian society an unwelcome reminder of wartime because his 'NP' symptoms often constituted, by psychiatric definition, a postwar 'replay' of his combat experience.⁵¹ Whether or not the veteran was actually diagnosed as neuropsychiatric, the experience of combat in itself brought him within the parameters of a generic 'psycho' field. Hence, the combat veteran was constructed through psychiatric discourse as a kind of generic

⁴⁹ 'Among the general public ... the term "psychoneurosis" is a scrap-basket term into which is dumped almost any and every kind of psychiatric condition.' Pratt, *Soldier to Civilian*, 95.

⁵⁰ S. Kirson Weinberg, 'The Combat Neurosis,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1946), 466.

⁵¹ The veteran subject, in his nightmare world, often saw a 'replay' of combat scenes in which his buddies and himself are on the verge of being killed, or in which the combat zone impinges on the postwar 'home.' See, *Ibid*, 471-8.

case-study. At the same time, the proliferation of psychiatric terms of reference was beginning to provide the language for society at large to participate, as it were, in the discussion of his case notes. In this sense, he represented a symptomatic manifestation of his former world together with the intrusion of a disturbed past into the postwar present of civilian life.

We can see in the construction of the veteran-as-stranger how the veteran was configured as a domestic version of the foreign Other, as a figure of ambivalence and incongruity returning home with the vestiges of his unknown past and bearing the stigma of difference, the difference of his militarised self.

Part Two

Readjustment and Film Narrative

Chapter 6
'Am I Really Home?'
Veteran 'Readjustment' and *The Best Years of Our Lives*

Three servicemen are flying home at the end of the war and, from the plexiglass nose-cone of their B-17, they 'get a nice view of the good old USA' where the landscape below them is recognisably familiar as home. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) was a significant *postwar* production, released in the context of changing perceptions of Hollywood which were beginning to raise questions about cultural value and artistic status in an industry striving for a new kind of recognition in the aftermath of wartime. As a narrative *about* returning servicemen, it was the period's most explicit dramatisation of the 'Veteran Problem' and widely credited with a 'new' kind of directness and relevance in its narrative engagement with 'real' social issues, acquiring 'flagship' status for what was often seen as the integrity implicit in its 'realistic' treatment of a momentous social problem.

At the same time, the narrative representation of its veterans' problems is made with an affirmative viewpoint at odds with claims for its 'realist' credentials. As the narrative works through these problems, it remains tied to a narrative ideology driven by a postwar 'celebratory' impulse. These problems are only seemingly resolved because the narrative is sustained by an optimistic imperative which, ultimately, allows them to be evaded. *Best Years of Our Lives* has often been read as an affirmation of postwar Americanism coming to terms with its wartime past and moving confidently towards an auspicious future. From the airborne perspective of the homeward-bound servicemen, home may have looked 'beautiful,' but, as each finds on his return, it turns out to be anything but that. In this chapter, I take account of the film as a more contradictory narrative: one ostensibly affirmative in its treatment of returning veterans but which nevertheless cannot entirely efface an underlying vision of an ineluctably uncertain postwar future, where both 'return' and 'home' are unstable terms in a narrative striving to make them secure. In order to explain how 'readjustment' discourse is played through these

narrative contradictions, we also need to see the film's connection to industry discourse and in the context of factors affecting its production and reception.

Best Years of Our Lives was released in the social context of demobilisation when it achieved phenomenal popular and critical success.¹ The film was marketed as a grandiose conception: publicised as a uniquely American epic, national advertising appeared under the rubric of 'AMERICA' and assiduously promoted its 'visionary' sense of postwar America society.² The prestigious production boasted a budget of \$3 million.³ The religiose tenor of the advertisement describes the film's genesis, quite literally, in biblical terms ("*In the beginning was the word*"), casting its producer, Samuel Goldwyn, as a kind of Old Testament prophet. The advertising copy implies that Goldwyn underwent a kind of epiphany when, 'providentially,' he came upon a photograph of returning servicemen in *Time* magazine.⁴ The image, for Goldwyn, betokened nothing less than 'his country's future' and the copy stresses Goldwyn's personal *mission*, in both a military and religious sense, in the project's magnitude.

William Wyler was 'assigned' by Goldwyn to direct *Best Years of Our Lives*, partly on the basis of his prewar reputation, partly because of a contractual obligation, and partly because Wyler's own wartime experience equipped him to undertake Goldwyn's postwar project.⁵ Wyler was himself newly-demobilised and his own veteran status was exploited in the advertisement: 'Just out of the lieutenant colonel's uniform he wore in the AAF [Army Air Forces].'⁶ He was already associated with two significant wartime productions, *Mrs Miniver* (1942) and *The Memphis Belle: A Story of a*

¹ Thomas Schatz has related the film's success to 'a huge box-office surge' attributable 'to millions of returning servicemen.' The film took over \$10 million on initial release, the highest box-office returns of the decade. Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 289, 370. The film won eight Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director. See Finler, *Hollywood Story*, 187.

² See, 'AMERICA' [advertisement], *The Best Years of Our Lives*, in, for example, *Time* (October 28, 1946), 2-3.

³ *Ibid.*, 3. A figure 'far beyond the industry average in 1946 of \$665,000.' Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 343.

⁴ 'Out of the window of a travel-soiled Pullman car stuck eleven pairs of khaki-clad shoulders, eleven faces, some smiling, some seemingly bewildered, some almost grimly expectant. Below the window were chalked two words. "Home Again!!" 'AMERICA,' 2. The original article was, 'The Way Home,' *Time* (August 7, 1944), 15-16. See also, Goulden, *Best Years*, 3-6.

⁵ On Wyler, see, Jan Herman, *A Talent for Trouble: The Life of Hollywood's Most Acclaimed Director, William Wyler* (New York: Da Capo, 1997); Axel Madsen, *William Wyler: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Crowell, 1973).

⁶ 'AMERICA,' 3. On Wyler's wartime role, see, Gary Hoppenstand, Floyd Barrows, and Erik Lunde, 'Bringing the War Home: William Wyler and World War II,' *Film & History*, 27 (1997), 108-18.

Flying Fortress (1944).

Mrs Miniver, produced in the context of national debates about American isolationism, reflected Wyler's own uncompromisingly pro-interventionist sentiments and proselytised on behalf of the Allies through a narrative sympathetic to Britain's beleaguered position.⁷ Wyler was unequivocal about the propagandist function of the narrative. 'I was concerned about Americans being isolationists,' he said. '*Mrs Miniver* obviously was a propaganda film.'⁸ In its evocation of a populist, 'Dunkirk spirit,' the narrative emphasises Britain's 'people's war' through the characteristically 'British' values exemplified by the Minivers' upper-middle-class home and family life. Its 'story of an average English middle-class family' was calculated to appeal to American sensibilities.⁹ '*Mrs Miniver*,' suggested Wyler, 'was perfect as propaganda for the British because it was a story about a family, about the kind of people audiences would care about.'¹⁰ The narrative assumed particular wartime significance when it was drawn into the discourse of wartime democracy as the 'war of the people.' FDR had the text of the vicar's 'we are the fighters' sermon - topically inflected with Churchillian rhetoric - broadcast over 'Voice of America' in Europe and printed on leaflets airdropped over occupied territories. The text was also widely published at home, appearing in *Time*, *Look*, and elsewhere.¹¹

Following *Mrs Miniver*, Wyler enlisted in the AAF where he consolidated his wartime role with *Memphis Belle*, a documentary about a B-17 (Flying Fortress) and her crew. For a wartime documentary, *Memphis Belle* received unusually extensive exhibition.¹² Like *Mrs Miniver*, *Memphis Belle* was critically acclaimed.¹³ The film was promoted as a different kind of wartime documentary narrative which, it was claimed, con-

⁷ Production began prior to Pearl Harbour. See Madsen, *William Wyler*, 212-3.

⁸ Quoted in Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 234.

⁹ Wyler's narrative deployment of 'Dunkirk' values is discursively related to Hollywood's wartime configurations of 'British.' See, H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Quoted in Madsen, *William Wyler*, 214.

¹¹ See, for example, Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 235, 489; Madsen, *William Wyler*, 217-8.

¹² See Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 268; Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 289; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 117.

¹³ Bosley Crowther's laudatory review appeared, unprecedentedly, on the front page of the *New York Times*. Crowther, 'The Memphis Belle' [review], *New York Times* (April 14, 1944), 1:2.

veyed a heightened sense of identification with the experience of airmen through camera set-ups designed to reproduce their point of view ('Fly and Fight with the Crew on an Actual Bombing Mission Over Germany').¹⁴ This shift in perspective, as Jeanine Basinger has noted, 'changes the role of the viewer from observer to participant.'¹⁵ Wyler went to considerable lengths to obtain this aerial point-of-view, often at considerable personal risk and in contravention of AAF regulations.¹⁶

Wyler's two wartime films, *Mrs Miniver* and *Memphis Belle*, together with *Best Years of Our Lives*, can be seen as a trilogy, thematically linked through common representations of what is described in *Memphis Belle* as the 'air front.' Mrs Miniver's son, Vin (Richard Ney), is an RAF pilot, and the film's closure dramatises squadrons of British aircraft seen through the bomb-damaged church roof. *Memphis Belle* 'continues' the earlier narrative with its documentary account of English-based American airmen and, in *Best Years of Our Lives*, the American servicemen return home on a B-17 in a narrative which focuses on the ex-bombardier, Fred Derry (Dana Andrews).

Wyler was one of several Hollywood directors who enlisted in the services and made military documentaries.¹⁷ *Best Years of Our Lives* was one of the newly emergent postwar productions which were seen to be more prestigiously 'artistic' and more overtly concerned with social issues. These claims for Hollywood's postwar *gravitas* were attributed to the import of the war and to filmmakers whose postwar films were legitimated by their own wartime experience and documentary work.¹⁸ The influence of the documentary signalled what was seen as a new thematic and stylistic seriousness which found expression through social realism, representing 'a new maturity' in postwar Hol-

¹⁴ The film's poster is reproduced in, for example, Hoppenstand, et al, 'Bringing the War Home,' 113.

¹⁵ Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 126.

¹⁶ During take-off and landing, Wyler occupied the aircraft's ball turret (the semi-spherical plexiglass 'bubble' beneath the fuselage) to get the shots he wanted. See Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 255-7.

¹⁷ John Ford made *The Battle of Midway* (1942); John Huston, *Report From the Aleutians* (1943) and *The Battle for San Pietro* (1945); and Frank Capra, the *Why We Fight* series (1942-45) [see Chapter 7]. On these documentaries, see Doherty, *Projections of War*, 227-64; Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 125-33. Huston also made a documentary about neuropsychiatric veteran rehabilitation, *Let There Be Light* (1946), which was banned by the War Department. On Huston's documentaries, see, 'John Huston: War Stories.' Director/Producer: Midge Mackenzie. C4 (UK) (August 28, 1999).

¹⁸ See Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 353.

lywood.¹⁹ Critical accounts of *Best Years of Our Lives* often emphasised its 'authenticity' as a postwar production. Crowther, for example, highlighting how Wyler drew on his own AAF experience, endorsed the film as a *reflection* of reality which uniquely 'catches the drama of veterans returning home.'²⁰

The film's critical reception was also linked to the discourse of readjustment via reports by veteran commentators in which 'reviews' often functioned as 'news' about the 'veteran problem' and the narrative's 'realism' was equated with its social significance.²¹ The film was subsequently lauded as a flagship production for the 'new' category of 'social problem film.'²² It also acquired quasi-official status with a significant symbolic function: 'Perhaps,' suggests Basinger, 'officially marking the end of the war.'²³

The film was invested with 'realist' status as a narrative about what Wyler described as 'real people, facing real problems' to be realised with 'as much simple realism as possible.'²⁴ To this end, Wyler adopted a self-consciously 'anti-studio' stance through a repudiation of 'artifice.' Make-up was minimised or avoided, 'so that we could really see our people, and feel their skin textures,' he said.²⁵ The cast didn't wear 'wardrobe' but 'demotic' department store clothes bought off-the-rack and worn in before production began. Characters were required to look authentic. Wyler wrote to Frederic March requesting that his 'figure suggest a K-ration diet.'²⁶ Wyler also blocked Goldwyn's attempts to have the non-professional actor, Harold Russell, coached in acting technique.²⁷ Sets were constructed, contrary to standard studio practice, to a *smaller-than-life scale*.²⁸ The film also made extensive use of location shooting which was

¹⁹ Ibid, 353, 370.

²⁰ Crowther, 'The Best Years of Our Lives' [review], *New York Times* (November 22, 1946), 27: 2.

²¹ For example, Howard A. Rusk, 'REHABILITATION,' *New York Times* (November 24, 1946), 60.

²² See, for example, Doherty, *Projections of War*, 269; Roffman and Purdy, *Hollywood Social Problem Film*, 230-33.

²³ Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 295.

²⁴ William Wyler, 'No Magic Wand,' *Screen Writer*, 11 (1947), 10. Wyler disdained Goldwyn's proposed biopic about General Eisenhower, preferring to portray 'ordinary' GIs. See Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 279.

²⁵ Wyler, 'No Magic Wand,' 10.

²⁶ Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 283.

²⁷ See, Howard Russell, with Victor Rosen, *Victory in My Hands* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1949), 192-4; Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 286.

²⁸ Madsen, *William Wyler*, 263; Herman, *Talent for Trouble*, 283.

untypical for a period in which most productions remained studio-bound. Cincinnati was used for Boone City, 'as the sort of typical American small town' envisaged in Robert Sherwood's script.²⁹ The look of the film, in contrast to 'classical' studio lighting and the characteristically low-key lighting of *film noir*, is unusually bleached, flat and grey.

We can see here the emergence of a discourse in which 'realism' was being correlated with 'quality' and claimed as *the* aesthetic form commensurate with the treatment of 'big' social issues. This realist aesthetic was often seen to have developed from wartime documentary stylistics, indexed to the *gravitas* of war. The postwar realist aesthetic was favoured by directors like Wyler, partly because it invoked the social-aesthetic value of wartime, and partly because it provided them with the means for a counter-offensive against the aesthetic hegemony maintained by Hollywood studio conventions. For Wyler, Hollywood failed to 'reflect the world in which we live' and its films were 'divorced from the main currents of our time.' For him, Hollywood was being superseded by European - especially *postwar* European - filmmakers because they (like him) were beginning to emerge after the war with special social relevance, 'because they are closer to what is happening in the world than we are.'³⁰

As Wyler began to express disdain for Hollywood, *Best Years of Our Lives* was being singled out for critical attention by the emerging French critical establishment which valorised what André Bazin described as the 'styleless style' of Wyler's realism.³¹ The 'neutrality and transparency' of this style, Bazin argues, was necessarily commensurate with a subject matter which 'demanded ... an extreme meticulousness, a quasi-documentary accuracy.' Because the film was intended as 'a civic good work,' Bazin contends, its 'realist' credentials were highlighted to endorse its 'civic' status.

But, at the same time, the film remained related to the propagandist function of wartime

²⁹ See, Martin A. Jackson, 'The Uncertain Peace: *The Best Years of Our Lives*,' in John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar, 1980), 152.

³⁰ Wyler, 'No Magic Wand,' 14.

³¹ André Bazin, 'William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing' [1948], in, Bert Cardullo, ed., *Bazin At Work: Major Essays & Reviews From the Forties & Fifties*, trans., Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9-18.

documentaries and the 'didactic mission' of the Army film unit.³² Bazin's praise for Wyler's realism didn't prevent him from highlighting its inherent contradictions and, indeed, the film's realism would be sharply criticised in ensuing debates about the problematic term.³³

As the title (unironically) suggests, *Best Years of Our Lives* is, seemingly, one of the most self-consciously affirmative and celebratory accounts of America in the post-war period. As an assimilation narrative, the film sets out schematically the stories of three returning veterans as 'typical' case-studies with a powerful narrative implication that their problems, however formidable, will assuredly be overcome. For each serviceman, 'home' is initially constituted by the impending reunion with his loved ones, a moment of intense anticipation. But none can look forward to the moment with anything other than anxiety, dread and foreboding. As they share their misgivings, the fears of combat are invoked to express the feelings of trepidation when approaching the front door ('Feels as if I were going in to hit a beach'). Their homes loom unpredictably before them and, on the threshold of experiencing 'home' as real, it suddenly becomes insecure, the 'target' of uncertainty and anxiety.

For Homer Parrish (Harold Russell),³⁴ the overwhelming concern is how his sweetheart, Wilma (Cathy O'Donnell) will react to his disability. There is a narrative implication that if Homer can reestablish his relationship with Wilma, then he can reestablish himself in other walks of life. Wilma, then, is positioned as the essential instrument through which his reconnection with the civilian world can be established. As the returning aircraft brings him closer to home, the uncertainty of Wilma's reaction is of momentous concern, intensified by the prolonged close-up of Homer's face. Al Stephenson (Fredric March) acknowledges Wilma's crucial importance ('I hope Wilma *is* a swell girl') and the others, too, recognise Homer's ordeal. Waiting for a moment in their

³² Ibid, 5.

³³ See, for example, Abraham Polonsky, "'The Best Years of Our Lives': A Review," *Hollywood Quarterly*, 2 (1947) 257-60; Robert Warshaw, 'The Anatomy of Falsehood,' *Partisan Review* (May/June 1947), repr. in *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 155-61.

³⁴ Russell, who lost both hands in a training accident, had been the subject of a Navy training film, *Diary of a Sergeant* (1945) and his story was widely reported. See, for example, 'Without Hands,' *Life* (July 23, 1945), 83-9. Wyler cast Russell as Homer having seen this film.

shared taxi to make sure he is alright - he wants to evade the impending moment with 'a couple of drinks' - they see him standing almost paralysed in Wilma's embrace, utterly incapable of expressing his feelings for her. Fred commends the Navy for its rehabilitation programme ('they sure trained that kid how to use those hooks'), but as Al points out, 'they couldn't train him to put his arms around his girl.'

Diary of a Sergeant charted Russell's progressive expertise in the use of his prosthetic 'hands,' and his role as Homer can be seen as a 'continuation' of the earlier narrative. Already capably 'dexterous,' he can't yet make the emotional adjustment to his disability, an adjustment which needs to be undertaken by himself, but which can only be accomplished *through* Wilma. He finds himself additionally handicapped by countless humiliations and indignities. Seen by civilian society as a tragic figure, personified by his disability, he has to cope with their incessant looks ('They keep staring at these hooks, or else they keep staring away from them'). While Homer's family are well-intentioned, their 'mistaken kindness' only worsens his situation and social gatherings at home become ordeals of exaggerated solicitude and fussing.

The civilian world effectively marginalises Homer and he withdraws from 'their' world, becoming increasingly morose and uncommunicative.³⁵ Unable to cope with his family at home, he retreats to the isolated refuge of his shed where he practises target shooting, a forlorn vestige of his military life. Here, taunted and mimicked by local children, he erupts with angry frustration, smashing his hooks through the windows and challenging the 'outside' world to stare openly at the 'freak.' He consequently drifts towards the more congenial and empathetic companionship of fellow servicemen.³⁶

But the public world in which his disability is on constant display is not the only one Homer has to contend with. He is also subject to a daily ritual in which his father has to undress him for bed and remove his prosthetics, rendering him helplessly

³⁵ In the novel on which the film is based, Homer's inability to cope with 'readjustment' causes his attempted suicide. One of several instances in which the film ameliorates the novel's darker narrative. MacKinlay Kantor, *Glory for Me* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1945), 242-45.

³⁶ It is significant that the three servicemen are able so spontaneously to create such a surrogate 'family' of their own. Drawn from different walks of life, thrown together at random, and knowing each other for scarcely a day, they have already formed a 'unit' which, with its ready camaraderie, appears more meaningfully familial than those of their families.

'disarmed.' His physical helplessness is correlated with sexual helplessness and, lying awake at night, his disability becomes an expression of emasculation. His disavowal of Wilma is an effect of his crisis of confidence in his own sexuality, his masculinity, and he has convinced himself that if she should see his nightly 'indignity,' she would reject him. But when, eventually, she sees his bedroom ritual, he recognises that her love for him transcends his disability. The narrative positions Wilma - literally, 'the girl next door' - in a crucial role. It suggests that after the Navy has done everything it can through rehabilitation and medical technology to ensure the disabled veteran's *physical* wellbeing, it will be through her nurturing love that his *emotional* 'readjustment' can be achieved and his disabled masculinity 'remanned.' As Homer gravitates to Butch's bar, Wilma's 'worried' phone call represents an attempt to draw him away from the servicemen's enclave and back home into domestic space with its feminised processes of recovery.

A parallel process can be seen in Al's homecoming. Unlike both Homer and Fred, Al is an older man with a longstanding marriage and family. Professional and successful, Al appears to have a more secure domestic base and more favourable prospects. In contrast to the awkwardness of Homer's family reunion, Al's is joyfully unrestrained. But despite the obvious closeness of Al's family, he feels that they have grown apart. His children, having grown up during his absence, are no longer 'his,' nor are they even 'children' any more. When his wife, Milly (Myrna Loy), asks him what he thinks of them, he can only reply, 'I don't recognise them.' This unrecognisable aspect of his children is apparent in his son, Rob's (Michael Hall) uninterested reaction to the Japanese souvenirs he has brought for him. Al discovers that Rob has also developed a different perspective on the war from his. Al's Pacific experience has seen him subscribe to expedients which will end the war whereas Rob is worried about their implications and the uncertainties of military technology in a post-Hiroshima world.

Al's family reunion doesn't last for very long and he soon begins to feel restless,

tense and awkward. Like Homer, he needs to escape from the oppressive constraints of home and he is drawn towards the society of fellow servicemen with whom 'on the town' becomes a preferable alternative. Moving frenetically from one bar to the next, Al finds release through drunken camaraderie, accompanied by his wife and daughter who look on with bemused indulgence while keeping a protective eye on his binge. Finally, it is for mother and daughter to put Al and Fred to bed, both men, drunkenly helpless, subjects of the women's care and solicitude. When they wake the following morning, both find themselves disorientated: as Al manoeuvres himself awkwardly around his 'unfamiliar' bedroom, he scarcely recognises himself in his 'new' surroundings while Fred seems to find incomprehensible the frilly canopy of his bed, an indication of unfamiliar feminine space (although, in a momentary recollection of former experiences, he suddenly checks his money to ensure he hasn't been robbed). Like the other men, Al has to contend with the actuality of a home which has existed for him hitherto only as a recurrent refrain in the realm of the imaginary: 'I had a dream,' he says. 'I dreamt I was home. I had that dream hundreds of times before this. I wanted to find out if it's really true. Am I really home?' The answer, however, remains unclear, complicated by a disjuncture between the distant object of yearning and its realisation. This is similarly true about Al's perception of Milly. As he says when attempting to dance with her, 'in a way, you remind me of my wife,' a drunken observation which nevertheless reveals something of the paradox of his perception. His estrangement from her is revealed in other little tell-tale ways too, as when he offers her a cigarette only to be reminded that she doesn't smoke.

Fred's homeward journey is even more fraught. Indeed, he cannot even find out where 'home' is and even the whereabouts of his wife are uncertain. Married to Marie (Virginia Mayo), their married life has amounted to less than three weeks together. Fred is returning to a 'typical' war marriage in which husband and wife scarcely know each other. As Al wryly observes, 'You and your wife will have a chance to get acquainted.'

Fred eventually arrives at his parents' house expecting to see Marie, but she is nowhere to be found. Denied the 'moment' of reunion granted to the others, there is an implication that, in her absence, something is wrong. He learns that she has taken a 'downtown' apartment and got a job in a night club. His efforts to locate her are constantly thwarted ('Why don't you call your wife?' 'I don't know her number'). Even when he finally locates her address, he can't get into her apartment building and, significantly, it is only after another man has done so that he can.

Drawn increasingly to Al's daughter, Peggy (Teresa Wright), Fred senses that even before he sees her again, Marie is 'wrong' for him, whereas Peggy may be 'right.'³⁷ Indeed, as he intuitively knows and subsequently discovers, Marie is far from being a 'swell girl' (like Wilma and Peggy). She may have been the airman's enviably glamorous 'pin-up' but he now finds her a 'tramp.' With her allowance from Fred supplemented by 'earnings' from the Blue Devil, Marie is a 'good-time' girl for whom the war has provided abundant opportunities to enjoy a profligate and promiscuous lifestyle. Her marriage provided her with a convenient source of income and an 'imaginary' husband who, in his absence at least, could be romanticised as a heroic figure. For both Fred and Marie, the uncertainties of wartime separation cast doubts on their sexual fidelity which becomes the focus of recriminations. He is ousted from Marie's apartment after challenging another ex-serviceman he finds making himself at home there ('Have *you* had any trouble getting readjusted?') In a narrative dichotomy between competing versions of postwar female identity, Marie, situated here in opposition to Wilma and Peggy, is sexually and morally chaotic, a disruptive and destabilising force.

Marie's failure to provide Fred with domestic security and continuity shows not only a selfish preoccupation with her own hedonistic concerns, but an abnegation of a crucial social responsibility. Marie's characterisation represents a deviation from narrative assumptions about the kind of woman a wartime wife was supposed to be and the

³⁷ Wright's casting as Peggy can be seen as a 'reprise' of her role as Carol Beldon in *Mrs Miniver*. In *The Men* (1950), she plays a 'Wilma' role, as Ellen, in the rehabilitation of the paraplegic veteran, Ken (Marlon Brando).

kind of role she was expected to fulfil. She is not merely absent or negligent but a contributory factor in Fred's potential instability, so the indispensable role of the feminine in the recuperation of the masculine is consequently assumed by other women. When Fred has a nightmare in which he relives the horrors of a flying incident, his frenzied shouts wake Peggy who comes to his bedside where, wiping the sweat from his brow and soothing his cries, she tenderly calms him, readily assuming the role of nurse. (Peggy's 'professional' nursing is linked to her wartime role of hospital aide). Continuing this role the following morning, Peggy is already becoming an understudy for the miscast Marie as Fred's surrogate wife as she creates a makeshift home for him, cooking his breakfast, and treating his aberrant behaviour of the night before with warmth and understanding.³⁸

The long-deferred reunion between Fred and Marie confirms their incompatibility. Although she greets him excitedly, the *him* she sees is the dashing captain, the heroic flyer, the smart uniform and resplendent ribbons ('You gotta tell me what they all mean!') She is reunited not so much with her husband as with her imaginary version of him. So, while he wants to get into civilian clothes as quickly as he can, she wants to keep him in uniform; while she is pleased with the gifts he brought her from Paris, she has no real interest in what he actually did during the war. When he shows her aerial photographs of a bombing raid, her interest in them is desultory and naive and she can scarcely comprehend the bursts of anti-aircraft fire which he explains to her as 'little black flowers that grow in the sky.'

Although 'loaded' when demobilised from the Air Corps, Fred's money quickly runs out and the jobless ex-serviceman can no longer afford to support Marie's extravagant lifestyle. Marie quickly begins to resent the strictures on their expenditure as Fred alone acknowledges the need to economise. When he returns home with groceries and insists that instead of going out to a restaurant they stay in and have dinner at home, she quickly grows bored with the regimen of a domestic budget. Her husband is no longer

³⁸ Peggy's civic-mindedness is repeatedly contrasted with Marie's 'slacker' mentality. Marie, in this sense, represents Fred's prewar self, and Peggy, his postwar future. See, Wyler, 'No Magic Wand,' 6-7.

the romantic hero of somewhere faraway, but, back home, only 'another soda jerk out of a job.' Marie undermines all Fred's attempts to reestablish himself in civilian society. She is disdainful when he considers retraining ('kindergarten') and irritated by his recurrent nightmares, taunting him about their 'psycho' implications ('Are you alright in your mind? ... Can't you get those things out of your system?') Indifferent to 'those things,' she sees him deadened by Army experience.

Prior to his reunion with Marie, Fred had already expressed his hopes for the future with her: 'All I want's a good job ... and a little house big enough for me and my wife. Give me that much and I'm rehabilitated like that.' But it quickly becomes clear to them both that even these modest aspirations are unlikely to be achieved. Having already resolved not to return to his prewar job at the drugstore, Fred soon realises that his prospects of any 'good' job are remote. Surplus to requirements in the postwar economic order, he represents a threat to those who remained at home and, with few other options, he reluctantly returns to the drugstore where ex-servicemen are viewed with suspicion and resentment, especially *en masse* ('Nobody's job is safe with all these servicemen crowding in'). Fred's 'jerk' status is confirmed in his demoralising interview with the store manager who, while noting Fred's 'splendid' service record, points out that his military experience has no relevance to employment there and that his war years count for nothing. Fred is hired at less than a third of his service pay in a job which, ineluctably, will involve manning the soda fountain. He learns here how unprepossessing and officious nonentities have prospered during the war at the expense of servicemen overseas.³⁹ He finds, too, that 'service' has acquired another meaning, servitude, as his drugstore uniform becomes a caricature of his military one, inscribed with degradation.

Each serviceman's story is predicated on his respective employment prospects in an uncertain postwar economy where employment is of paramount concern in the veter-

³⁹ Fred finds himself overseen by his own former assistant, 'Sticky' Merkle (Norman Phillips, Jr.). The unsympathetic characterisation of such figures, often with an emphasis on their 'surveillance' role, was a trope in many postwar films. For example, in *Holiday Affair* (1949), the department store sales assistant, Steve Mason (Robert Mitchum), himself a veteran, is closely monitored by a sinister-looking floor walker (uncredited) who is ultimately responsible for Steve's dismissal.

ans' 'readjustment.' The prospects for stable family life depended ultimately on stable employment and, in this sense, the narrative's ideological agenda is as much about allaying economic fears as familial ones.

Homer's employment prospects would appear the most difficult, with a disability likely to be an insurmountable obstacle to any worthwhile job in the future. However, as his role in *Diary of a Sergeant* shows, many of the physical problems of his disability had already been overcome through rehabilitation and training. The film, which emphasises pragmatic approaches to disability, can be read as a 'prequel' to *Best Years of Our Lives* and the 'first phase' of Homer's assimilation.⁴⁰ In the 'second phase' of the earlier narrative, Homer's skilled 'manual' dexterity is particularly evident, as the narrative continually emphasises, in the company of fellow servicemen. Not only does he light their cigarettes for them with matches (a difficult precision operation), he takes pride in the fellowship ritual of the shared cigarette. Later, at his wedding, he demonstrates that he is perfectly capable of placing the ring on Wilma's finger, despite the palpable anxiety of the congregation. The scene shows in explicit close-up the juxtaposition of Wilma's hand and Homer's hook and provides in visual terms an uncompromising assertion of Homer's renewed sense of himself as the camera's 'unflinching' focus on his hooks forces them to be acknowledged as an undeniable part of who he now is. The congregation - and, by extension, society - cannot any longer 'keep staring away from them.'⁴¹

But, at the same time, the anxieties of the congregation testify to the assumption that Homer is, perhaps, more likely to fail than to succeed. In this sense, Homer's difficulties arise less from what he can't do than from (societal) perceptions of what he can't do. His employment prospects are consequently linked to assumptions about his inabilities. Categorised as a *disabled* veteran, Homer has already been advised to consider a job in insurance on the grounds that disabled veterans make good salesmen not despite

⁴⁰ Russell preferred functional hooks to cosmetic but impractical hands. See also, 'Without Hands,' 83.

⁴¹ Several Army orientation films showed disabilities in visually explicit terms, but such representation in a mainstream film was unprecedented. See Doherty, *Projections of War*, 269.

their disabilities, but because of them. Hence, exploited *for* his disability, his future employment would be predicated on a 'sympathy' factor and his success therefore would necessarily involve the indignity and humiliation of being seen as simultaneously heroic and pitiable.⁴²

Al's future appears to be the more economically secure as he returns to his former job as bank manager. The bank appears to value Al's war experience and immediately offers him promotion to vice-president with responsibility for GI loans. However, Al has misgivings about returning to the bank. He has already voiced fears about 'readjustment' ('The thing that scares me most is that everybody's going to try to rehabilitate me') and the rapidly changing demands of society at home ('Last year it was "kill Japs" and this year it's "make money"'). Al is rewarded with a senior position and a new career role which accords with his interests and experience, but he has difficulties relating to the bank which no longer appears to him as it did before the war. The former 'hit-the-beach sergeant' finds himself being peremptorily forced back into an old familiar pattern which now looks very different or, perhaps, too much the same.

The crucial point of Al's transition from soldier to civilian sees him call into question his former middle-class values and he now begins to look askance at the respectability, probity and sobriety for which the bank is a kind of repository, and to which, hitherto, he has dutifully subscribed. He is now caught between conflicting demands. Instinctively resistant to the blandishments of the president, Al nevertheless slips into an ingratiating manner with him and cannot ultimately refuse the proffered brief-case. As he reluctantly allows himself to be drawn back into the bank's 'ethos,' the pressure on him to return can be seen as one of the attempts he had anticipated to 'rehabilitate' him. Al's heavy drinking, then, can be seen as a reaction against that attempt.

His responsibility for the administration of GI loans situates him between conflicting interests. Loans were administered through the banks and authorised on the basis of an applicant's collateral. Not all ex-servicemen would qualify (nor even necessarily

⁴² Russell describes in his autobiography how he considered the advantages of this career option. Russell, *Victory in My Hands*, 147-50.

comprehend the term) and the most deserving could find themselves least qualified. Al, retaining something of his sergeant's role, acts in the interests of the ex-soldier in whom he recognises another kind of collateral, the qualities demonstrated at Iwo Jima and Okinawa ('His collateral is in his guts'). He authorises an unsecured loan to a former sharecropper who now wants his own piece of land and whom he intuitively feels to have 'GI collateral.' But Al's authorisation of the loan is queried and he is advised that in future he must exercise more 'caution.'

His promotion is an acknowledgement that he is uniquely qualified for the role in which he can draw on both his banking and Army experience. Grounded in sound banking practice and conversant with servicemen's military experience, Al is well placed to act as a conduit between the respective interests of the bank and ex-servicemen. But these interests are irreconcilable. There is substantive disparity between the rhetoric of benevolent paternalism articulated through the bank's avuncular president, *Mr Milton* (Ray Collins) with his 'desire to extend a helping hand to returning servicemen ... whenever possible,' and the bank's commercial interests (which would have routinely rejected the sharecropper's application). Al's appointment, in this context, looks rather more cynical than it would seem. Al fervently believes that the bank's policy is contrary to the interests of his fellow ex-servicemen for whom the loans are as indispensable as they are to the future of the country. He refuses to accept that applicants should be classified by the regulation-bound bank solely in terms of their lack of collateral and there is a strong narrative implication that the bank is 'wrong' and Al is 'right.'

Caught between the commercial protocols of the bank and his residual loyalty to veterans, Al identifies more with 'the men.' However, in substituting his own criteria for those of the bank, Al exceeds his authority, countermands official policy, risks financial losses and jeopardises his own career. In his speech at the formal dinner, he bitterly attacks the bank's 'collateral imperative' while getting determinedly drunk. If Al is granted a degree of indulgence by the bank, it is unlikely to tolerate indefinitely a vice-president

who looks increasingly reckless and unstable, professionally unreliable, embarrassingly manic and incipiently alcoholic. Here, he becomes Milly's responsibility as she starts to mark off the number of drinks he consumes.⁴³ Although the narrative sees 'mature' love as the means to Al's recovery, his alcoholic instability is so acute that it may not, as the narrative implies, be so simply overcome as his position, caught between conflicting loyalties, remains unresolved. His future, then, is less secure than suggested by the narrative's ostensibly affirmative closure.

Nevertheless, Al has at least returned to a supportive domestic infrastructure. In Fred's case, 'home' is an altogether unstable destination and offers little which could be called worthwhile. He is situated from the outset in a succession of unpromising environments, each with transitory implications. Lacking the kind of middle-class domestic security awaiting Al and Homer, Fred lives, literally, on the other side of the tracks. Home is a dilapidated house in a dismal neighbourhood, where 'family' is a drunk father, a slatternly stepmother and a wife who has moved out. He eventually finds Marie in a cramped, unkempt apartment which appears to have little other function than as a place in which to conduct her extra-marital liaisons or from which to go somewhere else. Ultimately, it becomes the site of the disintegration of their marriage.

Fred's homecoming is a series of unsuccessful attempts to reconnect with an illusory home, attempts rebuffed at every turn. The ex-flyer resolves 'to bail out' and, by the end of the narrative, he has returned to the airport where he first arrived. The nadir of Fred's fortunes occurs after Boone City has failed to provide any social anchorage for him when he becomes set adrift and momentarily abandons any interest in his future destination and even the direction he should take. He leaves the decision to chance, heading either East or West, depending on which plane leaves first: any sense of direc-

⁴³ Millie Stephenson's characterisation evokes the sterling qualities of Kay Miniver (Greer Garson) in *Mrs Miniver*, in which the feminised 'home front' is maintained through the protective fortitude of the resolutely middle-class wife. Garson's screen persona uniquely signified national wartime values in such a way that she virtually constituted an emblem for the Allied war effort, a function further consolidated by her role as Paula in *Random Harvest* (1942) and the part she plays in the recuperation of the amnesiac neuropsychiatric veteran, 'Smithy' (Ronald Colman). Millie, as a postwar incarnation of Mrs Miniver, exemplifies similar values. Al will be redeemed, through her, as the familiar patterns of domestic stability and continuity are eventually resumed.

tion, destination or purpose has become meaningless and inconsequential.⁴⁴ He wanders around a vast airfield of abandoned aircraft, a diminutive figure in a colossal junkyard with row upon row of hulking wrecks. Like so many gravestones bearing inscriptions of a former life, the scene implies a visual correlative for Fred as the junked bombardier. The defunct nacelles retain a semblance of bodily integrity but, stripped of their motors, they imply amputation, emasculation, obsolescence. When Fred climbs into the cockpit of one of the bombers, he climbs back momentarily to a past in which his life had recognisable meaning. But here and now, in a scrapyards landscape, the present appears to him as a foreign country in which, like an alien, he has no recognisable identity or status.

Fred's story sees particular emphasis on the disparity between civilian advantage and veteran disadvantage. Wartime produced a social and economic distinction between the two groups and Fred is positioned in a kind of no-man's-land between them. Despite the disadvantages of his background, Fred's AAF career brought him a considerable measure of success, providing him with opportunities for achievement and advancement, professional status and recognition and, certainly, an experience with *meaning*. However, he quickly discovers that his wartime accomplishments go unnoticed in civilian society where he is marginalised by indifference. Indeed, this sense of being unrecognised and disregarded begins to undermine his own sense of himself. Out of uniform and out of a job, he even loses faith in the former meaning of himself as he discards his citations. This sense of being *already* an outsider is evident at the beginning of the film when, unable to get a flight home himself, Fred finds himself next to a businessman with no such difficulty. With a reservation made by his secretary, and travelling with golf clubs as excess baggage ('Oh that's alright, how much is it?'), Fred glimpses a postwar

⁴⁴ Many postwar films feature a Fred Derry 'type,' either explicitly or 'implicitly' a veteran, and characterised by *dislocation*, a breakdown in purpose and direction, perpetually in transit from one temporary location to the next. For example, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), the footloose Frank Chambers (John Garfield) is compelled by 'road fever' to keep travelling with no particular destination in mind. Garfield's prior roles had been almost exclusively military ones. As an airman in *Air Force* (1943); a neuropsychiatric veteran from the Spanish Civil War in *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943); a submarine sailor in *Destination Tokyo* (1943); and as the 'real-life' marine, Al Schmid, in *Pride of the Marines* (1945). These roles, which significantly encompass all the services, cumulatively allow for a reading of Frank Chambers as an ex-serviceman. Garfield subsequently played a former GI, Nick Blake, in *Nobody Lives Forever* (1946) and a Jewish soldier, Dave, in the anti-semitism 'social problem' film, *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947).

world in which prosperous civilians on vacation take precedence over returning veterans.

If Fred's story is supposed to conclude on an optimistic note, the promise of a more hopeful future - seemingly 'guaranteed' by marriage to Peggy and the chance offer of a labouring job - it takes little account of how comprehensively he has been disavowed by civilian society since his return. Fred's case suggests a potential social instability which cannot be so readily contained and his future is by no means as secure as the narrative implies.⁴⁵ The *deus ex machina* of a junkyard job and the narrative implication that from here he will eventually be able to 'work his way up' remains, to say the least, an uncertain trajectory.

⁴⁵ In the novel, Fred almost commits an armed bank robbery. Kantor, *Glory For Me*, 224-31.

Chapter 7

The Battle of Bedford Falls and the Suburban Ideal Postwar Suburbanisation and *It's A Wonderful Life*

In the 'graveyard' sequence at the end of *Best Years of Our Lives*, the veteran bombardier, Fred Derry assumes that the aircraft there are, like himself, destined to be scrapped. But the foreman informs him otherwise: 'This is no junk: we're using this material for building prefabricated houses.' Fred asks the foreman for a job. The foreman, eyeing him with steady appraisal, begins to recognise in Fred the same doughty quality which the banker, Al Stephenson, had earlier seen in the veterans with 'GI collateral.' Fred gets the job and begins to pull off his old flying jacket in anticipation of his new prospects. These prospects concern postwar *building* and specifically imply the building of new homes in postwar suburbia.¹ Fred has already confided in Peggy his overseas 'dream' of 'a nice little house for my wife and me, out in the country, in the suburbs, anyway.' Although he acknowledges the inevitability of a hard future, it is nevertheless a future in which he himself will be instrumental in the development of new postwar housing. It seems likely that he will eventually be able to secure such a home for himself and his wife and realise his ambitions for their postwar future. Hence, the directionless veteran who appeared so obsolete and superfluous in the postwar social order is situated at the narrative's closure as an active participant in the construction of the American postwar world. As the defunct aircraft are not, after all, to be junked, but transformed into a postwar social necessity, so too will he.

Parallel concerns are evident in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), a narrative not usually read in terms of veteran issues but which, as I will show, is as much concerned with

¹ Suburbanisation was widely criticised as symptomatic of postwar conformity. See, for example, Whyte, 'The New Suburbia: Organization Man At Home,' in *Organization Man*, 245-372; David Riesman, 'The Suburban Sadness,' in William M. Dobriner, ed., *The Suburban Community* (New York: Putnam, 1958), 375-408.

problems of 'readjustment' as *Best Years of Our Lives*.² Like Fred Derry, George Bailey (James Stewart) has a key role in postwar reconversion. Both are actively involved in the construction of postwar housing and the development of suburbanisation. Where Fred will work at ground level, on the site, George, the designer and engineer, will be its architect. George is a visionary with a dream of the future on a grand scale, a future in which he will 'design new buildings ... plan modern cities.' As he says to his father, 'I want to do something big and something important.' Later, during his courtship with Mary (Donna Reed), he reiterates his ideal with even more grandiose ambitions. Throwing rocks at the windows of the derelict old Granville house, George makes a wish for his future and Mary asks him what he wished for. 'I'm shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I'm going to see the world,' he announces. 'Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. ... I'm going to build things. ... I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high, I'm gonna build bridges a mile long.'

George exuberantly envisages a 'wonderful' future, but the future he describes is exclusively concerned with himself: a personal manifesto of his own individual ambitions. While the future he maps out for himself is born out of his fervent desire to *build*, his wishes, expressed with an insistent emphasis on 'I,' show an inordinate preoccupation with himself, with what *he* wants to be and what *he* wants to build. George's future trajectory is revealing in other ways, too. Firstly, the ritual and rhetoric of a moonlight wish already imply a realm of fantasy. Secondly, the attractions of a 'classical' Europe

² As in *Best Years of Our Lives*, the postwar concerns of *It's A Wonderful Life* are of the war. Its director, Frank Capra, had served in the Army where he made several films for the War Department, including the *Why We Fight* 'orientation' series (1942-45). See, Victor Scherle and William Turner Levy, 'Why We Fight Series and Other World War II Films,' in *The Films of Frank Capra* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1977), 195-221; William Thomas Murphy, 'The Method of *Why We Fight*,' *Journal of Popular Film*, 1 (1972), 185-96; David Culbert, "'Why We Fight": Social Engineering For a Democratic Society at War,' in K.R.M. Short, ed., *Film & Radio Propaganda in World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 173-91; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 70-75; 79-80. Both veterans and civilians would have been familiar with Capra's high-profile series which collectively constituted a kind of ideological mission statement for wartime America. At the end of the war, Capra, with Wyler, incorporated Liberty Films whose trademark symbol, the tolling Liberty Bell, had been used in Capra's Army films and, subsequently, on *It's A Wonderful Life*. For Capra, the bell symbolised his independent status and a return to what he saw as the prewar 'quality pictures' to be made in opposition to the 'quantity pictures' made during the war years. See Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 371-99. For an account of Liberty Films, see, for example, Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 347-352. The Bell can be seen as an evocation of wartime's ideological objectives of 'freedom' and 'independence,' carried over into the postwar world. On Capra's films, see Ray Carney, *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra*, 2nd edn. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

and its architecture, writ large in his imagination, beckon romantically, particularly in comparison with all the prosaic constraints of his ('crummy') home town, Bedford Falls. Thirdly, he plans great and magnificent designs.

But the narrative suggests that what George wants is *too* big and *too* distant, that he *is* reaching for the moon. Foreign travel, or the *idea* of foreign travel, has always had for him an almost mythological significance. Since he was a boy, he has yearned for a future when he could be somewhere else ('I'm going out exploring someday'). His travel brochures seem to possess an almost talismanic promise while 'the most exciting sounds in the world' are, for him, 'anchor chains, plane motors and train whistles.' His travel plans are always impossibly exaggerated. His suitcase, he insists, has to be 'a great big one' for his fabulous travels ('for a thousand and one nights') as his expansive gesture is caught emphatically in a protracted freeze-frame. The ways in which George habitually expresses his wishes for foreign experience, as here, reveal him as a fantasist. If his dreams are too big, it's because Bedford Falls is too small. His ambitions are born out of the disappointment and frustration of small-town life and business obligations, a life which he can only see in terms of the stultifying pettiness of 'nickels and dimes.' Here, there is only the prospect of a hopeless future of confinement and constraint ('I couldn't face being cooped up for the rest of my life in a shabby little office'). Thus, the imperative to 'get away' produces the compensatory fantasy of a different world elsewhere, a wide utopian alternative to the narrow world of home. George believes that Bedford Falls has forced him to stay, but has failed to provide him with anything worth staying for.

The narrative is concerned with how George eventually comes to see what is worthwhile about Bedford Falls, what *is* worth staying for: the values inherent in small-town life.³ These values are exemplified by George's father who, as head of the Bailey Building and Loan Association, provides mortgage loans for the citizens of Bedford

³ On the values of small-town life in films, see, Emanuel Levy, *Small-Town America In Film: The Decline and Fall of Community* (New York: Ungar, 1991), in particular, 'The 1940s - Ambivalence and Cynicism' and 'The 1950s - Conformity and Repression,' 71-108, 109-46.

Falls. Peter 'Pop' Bailey (Samuel S. Hinds) understands the social value of home-ownership. In a rejoinder to his son's more spectacular definition of 'important,' Pop pointedly emphasises another definition of the term which, conversely, is derived from the little and the local: 'I feel that in a small way we *are* doing something important. ... It's deep in the race for a man to want his own roof and walls and fireplace, and we're helping him get those things in our shabby little office.' Pop's sentiment echoes the Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian independence and self-sufficiency.

This narrative concern with the building of new houses is linked to a national imperative in the aftermath of the war with housing construction: housing was 'important,' both literally and metaphorically, and came to exemplify the material future in the postwar world. As John Morton Blum contends: 'The house and all that went into it, "the American home," best symbolized of all things material a brave new world of worldly goods.'⁴ But suburbanisation represented more than an exhibition of modern domestic consumerism. It was also linked to the American tradition of pastoralism and to the pastoral ideal as an expression of the anti-industrialism and anti-urbanism of machine-age modernity.⁵ If suburbanisation seemed to equate with materialism, it brought within the reach of millions of ordinary Americans the prospect of affordable home-ownership which promised a new and different kind of life. 'Symbolizing the world of new possibilities,' says Warren Susman, 'was the suburban ideal.'⁶ This 'ideal' of democratic availability, represented by modernity's appeal to a Jeffersonian Arcadia replete with material abundance, would become attainable, paradoxically, through industrialised mass production.⁷

The degree of national investment in the new postwar home can be seen as a con-

⁴ Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 102.

⁵ See, for example, Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁶ Warren Susman with Edward Griffin, 'Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America,' in May, ed., *Recasting America*, 21.

⁷ Advertising often rationalised mass-produced housing. For example, *Look* editorialised that, for 'millions,' an affordable 'decent home' necessitated 'factory-produced' houses. 'The jig-tables, moving assembly lines, giant presses and huge saws of industrialized homemaking should be symbols as familiar ... as the stamping out processes that bring fabric and furniture and cars within reach.' Fleur Coles, 'The 1948 Look House,' *Look* (April 27, 1948), 51.

sequence of the privations of wartime and depression. By the end of the war, in the context of a dearth of many consumer goods, the shortage of accommodation was acute and demand drastically exceeded availability. This shortage was caused principally by the severe decline in house building during the war years and throughout the preceding decade. In 1945, following a period in which there was a virtual moratorium on the construction of new homes, the cumulative effect was evident. 'Housing,' as Kenneth Jackson says, 'was the area of most pressing need. Through sixteen years of depression and war, the residential construction industry had been dormant, with new home starts averaging less than 100,000 per year.'⁸ Other factors exacerbated the deficit. Firstly, wartime effected a massive demographic upheaval, as Blum describes: 'Wartime dislocations, not least the mobilization of 13 million men, many with wives who traveled with them, further strained conditions. Over 4 million workers - with their families, some 9 million people - left their homes for employment in war plants.'⁹ With such extensive disruption, 'home' was necessarily defined as *temporary*. Secondly, as war became imminent, there was a sharp increase in the marriage rate from 1940 and, subsequently, a sharp increase in the birth rate, reversing trends of the preceding decade.¹⁰ Both rates remained at high levels after the war. The exigencies of wartime reinvigorated investment in marriage and family which, in the immediate postwar period, became more intensely projected onto the notion of 'home.'

Prior to the end of the war, however, the kind of home which many wanted remained only a notion. Standard types of housing, especially in cities, became increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to acquire. The stark reality was 'that there were virtually no homes for sale or apartments for rent at war's end.'¹¹ Many found themselves obligated to make do with the most unsatisfactory types of accommodation arrangements.

⁸ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 232.

⁹ Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 102.

¹⁰ 'Many of the newcomers were "good-bye babies," conceived just before the husbands shipped out, partly because of an absence of birth control, partly because the wife's allotment cheque would be increased with each child, and partly as a tangible reminder of a father who could not know when, or if, he would return.' Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 232.

¹¹ 'By June 1945, over 98 per cent of American cities reported a shortage of single-family houses, [and] over 90 per cent a shortage of apartments.' Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 102; see also, Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 232.

Overcrowding was a particularly prevalent problem.¹² Accommodation for working women was often shared, sometimes with someone unknown. As Audrey Davis wrote in a letter to her husband in the Navy, such an arrangement could cause mixed feelings. Although Davis 'didn't *want* to live with a stranger,' she found 'a very nice apartment house' too irresistible. 'There is only 1 main room with a double bed that comes out of the wall (the one disadvantage, having to share a bed!) but a grand kitchen and dinette (that did it!) ... and a whole room for a closet.'¹³ The letter is revealing in that it shows the premium placed by the writer on the *space* afforded; so much so that, for her, it was worth the compromise of sleeping with a 'stranger.'¹⁴ For other women, however, there were additional disadvantages. Mothers, for example, often found themselves by definition subject to disqualification, as Barbara de Nike recounts: 'Every morning we got up, grabbed the paper and read the for-rent ads. ... Most of the people just said no the minute they heard we had children. "Absolutely no." They just didn't rent to people with children.'¹⁵

The rapidly developing war industries were frequently accompanied by substandard living conditions - or worse - especially in the new 'boom towns.' There was a sudden influx of thousands of transient workers to small towns designated as sites for the construction of Army bases and defence plants. Small town life was consequently transformed and often overwhelmed. At Starke, Florida, for example, site of the Army's Camp Blanding, Geoffrey Perrett describes the 'overnight' transformation of small town to boom town in terms of a large-scale invasion.¹⁶ The effects on Starke of such an in-

¹² 'Continuing a trend begun during the Great Depression, six million families were doubling up with relatives or friends by 1947.' Ibid.

¹³ Audrey M. Davis (Savell), letter to Carleton Kelvin Savell (San Francisco, April, 1945), in Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds., *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 169-70.

¹⁴ Many postwar narratives show an inordinate preoccupation with the value of domestic space and, as in *Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), 'plenty of closet space' becomes an obsessive concern. In the novel, Mrs Blandings aspires to no fewer than thirty-three. Eric Hodgins, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 112. In *Johnny Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1944), the *competitive* value of wartime urban domestic space is evident in the demand for Johnny's absurdly overcrowded apartment. The difficulties of postwar accommodation for newly-married veterans is the narrative subject of *Apartment For Peggy* (1948).

¹⁵ Barbara de Nike, in Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin Mitchell & Steven Schechter, *The Homefront: America During World War II* (New York: Putnam, 1984), 192.

¹⁶ Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph*, 85.

tense concentration of temporary workers were devastating, especially in terms of accommodation.¹⁷ Boom town accommodation problems were widespread. In Richmond, California, site of the Kaiser shipyards and other defence industries, thousands of incoming workers were provided with accommodation on a scale which came to encroach on Richmond's local population: 'Almost overnight, enormous tracts of barrack-like housing covered Richmond's south side, providing shelter for seventy-two thousand people, more than half of the city's population.'¹⁸ The housing programme, cheaply and hastily constructed, proved hazardous. Fires were frequent and health problems, including epidemics, were widespread.¹⁹ At Willow Run, Michigan, site of the Ford bomber plant, conditions were notorious, as Agnes Meyer reported for the *Washington Post*. In a frame house, without water or plumbing, Meyer discovered 'five men living in the basement, a family of five occupying the first floor, four men sleeping on the second floor, nine men in the garage, and four families parked in their trailers in the backyard.'²⁰ In a Connecticut boom town, Blum cites the case of a landlord who profitably exploited the 'hot bunk' system where shift workers made do with the same bed in rotation, three shifts per day. 'Those victimized by the "hot bunk" system, Blum surmises, 'looked forward avidly to postwar space and conveniences.'²¹

Privacy, too, as another wartime deficit, would later become highly valued. Elsie Rossio describes a defence worker's typical experience in a war apartment in Seneca, Illinois. 'The walls were paper thin,' she says. 'You could almost hear your neighbor breathe.'²² The exigencies of wartime caused various incursions into domestic privacy, especially in cities. The opportunities for increased levels of privacy in postwar housing

¹⁷ 'Before long many thousands of people were sleeping in their cars, living in pup tents, lean-tos, even brush piles and packing cases along local roads and ditches.' *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Margaret Crawford, 'Daily Life on the Home Front: Women, Blacks, and the Struggle for Public Housing,' in Donald Albrecht, ed., *World War II and the American Dream: How Wartime Building Changed a Nation* (Washington, DC; Cambridge, MA: National Building Museum; MIT Press, 1995), 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ Quoted, *ibid*, 116.

²¹ Blum, *V Was For Victory*, 103.

²² Elsie Rossio, in Harris, et al, *Homefront*, p.43.

would become invested with particular compensatory significance.²³

Where *Best Years of Our Lives* is concerned with the postwar assimilation of its three servicemen to civilian life, *It's a Wonderful Life* works as a domestic correlative of the assimilation narrative and is concerned with the 'readjustment' of the civilian, George. The narrative sees the promise of a new postwar order which will be exemplified by 'home' and achieved through the development of suburban housing programmes. The realisation of this promise depends crucially on George's role and, ultimately, on his own acknowledgement of that role.

The narrative introduces George through a series of establishing shots of Bedford Falls. It is a dark winter's night and snow is silently falling on the town's deserted streets. The townspeople are heard praying for George on this, 'his crucial night.' He is on the verge of suicide and, depending on the outcome, the 'future' of Bedford Falls hangs in the balance. George is suicidal because of the imminent collapse of the Building and Loan but his desperate plight isn't solely attributable to the prospect of financial ruin. His present sense of hopelessness and despair is the consequence of the lifelong, cumulative effects of disappointment and frustration, a crisis of identity in which, the narrative suggests, he has undergone a fundamental misrecognition of his life's purpose. The trajectory of his ambition and the role he envisaged for himself are shown to be 'false' in both direction and scale. His preoccupation with the grand and the exotic, whether in terms of classical European architecture or modern American engineering, all suggest a misplaced investment in ideas of the 'foreign.' His nagging obsession to turn his back on Bedford Falls in order to 'see the world' implies a failure to acknowledge the value of the local as the essential site for his talent and ambition. He consequently lives with a misapprehension about what really is 'big' and 'important' and fails to recognise that his 'true' role is to be found locally.

The *raison d'être* of the Building and Loan was always to provide the inhabitants of Bedford Falls with the means to acquire their own homes, 'decent' homes. George's

²³ For an account of these factors, see, for example, Perry R. Duis, 'No Time for Privacy: World War II and Chicago's Families' in Erenberg and Hirsch, eds., *War in American Culture*, 17-45.

father was recognised even by Henry Potter (Lionel Barrymore) as ‘a man of high ideals’ and it was those ideals which made his name synonymous with that of his company (‘Peter Bailey *was* the Building and Loan’). After his death, however, those ideals and the company’s already uncertain prospects are put in further jeopardy when Potter proposes to put the Building and Loan into receivership. George reiterates his father’s ideal and the company’s ethos which challenges the old ‘wait and save’ order imposed by Potter which effectively denied to most people the possibility of owning their own homes: ‘Wait! Wait for what?’ George demands. ‘Do you know how long it takes a working man to save five thousand dollars? Just remember this, Mr Potter, that this rabble you’re talking about ... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath?’

The Building and Loan can be seen here in connection with a series of developments which radically transformed the postwar prospects of home ownership for millions of American families. The period saw two significant developments in housing: the implementation of a vast residential construction programme, and a series of financial measures which greatly facilitated the purchase of these houses. Public demand for new, affordable homes was an obvious consequence of wartime experience, both for servicemen abroad as well as for civilians at home. The Federal Government responded by underwriting construction programmes. As Jackson notes of the postwar decade, ‘Congress regularly approved billions of dollars worth of additional mortgage insurance for the Federal Housing Administration [FHA].’ Also, the GI Bill ‘created a Veterans Administration [VA] mortgage program similar to that of the FHA. This legislation, suggests Jackson, ‘gave official endorsement and support to the view that the 16 million GI’s of World War II should return to civilian life with a home of their own.’²⁴ The GI Bill’s extraordinarily extensive series of measures also had an unofficial function. Its health, education, housing and employment provisions were collectively designed to

²⁴ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 233.

deal with the myriad concerns of 'the veteran problem' and, as Paula Rabinowitz has pointed out, constituted a form of social welfare (at least for whites). In a discourse which linked welfare to national security and defence, Rabinowitz argues, the ideological purpose of the Bill was the legitimization of welfare to promote citizenship in defence of democracy.²⁵

The prewar conditions which determined mortgage policy had been prohibitive to all but a negligible minority. Richard Polenberg points out that 'banks ... ordinarily demanded a large down payment - 50 per cent as a rule - and required repayment within a short time - ten years at the most.'²⁶ This system was rendered obsolete by the possibilities afforded by the new, postwar arrangements. 'The FHA insured thirty-year bank mortgages of 90 to 95 per cent, and the VA of 100 per cent. The VA alone enabled 3.75 million ex-servicemen to buy homes, often with a token \$1 down payment.'²⁷ These arrangements offered incentives orientated towards suburban housing. 'The deck was stacked in favor of those who wanted to buy a new home in the suburbs.'²⁸

Potter, then, can be seen to represent an old, prewar order, and George, the new 'egalitarian' opportunities of the postwar period. Potter is first glimpsed as a solitary figure in a hearse-like horse-drawn carriage. His characterisation is drawn from a Dickensian nineteenth century.²⁹ Black-clad and wheelchair-bound, Potter is already old and debilitated when George is only a boy. Associated with gothic trappings, decrepitude and death - 'a hard-skulled character' who keeps an ornamental skull on his desk - he resembles a Victorian undertaker, attended by a cadaverous assistant. With his 'throne-

²⁵ Paula Rabinowitz, 'What Film Noir Can Teach Us about "Welfare as We Know It,"' *Social Text*, 18 (2000), 135-41.

²⁶ Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible*, 131.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 132.

²⁹ Potter is a Dickensian characterisation. The story on which the film is based, 'The Greatest Gift' by Philip Van Doren Stern, was originally printed by the author as a Christmas card. The film, like the story, can be seen specifically in relation to *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Both are set on Christmas Eve. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, Potter is miserly and mean-spirited, ruthlessly exploiting others for personal gain. Both are in opposition to family. Even their utterances are similar: Scrooge's 'Humbug!' being echoed by Potter's 'Sentimental hogwash!' For his account of the origins of the story, see Philip Van Doren Stern, 'It's A Wonderful Life Started as the By Product of a Shave,' *New York Herald Tribune* (December 15, 1946), in Jeanine Basinger, *It's A Wonderful Life Book* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 94; and for the story itself, see, 'The Greatest Gift,' *ibid*, 95-102.

like' wheelchair,³⁰ he is also linked with royalty ('Who's that? A king?') as a decadent relic of an *ancien régime*. Potter is also linked implicitly to the more recent past of the 1930s where he has amassed a personal fortune as a slum landlord through his exploitation of victims of the Depression era ('Times are bad, Mr Potter.' 'Then foreclose!')

But although Potter is related to a bygone era, his baronial power remains undiminished. He threatens to impede George's progress as the modernising force of postwar egalitarianism in a contest fought over future housing provision. To Potter, the townspeople are an undeserving 'lazy rabble' for whom the Building and Loan's exhortation - 'OWN YOUR OWN HOME' - is contrary to his own commercial interests. Potter also resents the ideological implications of home ownership: the prospect of autonomy which could soon be available to anybody, even a taxi driver like Ernie Bishop (Frank Faylen). Potter fears the 'revolutionary' implications of the new housing programmes 'because a few starry-eyed dreamers like Peter Bailey stir them up and fill their heads with a lot of impossible ideas.'

Potter wants to consolidate his power-base through his acquisition of the Building and Loan and has been trying for years 'to get control of it ... or kill it.' Although 'Old Man Potter' is an anachronistic figure in Bedford Falls, he is also identified with monopoly capital ('I run practically everything in this town'). The Building and Loan, built on Peter Bailey's 'faith and devotion' to people's individuality, wasn't only an institution which enabled them to buy houses: it was also defensively constructed to protect them from Potter's exploitation of 'the masses.'

Here, the narrative is crucially concerned with the continuity of the Building and Loan after Peter Bailey's death. Where Pop recognised its 'important' function, George only reluctantly assumes his father's role, resenting the irksome responsibilities foisted upon him which compel him to sacrifice his foreign ambitions. His frequent attempts to escape from Bedford Falls have been repeatedly thwarted by obligations forced on him by the company. However, with a dismal view of small-town life, he has failed to ap-

³⁰ Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, Frank Capra, Jo Swerling, 'It's A Wonderful Life' ('Final Script As Shot'), in Basinger, *It's A Wonderful Life Book*, 125.

preciate the intrinsic worth of his home town and the value of his own contribution to its development and continuity.

The narrative's 'unborn sequence'³¹ works to disabuse him of that view and to convince him that his home town role is not only 'important' but indispensable. The sequence ensues after George's failed suicide attempt when he wishes that he hadn't been born. His guardian angel, Clarence (Henry Travers) shows him the consequences of his wish, the transformation of Bedford Falls into 'Pottersville.' George's estrangement from his familiar world has become so absolute that he can't see it for what it is and only when he is shown the grimly inevitable alternative does he undergo the conversion which enables him to appreciate his home town. Pottersville is a looking-glass reversal of Bedford Falls in which George witnesses the consequences of his non-existence. Only when he is forced to see the devastating effects of his 'unborn' life does he realise its significance. His fixation on distant horizons has prevented him from seeing his own community and the integral part he has always played within it. As Clarence demonstrates, George has underestimated the value of 'community' and overlooked his own vital contribution to it. 'Strange, isn't it?' asks Clarence. 'Each man's life touches so many other lives, and when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?'

The 'awful hole' is rendered as Pottersville. Here, the characteristic attributes of Bedford Falls are obliterated when the small town is transformed into the big city. This is a dark night-world of urban decadence, a chaotic, crowded, electrified metropolis. Its flashing neon lights signal a world of vice and corruption, commercialised attractions and insalubrious diversions. As the town has become unrecognisable, so too has the community. The 'unborn sequence' demonstrates how the lives of its members turn out without George's intervention and how even his most insignificant actions reverberate with unforeseen effects of unimagined significance. Without George, the druggist, Gower (H.B. Warner), became a panhandling alcoholic after serving a jail sentence for (accidentally) poisoning a child. George's brother, Harry (Tod Karns), wasn't rescued

³¹ See, for example, Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 520.

from drowning as a boy and couldn't subsequently save the lives of the soldiers on board the transport ship. George's mother (Beulah Bondi) grew harsh and suspicious as the landlady of 'Ma Bailey's Boarding House.' Mary, childless and spinsterish, had no prospect of family life. All these lives, untouched by George, grew desolate and turned inexorably towards bitterness, loneliness and unhappiness. Where Bedford Falls is concerned with the promise of family life exemplified in the suburban ideal, Pottersville represents a reversal of such promise and, with its emphasis on all the 'worst' manifestations of the big city, appears as an *anti-ideal*: hard, dark and unforgiving.

In a dichotomy between Bedford Falls and Pottersville, George occupies a crucial position in defending the interests of his town. With a '4-F' classification, he is disqualified from enlisting and obliged to stay at home. It is here, as Joseph's voice reports, that 'George fought the Battle of Bedford Falls.' In a 'newsreel' montage sequence, the townspeople are shown in their war roles. The servicemen abroad are all seen to have had a 'good war.' Bert (Ward Bond) was wounded in Africa and awarded the Silver Star; Ernie parachuted into France; Martini (Bill Edmunds) helped capture the Remagen Bridge; and Harry, with the most distinguished war record as a Navy flier, received the Congressional Medal of Honour from President Truman in Washington. The war also provided Sam Wainright (Frank Albertson) with a 'fortune' as an industrialist in plastics. But like the women who worked for the Red Cross and the United Service Organisation, and the old men like Gower and Uncle Billy (Thomas Mitchell) who sold war bonds, George was consigned to play his wartime role on the home front.³²

³² Stewart's civilian role plays against his wartime persona. Stewart had an exceptional (and highly publicised) military career in which he served as a squadron commander in the European Theatre, attained the rank of colonel and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. See, Editors of *Look*, 'Jimmy Stewart' in *Movie Lot To Beachhead*, 70-81. He returned with 'war hero' status and his postwar roles were inscribed with his ex-serviceman persona. The first of these, as George Bailey, was underwritten by intertextual processes through which Stewart's actual role as a returning veteran inflected his screen role. Charles Wolfe has pointed out that the publicity photograph used to illustrate the film in a cover story in *Newsweek* (December 30, 1946) 'superimposes' the return of Stewart as veteran and star onto the narrative 'return' of George Bailey. Wolfe, 'The Return of Jimmy Stewart: The publicity photograph as text,' in Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991), 92-106. As postwar narratives often featured coded representations of the ex-serviceman as an ambivalent figure, we should note that Stewart's 1950s' star persona was modified by a run of 'post-veteran' roles in which he was characterised as an altogether unstable figure, frequently neurotic or psychotic, and often physically and emotionally scarred by 'preceding' events. See, for example, his roles in the series of Anthony Mann Westerns: *Winchester '73* (1950), *Bend of the River* (1951), *The Naked Spur* (1952), *The Far Country* (1954), *The Man from Laramie* (1955).

George, associated here with both the female and the elderly, is denied access to the 'man's world' of combat and, consequently, to the opportunities provided by the war for his adventurer-explorer instincts. Here, he is linked by his aspirations to America's frontier mythology of the pioneer figure he seeks to become. This figure of the 'homeless adventurer,' as Robert Ray has pointed out, was romanticised by townspeople who saw him 'passing through on the way to unknown places' and who recurred in the wartime figure of the serviceman. Ray contends that to many who stayed at home, 'the war ... seemed like the last great adventure in a world where the possibilities for such exploits were increasingly diminishing.'³³ George, in this sense, is merely a spectator of what others have done in the war: he, paradoxically, remains an outsider at home. The narrative can be seen here to legitimate the role of the '4-F' who was often seen as a dubious figure, as a 'slacker.' (When Uncle Billy needles Potter about Harry's wartime honours, Potter retorts with a slight about 'slacker George').³⁴ The narrative works to assuage the guilt of the civilian who didn't fight abroad, but also to persuade returning servicemen that *his* fight, at home, had been as indispensable to the postwar world as their own. George's anguished frustration, in this sense, suggests a crisis of masculinity arising from a compulsory domestic role which hints at emasculation. That his 'masculinity' is ultimately restored is a way of saying for the benefit of returning servicemen that 'home' could be a 'man's world' too.³⁵

George, as the home-front hero, fights the 'Battle of Bedford Falls' on behalf of the small-town community for the realisation of a postwar suburban ideal. However, there are several scarcely suppressed indications in the narrative which call into question the values it purports to affirm. For example, George's little company hardly consti-

³³ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 193. For Ray's illuminating discussion of the film, see also, 179-215.

³⁴ George's identity crisis is linked to his 4-F status and its 'slacker' implications. Discarded script dialogue invoked FDR's 'Four Freedoms' which were equated with George's self-perception as a failure. 'I was a 4-F. In my case it didn't stand for Four Freedoms, it meant Four Failures. Failure as a husband, father, business[man] - failure as a human being.' McBride, *Frank Capra*, 519. George's 'failure' at home is contrasted with the success abroad of the narrative's 'adventurers,' Harry the war hero and Sam the tycoon.

³⁵ Stewart's casting as the 'heroic' civilian is particularly significant here, legitimated, perhaps, by his own distinguished war record.

tutes a credible opposition to Potter's business empire. While the narrative makes a virtue of the integrity implicit in the small family concern, when Uncle Billy inadvertently hands over to Potter an envelope containing \$8,000 in cash - a vital company asset - his incompetence jeopardises the future of the Building and Loan. As genial as Uncle Billy is, his antiquated eccentricities, such as the pieces of string tied to his fingers, indicate little of a modern company. Although the company's ethos implies an earlier period than the 1940s, this cannot be seen as a simple parallel with Potter's business which may appear archaic but which nevertheless differs significantly in its coded implication of corporate expansionism ('He's already got charge of the bank. He's got the bus line. He's got the department stores'). Similarly, the narrative's period setting, its sense of harking back to a 'golden age,' effectively undermines its concerns with modernisation and the future. As James Agee suggests in his review of the film, Capra 'idealizes' a nineteenth-century view of the town. 'Many small towns are, to be sure, "backward" in that generally more likable way, but I have never seen one so Norman Rockwellish as all that.'³⁶

But the Bedford Falls community can hardly be seen as the affirmative counterpoint to Pottersville that the narrative implies: nor is it quite as 'Rockwellish' as Agee suggested. Indeed, there are instances when the 'community' more closely resembles an anti-community of the type already denigrated by Potter as a 'rabble.' This is most evident when, after the Building and Loan has had its loan called in, hordes of its account holders converge there. Once inside, their mood is grim and panic-stricken as they stand in front of the teller's window with their pocket-books, anxiously pressing to withdraw their money. George explains to them that their money isn't there but *in* each of their houses. Although the townspeople are themselves the beneficiaries of homes provided by the Building and Loan, they disclaim any responsibility for such provision and, despite George's entreaties ('We've got to stick together'), their actions negate the community value implicit in the new housing settlements.

³⁶ James Agee, *It's a Wonderful Life* [review], *Nation* (December 28, 1946), quoted in McBride, *Frank Capra*, 522.

Insisting on the withdrawal of their money, they renege on their signed agreements and show a Potter-like indifference to the consequences of foreclosure. One of the first in line, Tom (Edward Keane), is the most uncompromising and his demand for full and immediate reimbursement of his '\$242' becomes an intransigent refrain. Some of the others go to Potter who, surreptitiously buying into the Building and Loan, pays them fifty cents on the dollar. They are resigned to their own losses and indifferent to the implications of Potter's ulterior motive ('Potter isn't selling! Potter's buying!') Although there is a gradual shift in the crowd's sentiment as their intractable demands turn towards more modest requests, their late conversion to some degree of 'community' responsibility cannot entirely efface the narrative's representation of the townspeople seen here, as Potter described them, with all the archetypal characteristics of the mob. Indeed, this representation of 'the masses,' swaying between Potter's 'guarantees' and George's exhortations, suggests the 'fickle mob' and its susceptibility to demagoguery. The scene, in conjunction with the 'unborn sequence' and the ending, effectively negates the democratically conceived narrative dictum that 'each man's life touches so many other lives' with the actual disclosure of *one* man's life, situated, most undemocratically, above all others. As Dana Polan has suggested, 'where the ending shows that all are brethren, the flashback suggests that only the presence of George Bailey prevents a fail [sic] into chaos.' Hence, 'the film's ostensible populism shades into fascism and the suggestion that the masses are a rabble saved only by a strong individual'.³⁷

George has continually provided others with the opportunity to realise *their* postwar suburban ideal. The scene of the residents' departure from the shantytown shacks of Potter's Field to the new houses at Bailey Park is rendered as an exodus to the Promised Land and when the Martini family arrive, there is a ceremony to bless their new home.³⁸ The imagery of the scene is drawn from the Depression era - an overloaded

³⁷ Polan, *Power and Paranoia*, 222-3. This reading invokes comparison with the 'Nietzschean' architect Howard Roark (Gary Cooper) in *The Fountainhead* (1949) whose *Übermensch* individualism finds expression in a 'quasi-fascistic' aesthetic through postwar Modernism.

³⁸ The houses are significantly described in the screenplay as '*not all alike, but each individual.*' Goodrich, et al, 'Final Script As Shot,' in, Basinger, *It's A Wonderful Life Book*, 220.

old truck, piled high with household belongings - and the move represents a transition from 1930s' deprivation to postwar prosperity, symbolised by the opportunities for home-ownership.

George's own domestic future, however, looks considerably less assured. As his home town has seemingly conspired to keep him from going away, so too has his own home. Indeed, it is here that all the years of his accumulated frustration and disappointment are focused as the old Granville house becomes for him the site of acute alienation. Since George and Mary made their wishes there, the house has been the source of ambivalent feelings. For Mary, it is the home she wished for, although it seems unlikely that George wished for it too. Although the house is associated with comedy and romance, it is also dark and dilapidated, an old gothic ruin. It is converted on their wedding night into a charming 'bridal suite' with whimsically makeshift trappings. But as George arrives, it is dark and raining: the scene is stylistically *noir*, permeated with a sense of darkness and solitude. For George, the would-be traveller, the house itself seems to fix his position permanently at home.

This, in turn, is linked to his feelings about his marriage which are not as unequivocal as the narrative suggests. After all, it was Mary's wish again rather than his which was realised. She is firmly consolidated in the home. Seen in the kitchen in her black white-trimmed dress and apron, Mary's appearance has a pointed domestic emphasis in a role which exceeds that of a traditional housewife to suggest a uniformed domestic servant and, as such, she is situated in terms of postwar assumptions about the 'reconversion' of women from wartime to domestic roles.³⁹ As McBride's description of the 'telephone scene' suggests, 'Mary's yearning for marriage, home, and family is portrayed with considerable ambivalence by Capra, who emphasizes George's resistance and his agonized capitulation.'⁴⁰ Angry and wretched, George is tortured by the

³⁹ This postwar representation is in contrast to the characteristically independent women of Capra's pre-war films. See, for example, Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) in *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* (1936); Saunders (Jean Arthur) in *Mr Smith Goes To Washington* (1939); Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Meet John Doe* (1941).

⁴⁰ McBride, *Frank Capra*, 523.

prospect of being drawn into marriage which, as he realises, will destroy his ambitions ('I don't want to get married - ever - to anyone! ... I want to do what *I* want to do'). This scene, as Barbara Deming has noted, 'is intended by Capra as comedy, and he does make it comic, and yet - through the strain of trying to - he makes it more grim.'⁴¹ Subsequently, when George returns home on Christmas Eve, the particularly concentrated form of his domestic world becomes insufferable to him. The long scene's escalating sense of anguish and desperation with everyone and everything around him triggers an explosive diatribe - 'Everything's wrong!' - against his children, his wife, his home and his town. On a table in the corner of the living-room, George's models of buildings and bridges remain the last vestige of his once-great plans, now contained, like so many of his children's toys, at home. With deep-seated resentment, he smashes them, his family having foreclosed any possibility that he might realise his ambitions.

In the film's concluding scene, however, George, the would-be outsider, is ultimately brought *in*, reunited with family and friends and reintegrated within the small-town community. The scene assembles *around* George all the townspeople who collectively contribute the funds necessary for the recovery of the Building and Loan, enabling him to 'come home.' But the 'happy ending' only seemingly consolidates George's 'return' and the revelatory sense of his 'wonderful life' remains as fragile as his building models. The quasi-religious emotionalism of the scene, with the intense physical proximity of family and the inrush of communal benevolence and goodwill, produces a crescendo of social ecstasy - what we might call an *hysterical* narrative closure - which cannot disinvest George's impassioned denunciation of his domestic life nor dispel the sheer darkness and desperation in the 'unborn' vision of himself and his community 'brethren.' Within the narrative's didactic ideology, George's 'readjustment' sees him learn to accept a *social* and *civic* role in place of his individualised fantasy of 'big' and 'important' and foreign, and to scale down his grandiose plans in order to fulfil his necessary building role within the community at home. But if the 'cosmological' significance of

⁴¹ Barbara Deming, *Running Away From Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn From the Films of the 40's* (New York: Grossman, 1969), 113.

George's life depends on his recognition of that role, he has nevertheless glimpsed the darkness beneath the surface of small-town community life and will carry with him the incommunicable knowledge that Bedford Falls remains an incipient Pottersville.

Chapter 8
'Awful Cheap Material'
Veda's Dress, Consumer Culture and *Mildred Pierce*

As social commentators equated postwar suburbanisation with conformity, they found further evidence for their critique in the period's consumer culture. 'No creature in history is more uxorious than the American consumer,' wrote Daniel Bell, highlighting the terms of a discourse in which postwar consumerism was seen as the submissive willingness of a newly-affluent 'consumer society' in thrall to the material acquisition of mass-produced commodities.¹ The consumer, according to this view, was vulnerable to the manipulative effects of advertising and the instalment plan. Moreover, as Bell implies, this was seen as a *feminised* culture which would come to be personified by the suburban housewife, compulsorily relocated after the war to a domestically-centred role in the home.²

This discourse of women's postwar domestic relocation has often been cited in critical accounts of *Mildred Pierce* (1945), especially in readings of the narrative's closure.³ Joyce Nelson, for example, has noted that the film's release in late 1945 coincided with demobilisation when women's wartime economic independence and 'freedom' had to be 'revoked' and that the film's concluding image sees the restoration of a social order in which wartime women were 'put back in their proper places.'⁴ Similarly, Pam Cook sees Mildred (Joan Crawford) finally 'returned to point zero, completely stripped [and]

¹ Bell, 'Work and Its Discontents: *The Cult of Efficiency in America*,' in *End of Ideology*, 254.

² See, for example, Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*. Friedan elaborated with considerable rhetorical force a domestic pathology of postwar women defined by the 'progressive dehumanization' of their domestic role. Her influential account, in which 'women' are generalised as a monolithic category, has been widely criticised as a study in domestic victimology which fails to acknowledge 'competing' feminine discourses. See, for example, Joanne Meyerowitz, 'Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,' in Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229-62.

³ *Mildred Pierce* has attracted considerable critical attention, not least as the textual focus of feminist theoretical concerns, often with a bias towards psychoanalytical and structuralist approaches, and usually in the context of *film noir*. See, for example, Pam Cook, 'Duplicity in *Mildred Pierce*,' in Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, 68-82; Joyce Nelson, '*Mildred Pierce* Reconsidered,' *Film Reader*, 2, repr. in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, Vol. II (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 450-8. For a 'reconciliatory' account of debates between feminist-theoretical and socio-historical approaches to the film, see, Linda Williams, 'Feminist Film Theory: *Mildred Pierce* and the Second World War,' in E. Deidre Pribram, ed., *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (London: Verso, 1990), 12-30. See also, Julie Weiss, 'Feminist Film Theory and Women's History: *Mildred Pierce* and the Twentieth Century,' *Film & History*, 22 (1992), 74-87.

⁴ Nelson, '*Mildred Pierce* Reconsidered,' 457.

rehabilitated' as she is subordinated to a domestic role.⁵ Both these accounts see Mildred's 'rise and fall' as a trajectory bound to feminine ideological containment: in Joyce's case, one loosely indexed to the exigencies of the postwar economy, and in Cook's, to a more general paradigm of female repression within a 'universal' patriarchal order. Both approaches, however, problematically elide the film's historical specificity. As a seminal 'theoretical' text, the film has been subject to voluminous work but there is little sustained analysis which relates the narrative to wartime discourses.⁶

In this chapter, I reconceptualise Mildred's 'rise and fall' in relation to the narrative's concerns with material and cultural consumerism. Wartime transformed the ideology of consumption into an ethic where 'the use of things' acquired different significance and 'the meaning of things' was invested with national wartime purpose.⁷ As wartime consumption became equated with patriotic duty, the wartime consumer was expected to participate practically in the home-front war effort and, hence, to contribute symbolically to America's wartime identity. Here, in the context of shifting assumptions about gender roles, consumer ideology was linked to changing patterns of employment and parenthood which disrupted traditional perceptions of (feminine) domesticity. Hence, I suggest that we can see in the destabilised domestic space in *Mildred Pierce* competing versions of national identity played out between an 'authentic' but unstable Americanism represented by Mildred's first husband, Bert (Bruce Bennett) and her younger daughter, Kay (Jo Ann Marlowe) against a corrupt and decadent form of anti-Americanism through Mildred's second husband, Monte Beragon (Zachary Scott) and, especially, by her older daughter, Veda (Ann Blyth). Mildred's 'rise and fall' is played out between these polarities. The narrative problematic cannot be adequately 'explained' by Mildred's 'fall' correlated with women's postwar 'reconversion,' but needs to be re-

⁵ Cook, 'Duplicity in *Mildred Pierce*,' 74, 81.

⁶ For more historically-specific accounts of the film, see Williams, 'Feminist Film Theory,' 12-30; Bis-kind, 'The Taming of the Shrew: *Mildred Pierce* and the Feminist Mistake,' in *Seeing Is Believing*, 296-304. On the film's production history, see, Albert J. LaValley, 'Introduction: *A Troublesome Property to Script*,' in, LaValley, ed., *Mildred Pierce* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 9-53; Schatz, *Genius of the System*, 414-22. On the film's promotion, see Mary Beth Haralovich, 'Selling *Mildred Pierce*: A Case Study in Movie Promotion,' in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 196-202.

⁷ On consumer culture theory, see, for example, Don Slater, *Consumer Culture & Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998). On the 'uses' and 'meanings' of things, see 131-73.

contextualised in relation to the period's consumer ideology and its bearing on 'readjustment.'

The new suburban housing development in *It's A Wonderful Life*, is prefigured in *Mildred Pierce*, where Mildred and her family are seen initially in a house not unlike those in Bailey Park. Mildred introduces her home in terms of its similarity to the others in the street, 'where all the houses looked alike.' The Pierces' home was built by Mildred's husband, Bert and his business partner, Wally Fay (Jack Carson). Their real estate business and its extensive housing developments had been successful ('they made good money' and 'built a lot of houses') but after a rapid downturn in the economy ('the boom was over'), Bert lost his job and Mildred's prospects were bound up with those of an unemployed husband.⁸ Until recently Bert was gainfully employed and provided for his family, but now, newly-unemployed, he finds himself left with little more than a sense of his own redundancy. Although a civilian, he is attributed with characteristics often associated with veterans. At home, for example, Bert is sullen, irritable and physically inactive whereas Mildred is busy in the kitchen. When she broaches the subject of a job for him, his surly and introspective response suggests that he is quite familiar with her bustling reproachfulness ('It might be nice if you left me alone for five minutes, Mildred. When the time comes, I'll get a job'). The contrast between Mildred's activity and Bert's inertia highlights in visual terms the disjunction in their relationship.

A disagreement ensues over the upbringing of their children, Kay and Veda, triggered by the delivery of a dress which Mildred has bought for Veda. For Bert, the dress is the latest extravagance to be lavished on their daughter and he wants to know where Mildred got the money for it. 'Baking cakes and making pies for the neighbours. That's where I got it. I earned it,' she answers defiantly. 'That's right,' he retorts. 'Throw it up at me that I can't support my own family.' The exchange demonstrates a shift in the balance of domestic power within their marriage as Mildred is already beginning to acquire independent earning power where Bert has none. While she becomes empowered

⁸ The narrative is grounded in wartime fears of a seemingly inevitable postwar bust while obliquely evoking an ambient sense of the Depression.

through her spending capability, he becomes increasingly marginalised through his lack of income. Money - and everything money can buy - will become for her the means by which she will express with obsessive intensity her love for her daughters and, in her determination to 'do the best' for them, she insists that they 'come first' in the house. At the same time, she recognises that her plans for the children's upbringing will be jeopardised by a husband who instinctively opposes her ambitions for them. Bert feels that Mildred is compulsively 'trying to buy love' from them and has misgivings about *how* she is buying their love and *what*, through them, she is buying into.

He is aggrieved to see his daughters being led into a world of accomplishments, where 'Veda has to have a piano and lessons and fancy outfits ... And Kay, a nice normal kid that just wants to skip rope and play baseball. But she's got to take ballet lessons!' Bert is intuitively suspicious of this world with its social and cultural pretensions but finds it difficult to articulate his misgivings ('There's something wrong, Mildred. I - I don't know what. I'm not smart that way. But I know it isn't right to ...') There is a narrative implication here of a wartime separation between husband and wife in which the mother has assumed full parental responsibility in the 'absence' of the father. Against Mildred's uncompromising determination to do what *she* feels is 'best' for the children, Bert seems faltering and ineffectual. As he slumps on the sofa with his newspaper, he appears indolent and adrift, powerless to influence the course which Mildred has single-mindedly set for their children.

Despite the ambiguity of his wartime status, Bert's recumbent posture here can be seen as one of the recurrent images in many postwar narratives which invokes the figure of the returned veteran. Scott Simmon has illustrated this figure of postwar *ennui* with the examples of Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) in *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and Al Stephenson in *Best Years of Our Lives*. '[Fredric] March,' suggests Simmon, 'is weary, and the film admires his presumption of a well-earned rest, feet up, taking time off for contemplation between wartime and postwar modes of action. ... Wyatt's posture *could*

lead him to be mistaken for a member of the group of ... veterans mocked in 1946 as "The Rocking Chair Club" ... who opted for a year of twenty-dollar-a-week "readjustment allowance."⁹ Bert's recumbency in this scene could also be read as a visual metaphor for the putative inertia of 'the veteran.' Alternatively, we might read his domestic recumbency as indicative of his *non*-veteran status, as a 4-F, here - in contrast to George Baily in *It's A Wonderful Life* - with 'slacker' implications. (Hence, the narrative can be seen as working towards Bert's 'rehabilitation' as much as Mildred's and, ultimately, to see him reconstituted through his eventual reunion with her.) In either case, his passivity as both husband and father implies a debilitated form of postwar masculinity which, in a postwar discourse concerned with the disruption of traditional gender roles, was seen in relation to 'deviant' forms of maternalism which the weakened male had become powerless to affect.

From the outset, Mildred has always been situated within the domestic sphere and she summarises her early life exclusively in terms of its domestic boundaries: 'I was always in the kitchen. I felt as though I'd been born in a kitchen and lived there all my life, except for the few hours it took to get married ... I married Bert when I was seventeen. I never knew any other kind of life, just cooking and washing and having children.' Mildred's narration suggests an innate dissatisfaction with a domestic life which seems to her like a domestic form of penal servitude, a role which seemed inevitable.¹⁰

Mildred's narrative characterisation is related to a discourse in which women's roles during the 1930s and 1940s were subject to a series of conflicting assumptions and expectations. In the prewar period, the Depression effectively consolidated the traditional view which saw women restricted to a domestic role so that, as Susan Hartmann has suggested, 'women were put on the defensive as a general consensus hardened

around the position that married women should not work outside the home.'¹¹ From a

⁹ Simmon, 'Concerning the Weary Legs of Wyatt Earp: The Classic Western According to Shakespeare,' in Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, eds., *The Western Reader* (New York: Limelight, 1998), 159.

¹⁰ There is a narrative implication here (despite discrepancies in the children's ages) of a war marriage and, with Bert's departure, Mildred's situation as a war widow. Wally tells her, 'You've just joined the biggest army on earth ... the great American institution that never gets mentioned on the Fourth of July ... a grass widow with two kids to support.'

¹¹ Hartmann, *Home Front and Beyond*, 16.

prewar perspective, this position seemed inevitable. 'The Depression,' William Chafe points out, 'had fostered a wave of reaction against any change in women's traditional role.'¹² Women who did work outside the home were maligned for 'usurping' jobs which were seen to belong rightfully to men. Women in these circumstances had little alternative but to fall back on the only resource available to them to help make ends meet, that of their domestic base. 'As family income declined,' says Hartmann, 'wives had to substitute their own labor for goods and services which they had formerly purchased.' Domesticity, then, provided a crucial economic resource. 'Home canning, baking, and sewing for family consumption increased, and women also endeavored to supplement family income by taking in laundry or boarders or preparing food and clothing to sell.'¹³ Moreover, if a husband was unemployed, the wife often assumed yet further responsibility through 'women's traditional function of providing emotional maintenance ... as they coped with the psychological strains created when husbands no longer could live up to the traditional standard of masculinity - that of family provider.' Moreover, an unemployed husband spending more time at home could also become an awkward presence in 'her' domestic space.¹⁴ For women who did work outside the home, the type of work available usually represented an extension of their domestic role, where a 'sex-segregated labor market resembled the division of labor in the family: women factory workers were concentrated in the production of clothing, food and other goods formerly made by women in the home,' while 'women in fields like health care, education, and even clerical work were seen as performing wifely and motherly functions.'¹⁵

With wartime mobilisation, however, working women could no longer be discounted because they had become indispensable to the war effort. The strictured domestic ideology of the 1930s which had determined women's domestic role as a national duty was abruptly reversed. Indeed, it suddenly became a national duty for women to undertake non-domestic wartime roles which were assigned a new kind of national sig-

¹² Chafe, *American Woman*, 135.

¹³ Hartmann, *Home Front and Beyond*, 16-17.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

nificance. Women were made aware of their importance, says Hartmann, 'not alone as mothers, wives and homemakers, but also as workers, citizens, and even as soldiers,' roles which provided opportunities in areas traditionally seen as the exclusive preserve of men.¹⁶

The exigencies of wartime, then, produced a social reconstruction of women's 'national' roles through which they gained importance as a force *outside* the home. These new roles, however, were necessitated and legitimated only by the conditions of wartime expediency and there remained a deep residual sense of women's traditional association with domesticity. As women were repositioned in their new wartime roles, they were simultaneously reminded that their former domestic role would ultimately be resumed. Hartmann identifies three conditions by which public discourse delimited the prospects for women's wartime roles to be carried over into the postwar period. Firstly, 'women were replacing men in the world outside the home only "for the duration."' Women, it was assumed, *wanted* to return home and would readily relinquish their wartime jobs to returning servicemen. Secondly, 'women would retain their "femininity,"' despite their 'masculinised' working appearance. Thirdly, women's war work was actually a manifestation of an 'eternal' femininity as 'women took war jobs to bring their men home more quickly and to help make the world a more secure place for their children.'¹⁷

This imperative towards domestic 'reconversion' can be seen as a parallel process to the 'readjustment' of returning servicemen and, indeed, women were seen to have an indispensable role in veteran 'readjustment.' A proliferation of popular and professional literature about 'assimilation' emphasised women's primary responsibility in this role.¹⁸ Where 'marital reconstruction' was at stake, it became incumbent on wives to safeguard their marriages and 'marital success,' Hartmann suggests, 'required conformity to such traditional ideals of womanhood as dependence, submissiveness, and self-abnegation.'¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid, 23.

¹⁸ See Hartmann, 'Prescriptions for Penelope,' 223-39.

¹⁹ Hartmann, *Home Front and Beyond*, 169.

Mildred's narrative characterisation situates her within the shifting demands of this discourse. Where social presumptions assigned women to a domestic role and men to an economic one, *Mildred Pierce* sees an inversion of these roles. The continuity of a gendered social order is disrupted here from the outset as both Mildred and Bert occupy ideologically 'misplaced' roles. Their marital relationship becomes a contest of what we might call 'successful' femininity versus 'failed' masculinity. Wartime had precipitated a gendered imbalance in a marriage which had lost any 'democratic' sense of partnership: she is dominant, he is subordinate. As an incapable breadwinner, Bert 'fails' his family and, consequently, Mildred assumes financial responsibility for them in place of their 'failed' father. As Bert becomes increasingly redundant, Mildred turns away from him. He has already drifted into a relationship with Maggie Biederhof (Lee Patrick) which Mildred uses as the nominal cause of the breakdown in their marriage. She throws him out and begins to focus her attention exclusively on the children..²⁰

Veda's dress becomes, symbolically, the means by which the relationship between mother and daughter is defined. Veda, with her airs and graces and ladylike ways, has pretensions to an altogether superior social position to the one she actually has. Although the dress is 'the best' that Mildred can afford - and paid for only by the most assiduous husbandry - Veda is contemptuous about it because she finds it cheap and nasty, ill-befitting the young lady whom she takes herself to be. As she cultivates a superior sense of herself through her fastidious tastes, the dress becomes a particular affront to her because it offends against her idea of refinement: it is *vulgar*. Her disdain for the dress is also an expression of her distaste for its source. There is something especially contemptible in the expression of distaste through smell, and Veda's visceral reaction - 'It's awful cheap material ... I can tell by the smell' - is because she can 'smell' her mother's money in it, money which smells to her of vulgarity.

²⁰ The discourse of assimilation stressed the crucial role of wives in a literature which 'called upon women to strengthen the male ego, relinquish some of their own independence, and, above all, to adapt their needs and interests to those of their returning men.' *Ibid*, 25. In so doing, women were themselves subject to a parallel process of assimilation in which their wartime gains in extra-domestic roles would be peremptorily curtailed. Mildred, in this context, suggests a counter-discourse which repudiates these prescriptive roles, both domestic and assimilative.

We can see here, *in the dress*, a problematic question of *taste* through cultural consumption in what the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu has theorised as the ‘distinction’ of economic and cultural capital.²¹ Veda’s response to the dress can be seen in relation to Bourdieu’s assertion that ‘tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (“sick-making”) of the tastes of others.’²² Bourdieu argues that because cultural distinctions are (hierarchically) indexed to class distinctions, tastes function ideologically ‘as markers of “class”’ and that cultural consumption is ‘predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.’²³ Veda sees the dress as a cultural marker of the social inferiority she despises. Her social outlook is strictly determined by social stratification: she sees Kay as ‘a peasant,’ Mrs Biederhof as ‘distinctly middle-class,’ and Mildred as ‘a common waitress.’ Mildred acquires economic capital but, like the dress, lacks ‘class’ herself. The choice of dress, then, is not merely an error of stylistic judgment; rather, it bears the stigma of cultural inadequacy and, consequently, of social inferiority.

Mildred attempts to buy into ‘class’ but her ‘best’ is necessarily limited to what she can afford: for Veda, Mildred’s ‘best’ isn’t good enough and never can be. Veda’s social aspirations are inevitably unattainable, or at least beyond what Mildred could then provide for her (‘*definitely* not the best’). Mildred also attempts to acquire ‘class’ via ‘culture’ by buying Veda music lessons. Culture, in this sense, is the repertoire of the European classical tradition, reflected in Veda’s ludicrously pretentious French (‘I’m learning a new piece. “Valse Brilliante.” That means “brilliant waltz”’) as a cultural expression of her social superiority.

But if Veda subscribes to this idea of culture, her younger sister rejects it. Kay is initially seen wearing overalls and playing-rough-and-tumble football on the street with other local children. Veda passes by imperiously, disgusted with the scene: appalled by Kay’s dirty, dishevelled appearance and raucous, boisterous behaviour, Veda intervenes

²¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans., Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1996).

²² *Ibid.*, 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2, 7.

and takes her away. Kay is the social antithesis of her older sister and, as the 'nice normal kid' described by her father, Kay's 'street' normality is contrasted with Veda's social pretentiousness. When, for example, they return home together, Kay's vernacular greeting to her mother, 'Lo, Ma,' is contrasted with the affected formality of Veda's 'Good afternoon, Mother.' Kay withstands the concerted attempts made by her mother and sister to equip her with 'culture' and her attitude to *their* culture can be seen in her 'Carmen Miranda' rendition. With her improvised stage costume and crudely applied lipstick and mascara, her vaudevillian performance is a comic travesty of the female elegance and glamour to which she is supposed to aspire and a parody of the cultural values implicit in her ballet lessons. As Mildred insists on the inculcation of 'classical' cultural values for both her children, Kay's 'normal' reaction is to disregard them. Against Kay's 'normal' outlook, Veda's social and cultural pretensions seem abnormal.

Mildred's orchestration of her children's values seems motivated by a kind of maternal perversity contrary to those values held to be necessary and desirable in the national interests of home-front wartime unity. Where the home front was concerned with the *modification* of domestic consumption, Mildred transgressively opposes collective national interests in pursuit of self-interested ambition through profligate consumerism. In what Caroline F. Ware has called 'the consumer front,' civilians were called upon to play a crucial role as home-front consumers.²⁴ With the emergence of 'consumer education' as a professional field, civilians became subject to wide-ranging guidance and instruction on the problems of domestic management.²⁵ In what was tantamount to a manifesto for wartime civilians, the wartime consumer was situated in quasi-military terms in a discourse which constructed wartime consumerism as a national 'duty.' Consumers were conceptualised in terms of a citizenship role, as 'citizens of a democracy at war,' and exhorted to draw on their 'weapons' of 'initiative, responsibility, and resourcefulness.'²⁶ It was a discourse in which domesticity and democracy became indivisible,

²⁴ Ware, *The Consumer Goes To War: A Guide To Victory On the Home Front* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1942), 1-4.

²⁵ See also, Kenneth Dameron, ed., *Consumer Problems in Wartime* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1944).

²⁶ Ware, *Consumer Goes To War*, 2. See also, 194-223.

whereby, according to the typical sloganeering rhetoric of wartime, 'Democracy in the home helps democracy in the nation.'²⁷

But if civilians were to be enlisted in this consumer-conscious 'army,' they would have to set aside any notion of the continuing availability of consumer goods. 'From now on,' Ware predicted, 'virtually everything is going to be "scarce."'²⁸ Restrictions on wartime goods and services were extensive; shortages and rationing were widespread.²⁹ These privations began to make themselves felt immediately, cutting deeply into an American consumerist culture predicated on taken-for-granted natural resources and a highly-developed manufacturing capability, where material abundance was inscribed in America's national identity. 'Visible possession and conspicuous consumption,' Paul Fussell suggests, 'had been the traditional signals of personal distinction.' Consequently, 'to be told by the government that one could not buy and exhibit a new car or wear new shoes or silk stockings or have a new extension phone installed was a heavy blow to the psyche.'³⁰ Wartime shortages and controls set limits on America's consumerist culture, calling into question a national identity often characterised in terms of 'possession' and 'consumption.' Traditional assumptions and expectations about consumerism were required to change, as Ware advised: 'We have struggled to "keep up with the Joneses"; now both we and the Joneses must "keep down."'³¹

However, wartime's deprivation culture was also seen as a positive development. Where prewar society was seen as materialistic, wartime deprivation could be seen to challenge the national 'orthodoxy' of material acquisition and bring about a qualitative change in the relationship between the consumer and the thing consumed. Possessions, Ware counselled, are 'to be used efficiently, to be kept in repair, to be made to last and to be shared with others.'³² Things would be inscribed with new value: with a new em-

²⁷ Benjamin Andrews, 'Household Management in Wartime,' in Dameron, ed., *Consumer Problems in Wartime*, 330-1.

²⁸ Ware, *Consumer Goes To War*, 5.

²⁹ On wartime shortages and the home-front consumer, see, for example, A. A. Hoehling, *Home Front, U.S.A* (New York: Crowell, 1966), 63-79.

³⁰ Fussell, *Wartime*, 195.

³¹ Ware, *Consumer Goes To War*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 106.

phasis on 'care and repair,' carelessness, wastefulness and profligacy became indefensibly unpatriotic. If possessions formerly constituted objects of pride, wartime necessitated an altogether different attitude, 'a different kind of pride, pride in the ability to make old things do, pride in ingenuity and in skill.'³³ An ethic of demonstrable frugality was encouraged everywhere. Richard Polenberg describes how a school in Rockport, Illinois instituted a 'patriotic patches' club which *required* students to wear patched clothes.³⁴ These exhortations to 'make' and 'do' signalled a new social ethic involving more productive and creative kinds of consumer management.³⁵ The old competitive consumer culture of 'keeping up with the Joneses' was discredited as the new consumer ideology promoted an alternative ethic of sharing through the rediscovery of traditional social practices.³⁶ This ethic served to provide a renewed sense of 'community' and, indeed, it would be through community organisation initiatives that 'consumer education' would be implemented.³⁷

Ware's manifesto, in this sense, is not only a manual for the home-front consumer, but also a critique of those 'anti-social' values derived from an unconstrained consumerist ethic. These values had displaced the social connections implicit in 'community' which wartime values could redeem and, hence, enable the rediscovery of community.³⁸ Moreover, these same 'anti-social' values had destabilised democracy as a 'real' rather than a rhetorical force. Democracy is a way of life, Ware insisted, necessarily enacted 'in our day-to-day relations in the neighborhood, in school, at work, and in our local government.' Democratic principles must find expression through these local communities, she says, because, 'if they are not expressed here, no amount of talk about our

³³ Ibid, 109-10. See also, 106-14.

³⁴ Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible*, 65.

³⁵ For example, this ethic is implicit in a period neologism - 'imagineering' - which, in its contraction of 'imagination' and 'engineering,' promoted (American) initiative, ingenuity and invention. See, Paulena Nickell, 'Care and Use of Consumer Goods,' in, Dameron, ed., *Consumer Problems in Wartime*, 370.

³⁶ 'Sharing used to be a common American practice in the days when frontier families joined in log raisings to build each other's houses, or cooperated in quilting parties to make each other's quilts.' Ware, *Consumer Goes To War*, 112.

³⁷ See, for example, Kenneth Dameron, 'Introduction - Consumer Education in Wartime,' in Dameron, ed., *Consumer Problems in Wartime*, 1-22.

³⁸ Ware, *Consumer Goes To War*, 187. See also, 187-223.

“democratic way of life” can have any meaning.’³⁹ Thus, it is precisely *through* wartime deprivation that ‘traditional’ American values - initiative, responsibility, resourcefulness - could be mobilised to combat the adverse effects on community and democracy of a possession-consumption culture. This, as Dana Polan has suggested, was a ‘discourse of war not merely as the triumph *over* scarcity but as a kind of welcomed triumph *of* scarcity.’⁴⁰

Although *Mildred Pierce* occupies an uncertain temporal space and elides any explicit reference to wartime,⁴¹ the narrative is underwritten by concerns with home-front consumerism and its postwar implications.⁴² The wartime discourse which constructed the home front through reconstituted forms of community and democracy appealed to a sense of social *levelling*. In this context, *Mildred Pierce* can be read as a kind of counter-discourse in which Mildred repudiates the national ethic of home-front values and, instead, subscribes to a series of ‘anti-values’ which positions her outside, or in opposition to, wartime’s community-democracy discourse. Mildred has considerable potential to contribute to the objectives of ‘the consumer front’ but evades any personal responsibility for involvement. She is extraordinarily capable - resourceful, enterprising, industrious - but all her talents and efforts are ‘misguidedly’ concentrated on personal rather than collective goals.

Mildred’s domestic expertise has always been accompanied by acute financial acumen and the kitchen has always provided her income. But there is a narrative ambivalence about her domestic characterisation and an implication that she has overinvested in the kitchen as a commercial enterprise. There is already a sense of something inap-

³⁹ Ibid, 187.

⁴⁰ Polan, *Power and Paranoia*, 85.

⁴¹ The narrative contains only one specific reference to wartime, when Monte mentions that ‘nylons are out for the duration.’ Other references are more oblique, as when Ida (Eve Arden) alludes vaguely to a ‘manpower shortage.’ On the ‘*non-specific* context of a never-mentioned war,’ see Williams, ‘Feminist Film Theory,’ 20-9. Haralovich notes that ‘the film managed to convey a range of wartime conditions - working women, absent husbands, housing shortages - without directly invoking the war.’ Haralovich, ‘Selling *Mildred Pierce*, 202.

⁴² The narrative treatment of these issues may have been too close to home for wartime audiences. As Thomas Schatz has pointed out, the film’s release was held over until shortly after V-J Day when a postwar box office appeared more favourable. ‘*Mildred Pierce* tapped directly into the postwar mood of the country - generally upbeat, but with an undercurrent of anxiety about traditional notions of sexuality and marriage, which in a postwar milieu necessarily raised questions about women in the workplace, housing, and the economy in general.’ Schatz, *Genius of the System*, 421.

propriate or even 'wrong' about her use of family domestic space for business purposes. A similar sense of ambivalence attaches to Mildred throughout her professional career.⁴³ Following Bert's departure, she quickly discovers from the household accounts that she is 'dead broke' and urgently in need of a job. A montage sequence shows her attempts to find work repeatedly rejected until only her dogged resolve keeps her going. By sheer force of determination, she finally gets a job in a restaurant where she undergoes an intense apprenticeship and, as she recounts, made rapid progress: 'I learned the restaurant business ... I learned it the hard way. In three weeks I was a good waitress ... In six weeks I felt I'd worked in a restaurant all my life ... and in three months I was one of the best waitresses in the place.' When Mildred's driving ambition has taken her as far as she can go in the restaurant, she utilises her entrepreneurial talent to sell her own produce there. She is seen in the kitchen at home with an order sheet, working indefatigably through the night to meet the orders. She exploits the traditional domestic role of the female as the only way available to her to achieve an independent income. But if her achievements are admirable, there is already an implication of instability in the accelerating momentum of her success and her rise is accompanied by a sense of hubris. She is successful because she is businesslike but, at the same time, she seems altogether *too* businesslike.

Mildred becomes phenomenally successful as a businesswoman: a montage sequence illustrates her 'rise' through her chain of restaurants with their prominent neon signs - 'Mildred's' - crowded with customers and busy cash registers.⁴⁴ But it is as a businesswoman that her success is measured and found wanting. As she recounts herself, the *raison d'être* for her business empire was for one exclusive purpose. 'Everywhere you went I had a restaurant ... they made money. Everything I touched

⁴³ Mildred's ambivalent characterisation is accentuated by the way in which Crawford is lit for the role, often with diagonal shadows partially obscuring her face.

⁴⁴ The success of 'Mildred's' can be read as narrative representation of the transformation of the postwar diner from a predominantly male, working-class 'eatery' to a middle-class, family restaurant. Andrew Hurley has described how postwar consumer culture was characterised by the domestication of public spaces such as the restaurant, which came to resemble the suburban home. Hurley, 'From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture,' *Journal of American History*, 83 (1997), 1282-1308.

turned into money ... and I needed it. I needed it for Veda ... she was becoming a young lady ... with expensive tastes.' The situation had become something of a Catch-22 because the more successful Mildred became, the more money she made, and the more she could buy for Veda. But, at the same time, the more successful she was, the more commercial she looked, and the more despicable her money appeared. Veda was being fashioned as 'a young lady' through Mildred's business but despised the source of the money because it was tainted by commerce. In other words, the same means which were supposed to make her into a lady were preventing her from becoming one.

Veda had always shown an obsessive concern with money and class. Her world view is predicated on material acquisition, particularly where it confirmed her 'ladylike' status. She valued others only inasmuch that they could be instrumental in contributing towards her pursuit of status. Only hours after her father's departure, she was slyly calculating the material benefits which might accrue from her mother's remarriage ('a maid and a limousine ... and maybe a new house'). Even as the family became, literally and symbolically, 'broke,' Veda was already beginning to broker a loveless marriage for her mother in order to raise her own social standing. She had already treated her father's departure with cool indifference in contrast to the arrival of her dress which she greeted - at least momentarily - with animated enthusiasm. Indeed, the only real significance in Bert's departure was the new opportunities for her social advancement. Her pretended indifference to what Wally could provide ('I don't care what we have ... as long as we're together') couldn't conceal how self-centred, materialistic and duplicitous she really was ('It's just that there are so many things I - we should have, and haven't got').

Moreover, there is already a sense in which 'love' between mother and daughter is being transacted through the promise of future money and class. Although Mildred sees through Veda's attempts to manipulate her, she can't help but respond sympathetically ('I know, darling. I know. I want you to have nice things. And you will. Wait and see. I'll get you everything. Anything you want. I promise'). Mildred knows that to obtain

the love which she desperately covets from Veda, she must negotiate for it. Veda detects her mother's vulnerability and ruthlessly uses it to strengthen her bargaining position, knowing that her 'love' is an asset to be exploited. Her response to Mildred's 'I love you, Veda' is qualified ultimately by the physical rejection of her mother's kiss: 'I love you, Mother. Really I do. But let's not be sticky about it.'⁴⁵

Although Mildred would eventually provide Veda with money, she couldn't provide her with class. For Veda, the aspiring lady, the discovery that her mother was 'a common waitress' had been a lesson in humiliation and degradation. It also confirmed what she has already suspected: that her mother lacks the kind of pedigree which confers social respectability through lineage ('You've never spoken of your people'). Veda imputes the blame for her own *déclassée* status to her mother's 'common' job and 'disreputable' background: no amount of Mildred's hard-earned money can conceal her low-born, ill-bred origins, nor disguise her *nouveau riche* social position ('You think now you've made a little money you can get a new hairdo and some expensive clothes and turn yourself into a lady, but you can't because you'll never be anything but a common frump whose father lived over a grocery store and whose mother took in washing'). Mildred becomes the target for all that Veda finds repugnant about the *reek* of work and the 'stigma' of *working-class* status. 'With enough money I can get away from you ... from you and your chickens and your pies and your kitchens and everything that smells of grease. I can get away from this shack with its cheap furniture, and away from this town and its dollar days, and its furniture factories, and its women that wear uniforms and its men that wear overalls. With money I can get away from every rotten, stinking

⁴⁵ Veda's characterisation suggests psychopathic tendencies, a condition in which Mildred was pathologically complicit. The mother-daughter relationship here is linked to the discourse of 'momism' in which mothers were criticised for over-determined maternalism and overindulgence in their children's upbringing which stunted the autonomous development of children. See, Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*. Wylie identified behind the outward appearance of maternal overcaring a pathology of vanity and egotism. These elements can be found in the source novel where the mother-daughter relationship is overtly incestuous. See, James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce* [1941] (New York: Vintage, 1998). In the film, Mildred's obsession with Veda suggests a perverted kind of narcissistic mother-love, as Molly Haskell has noted. 'Even Mildred's competence in the business world, radical enough, perhaps, for its time, is not a sign of independence sought for its own sake, but of initiative in the service of family (or of self-love pervertedly disguised). Mildred's ambitions are for some "higher purpose" than self-fulfillment.' Haskell, *From Reverence To Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 179-80.

thing that even reminds me of this place - or you').

Class is provided by Monte Beragon who, unlike Mildred, doesn't have money, but does have at least the appearance of wealth and, more significantly, the cachet of class. We can see Monte's superior social standing in relation to the 'leisure class' theorised by Thorstein Veblen. Social status ('esteem'), Veblen argued, is derived not merely from the possession of wealth, but demonstrated conspicuously through 'abstention' from 'productive' labour. Not working, he suggests, doesn't imply indolence but distance from the necessity to work. From such a distance, the 'leisure' class would usually have 'an instinctive repugnance' for 'vulgar' labour and the 'ceremonial uncleanness' which attaches to 'menial service.'⁴⁶

Monte maintains the semblance of 'a man of property' through the Beragon estate, which includes a beach house and 'the old family mansion in Pasadena.' Characterised in dress and demeanour as an aristocratic figure and associated with the decadent implications of a European aristocracy, Monte is a society playboy who belongs to a 'society' *milieu*, a leisured world of polo, yachting and racing. (Veda is familiar with 'the Monte Beragon' from 'the society section'). Without money, however, this is an unsustainable world, and Monte has only his 'class' credentials. It is also a class which eschews any question of what he might *do* ('Oh, I loaf ... in a decorative and highly charming manner') and he disdains the very idea of doing what *others* do ('if there's one thing I can't stand it's watching people work'). But however penniless Monte may be, he has at least the vestigial distinction of *class* denoted through his leisured lifestyle and aversion to work. As Mildred begins to support him financially, he comes to regard her money as contemptuously as Veda does, 'contaminated' at source: 'Yes, I take money from you, Mildred. But not enough to make me like kitchens or cooks. They smell of grease.' Although he finds it convenient for Mildred to pay the bills for such items as his polo saddle and monogrammed shirts, he sees Veda as superior to her because, like him, she is 'above' what Mildred does ('She's not like you ... You'll never make a

⁴⁶ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* [1899] (New York: Mentor, 1963), 41-4.

waitress out of *her*').

The family mansion takes on strategic importance for Mildred as the symbolic expression of the class to which Veda aspires and will become the means by which her return can be arranged. But if the house is an expression of class, it is also, like Monte, an anachronism. The house is old and gloomy with a faded gothic splendour, 'an antiquated tomb' which sees Monte at his most languid and effete. Monte, in this sense, isn't merely a degenerate 'slacker' but a figure whose *unworking* lifestyle situates him in opposition to the imperatives of collective wartime enterprise with its national ethic of modified consumption, domestic husbandry and participative citizenship. Monte's seductive decadence, as the focus of attraction and emulation, effectively destroys everything Mildred has worked for. After his death, Mildred is reunited with Bert who, like Fred Derry at the end of *Best Years of Our Lives*, is working again (for an aircraft company), significantly 'rehabilitated with a job'⁴⁷ which will provide the economic basis for their reconstituted marriage. If their future life together seems tentative and uncertain, it will at least be grounded in aspirations more modestly and pragmatically modified by integrity which, in the circumstances, is the best they can hope for.

⁴⁷ LaValley, 'Notes to the Screenplay,' *Mildred Pierce*, 251.

Chapter 9

Decor and Recollection: *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna and American Cultural Readjustment *Letter From an Unknown Woman* and *The Emperor Waltz*

In *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1948),¹ the arrival of Stefan Brand (Louis Jourdan) at the apartment building is preceded by the arrival of his belongings. For Lisa Berndle (Joan Fontaine), these objects are imbued with fascination and wonder and, from her adolescent viewpoint, the collection of musical paraphernalia and *objets d'art* seems strange and alluring. They surely presaged the arrival of someone extraordinary, someone of exquisite taste and refinement. Lisa's first 'recollection' of Stefan is of a moment before she even sees him, a moment in which she sees his possessions as exotica, objects which enigmatically impart a sense of their owner. As she recalls this moment - 'I wondered about our new neighbour who owned such beautiful things' - she had already begun to construct 'Stefan' through his possessions as an imaginary figure. His arrival, prefigured by his 'beautiful things,' marked the birth of her conscious life: 'Nothing,' she narrates, 'is vivid or real in my memory before that day in Spring ...' Stefan becomes for Lisa the subject of studied observation as she watches him and listens to him at every opportunity, assiduously contriving to enter his world. Shown initially as little older than a child, we see her listening dreamily while playing on a swing, captivated by the sound of his music and the sound of her swing can be heard as a creaking accompaniment to the Liszt *étude* he is playing.

¹ For work on the film, see, Virginia Wright Wexman, 'The Transformation of History: Ophuls, Vienna, and *Letter From an Unknown Woman*,' in Wexman and Karen Hollinger, eds., *Letter From an Unknown Woman: Max Ophuls, Director* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 3-14; V. F. Perkins, 'Letter From an Unknown Woman,' *Movie* ['Max Ophuls'], 29/30 (1982), 61-72; George M. Wilson, 'Max Ophuls' *Letter From an Unknown Woman*,' in, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), 103-25. On Max Ophuls, see Susan M. White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls: Magisterial Vision and the Figure of Woman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). The film is based on the novella by Stefan Zweig, *Brief Einer Unbekannten* (*Letter From an Unknown Woman*), trans., Jill Sutcliffe, repr. in Wexman and Hollinger, eds., *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, 157-85. It is also worth noting the film's remarkable similarity to *Only Yesterday* (1933), a 'letter' narrative with a flashback structure in which Mary Lane (Margaret Sullavan) has a child by a soldier, James Emerson (John Boles) who subsequently fails to recognise her. On the film's production history, see, Howard Koch, 'Script to Screen with Max Ophuls,' and John Houseman, 'Front and Center,' repr. in Wexman and Hollinger, eds., *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, 197-203, 189-96. See also, Richard Corliss, *Talking Pictures: Screenwriters in the American Cinema* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1985), 116-22.

The young Lisa is gauche and gawky while Stefan is elegant and charming: his world is glamorous, sophisticated and cosmopolitan. The adolescent's awestruck fascination with the seductive appeal of the older man raises questions about her identity in relation to his and about the way in which her consciousness becomes animated by her discovery of his world. The narrative also raises questions through their ensuing relationship about postwar national identity where Europe and America are linked to a discourse of American cultural identity. The film has often been categorised as melodrama and discussed in terms of female subjectivity as an exemplar of the generic 'woman's film.'² But we can also see in Lisa's strangely uncompromising devotion to the 'worthless' Stefan a narrative connection with an emergent cultural Americanism which was being constructed against the fading glamour of a decadent Europeanism. The discourse of 'readjustment,' as we have seen, was largely concerned with the social implications of veterans returning to postwar American society and often with the kind of society veterans were returning *to*. Similarly, we can identify a corresponding discourse which we might call cultural 'readjustment.' Here, intellectuals turned their collective attention to what they saw as the necessary redefinition of America's postwar cultural identity in contradistinction to the cultural hegemony of a Europe which many saw as the site of an archaic, decadent civilisation *and* the issuing source of totalitarian modernity. In this chapter, I want to suggest that our readings of *Letter From an Unknown Woman* and *The Emperor Waltz* (1947) can be usefully recontextualised in relation to this discourse of cultural 'readjustment.'

There was a long tradition in America's literary, artistic and intellectual life which viewed Europe as the source of an historically authentic culture and civilisation which America self-consciously lacked. America, according to this view, contrasted unfavourably with the richness and complexity of a 'mature' European cultural tradition against which its own native culture could seem rudimentary and 'adolescent.' Henry James, for example, famously catalogued the qualitative aspects of a European culture which he

² See, for example, Tania Modleski, 'Time and Desire in the Woman's Film,' *Cinema Journal*, 23 (1984), repr. in Wexman and Hollinger, eds., *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, 249-62.

found constituted the 'high civilisation' substantively 'absent' in a nineteenth-century America he measured in terms of cultural deficit.³ The hegemonic allure of European culture and civilisation remained an influential force as many American writers, artists and intellectuals saw themselves as culturally disinherited at home. Moreover, with increasing misgivings about American 'mass culture,' they often saw themselves as cultural outsiders, estranged from a native culture seen as 'absent' or *ersatz*.

But the meaning of Europe as a self-evident cultural entity is problematic conception. 'Europe,' as David Morley and Kevin Robins have pointed out, 'is not just a geographical site, it is also an idea.'⁴ 'Europe,' in this sense, is the imaginary Other against which American intellectuals sought to define their own national-cultural identity. Conversely, a collective sense of a European identity, drawing on its 'culture and civilisation' traditions, was constituted against America's putative 'non-culture' or 'anti-culture.' A tradition of European anti-Americanism was defensively constructed against the threat of 'Americanisation' which usually meant fears of an invasive mass culture - vulgar, brash and commercialised - which threatened to subsume the quality of European culture.⁵ These fears about 'Americanisation,' however, can be seen as a European reaction to American modernity where, as C.W.E. Bigsby has suggested, 'forces of change' were equated with 'the approach of barbarism' which is 'destructive of taste and tradition.' America, Bigsby says, 'has inevitably been invoked as the paradigm of a society lacking the necessary spiritual and national qualities required to resist what has all too often been regarded as the onset of moral and aesthetic decay.'⁶

Postwar American commentators became preoccupied with the meaning of American national identity and, by extension, with the distinctiveness ('exceptionalism') of an Americanism relative to the 'idea' of Europe. They were particularly concerned with a revaluation of the value and status of an American culture which could authenticate

³ Henry James, *Hawthorne* [1879] (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), 55.

⁴ Morley and Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

⁵ See, *ibid.*, 50-8.

⁶ Bigsby, 'Europe, America and the Cultural Debate,' in Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), 6.

and legitimate a distinctively American cultural identity. A wide-ranging body of work about the 1940s addressed these concerns: firstly, through a proliferation of national character studies;⁷ secondly, through the development of ‘myth-and-symbol’ approaches in American Studies;⁸ and thirdly, through the development of American Studies itself, particularly through its burgeoning programmes in Europe which exported American cultural nationalism abroad.⁹ This expansion of American Studies, as Philip Gleason has pointed out, was linked to America’s wartime revival of democracy ‘and its relation to the “cultural” understanding of American identity.’¹⁰

American intellectuals sought a reevaluation of their national cultural identity and several contributed to the *Partisan Review* symposium, ‘Our Country and Our Culture’ (1952) which called for a cultural reappraisal of America *vis-à-vis* Europe. ‘America,’ *PR* editorialised, ‘is no longer the raw and unformed land of promise from which men ... like [Henry] James, [George] Santayana, and [T.S.] Eliot departed, seeking in Europe what they found lacking in America.’¹¹ The symposium appealed for a new regenerated Americanism, especially against an old enervated Europe.¹² As Europe was seen to be physically ruined and culturally exhausted, the symposium represented a concerted effort to define a cultural Americanism distantiated from European cultural hegemony.¹³ Leslie Fiedler, for example, saw a postwar Europe ‘racked by self-pity and nostalgia ... reading in its ruins *Moby Dick* ... haunted by the idea of America.’¹⁴ For Philip Rahv,

⁷ See, for example, Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Harcourt, 1942); Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at the American Character* [1942] (London: Whiting & Wheaton, 1967); D. W. Brogan, *The American Character* (New York: Knopf, 1944); Riesman, *Lone-ly Crowd*.

⁸ See, for example, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West As Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage, 1950); F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression In the Age of Emerson and Whitman* [1941] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience* [1962] (New York: Atheneum, 1979); Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* [1960], 2nd edn (London: Paladin, 1970).

⁹ Gleason, ‘World War II and the Development of American Studies,’ *American Quarterly*, 36 (1984), 343-58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹¹ ‘Our Country and Our Culture: A Symposium,’ Editorial Statement, *Partisan Review*, 19 (1952), 284.

¹² *Ibid.*, 286.

¹³ So concerted was this effort that its contributors seemed to speak with one voice. Norman Mailer, alert to the symposium’s ‘totalitarian’ implications, took exception to the consensus and complained of a period which ‘smacks of healthy manifestoes.’ Mailer, ‘Our Country and Our Culture,’ 299.

¹⁴ Fiedler, ‘Our Country and Our Culture,’ 294.

there was declining appeal in 'the Jamesian vision of Europe as the "rich, deep, dark Old World,"' now reducible to 'hardly more than a combination of décor and recollection,' a darkly oppressive 'Old World' in which 'the Jamesian vision pales and dissolves.'¹⁵

As intellectuals insisted on the decline of Europe's cultural status, they promoted the corresponding notion of an ascendant American cultural identity intended to dispel the lingering Jamesian stigma of American provincialism. Jacques Barzun, for example, identified in the prewar decades an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook attributable to the substantial increase in numbers of 'ordinary' American visitors to Europe which began to replace the kind of complacent provincialism 'from which American artists had felt obliged to escape.'¹⁶ Barzun also pointed out that in the 'Marxist thirties,' Europe was perceived not only in relation to its 'artistic' provenance, but also as a source of political instability, especially where its old structures were collapsing to be replaced by new forces of Fascism. Consequently, he suggested, '[s]eeing ... the old continent paralyzed equally with the new, watching the rise of Hitler ... and the break-up of the old empires, the repatriated American began to question the worth of the "civilized existence" he had lately been praising.'¹⁷ Postwar Europe could no longer be evaluated on the basis of exclusively 'aesthetic' standards, Barzun argued, when America could now claim to have displaced Europe. Postwar America, he claimed 'was quite simply *the* world power ... it was Europe that was provincial.'¹⁸ With America's ascendancy as a military and economic power, intellectuals staked out their claims for an equivalent role as a cultural power, as 'the protector of Western civilisation.'¹⁹ The imperative towards what Alfred Kazin described as 'this experience in national self-discovery' was activated by what was seen as Europe's cultural vulnerability to the threat of a totalitarian world order, precipitating what Kazin saw as 'the sudden emergence of America as the repository of Western culture in the world overrun by Fascism.'²⁰ In what can be seen as a bid for

¹⁵ Rahv, 'Our Country and Our Culture,' 305.

¹⁶ Barzun, 'Our Country and Our Culture,' 424.

¹⁷ Ibid, 425.

¹⁸ Ibid, 426.

¹⁹ 'Our Country and Our Culture,' Editorial, 284.

²⁰ Kazin, 'America! America!' in *On Native Grounds*, 488. See also, 485-518.

'world' cultural status, cultural commentators proclaimed America as the new centre of postwar Western culture.²¹

In *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, the narrative is discursively linked to these concerns through what we can see as the relation between Stefan's 'European' characterisation and Lisa's 'American' one.²² Lisa has spent much of her uneventful childhood at home with her mother in their city apartment in Vienna where they live on the 'small pension' her mother has received since the death of her father. Lisa seems bound within the enclosed space of the apartment building and constrained by a conventional lower-middle-class upbringing. For her, this is a small, prosaic world with limited horizons. She is imaginatively predisposed towards a different kind of life, possessed by a romantic longing for another kind of world glimpsed already through Stefan's 'beautiful things.' Lisa's idolisation of Stefan is also an idealisation of his world of other possibilities. As an impressionable adolescent girl, she is vulnerable to the mysterious quality of Stefan's playing and its magic holds her spellbound. As she has 'seen' him in his possessions before she meets him, she hears him too, through his music and, as she is constantly watching for him, she is always listening for him as well. Through the rapture and enchantment of his playing, she is drawn into a realm of fantasy ('What I really lived for were those evenings when you were alone and I pretended you were playing just for me').

The film is set at the turn of the century and Stefan, as the Romantic artist, is inextricably linked with old Vienna. He belongs to the city's traditional social and cultural

²¹ Intellectuals were laying the groundwork here for an 'anti-totalitarian' culture. As Serge Guilbaut has argued, the emergence of what was seen as a uniquely American avant-garde, later exemplified by 'Abstract Expressionism,' would legitimate claims for a shift in the centre of Western culture from Paris to New York. See, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans., Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²² Louis Jourdan, the French actor, speaks with a heavily inflected accent which signifies a 'European' characterisation sympathetically distanced from a 'Germanic' Austrian one. Joan Fontaine is at least nominally 'American' here and she alone in the cast has no distinctive 'continental' accent. Her characterisation as Lisa exploits a star persona which draws on an ambivalent sense of national identity. A British actress who retained an English 'class' accent, she was associated with 'Englishness' through a succession of former roles: in *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), *This Above All* (1942) and *Jane Eyre* (1944). She also played one explicitly American role (with an uncharacteristic American accent) in *From This Day Forward* (1946) as Susan, the young GI wife facing the uncertainties of a postwar future in what can be seen as a parallel narrative to *Best Years of Our Lives*.

order and is exclusively associated with the classical and the antique. Stefan's Vienna seems to deny even the possibility of a twentieth century and disavows the very idea of modernity. His world is the Vienna of the concert hall and the opera house and his apartment, with its portraits of composers and musical manuscripts, is testimony to this world. When Lisa clandestinely enters his apartment, she illicitly glimpses an arcane, Gothic culture, the antithesis of her own.²³ The apartment also implies an 'artistic' realm, the artist's garret as an authentic space in which the struggling, suffering artist lives with Bohemian credibility outside 'conventional' society.²⁴

But Stefan is characterised as much as a cultured aristocrat as he is as a Romantic artist. He is comfortably off and it seems unnecessary for him to earn a living. He is also prodigiously talented and his early success has been effortlessly achieved: as he admits to Lisa, he had 'rather an easy time of it.' He has an easy-going familiarity with the upper echelons of Viennese society which he generally finds more congenial than his professional obligations as a working musician. He is hardly a dedicated artist and we see little evidence of his preparation or practice. Although he readily accepts the compliments which accrue from his celebrity status (and graciously autographs Countess Rudentsky's concert programme), he also readily abandons a scheduled rehearsal and puts off consideration of a recommended manuscript. The promise of Stefan's future is never realised as he increasingly neglects his work and abandons his music in preference to a hedonistic lifestyle. As Lisa has often observed, there were frequent visitors to his apartment. 'Many of them were women,' she says, 'most of them.' Stefan's relation-

²³ The hegemony of the past is implied through Gothic narrative space and the evocation of fairy tale. Fontaine's narrative persona was already established through roles which situated her in a series of malign Gothic spaces such as Manderley in *Rebecca*, and Gateshead Hall, Lowood and Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*. Fontaine draws on a performative expressiveness in these roles to convey a frail and uncertain vulnerability of young feminine innocence against the dark, worldly experience of older men, both of whom are traumatised by a past which haunts the present. In *Rebecca*, she is associated with both Cinderella and Alice in Wonderland, and repeatedly likened to a child by her husband while in *Jane Eyre*, the 'elfin' Jane is also associated with fairy tales. Lisa's characterisation can also be related more generally to the women's Gothic tradition in which European decadence is often represented as a threat to an ordinary American woman by a mysterious 'foreign' man (often her husband). See, for example, *Gaslight* (1944), *Experiment Perilous* (1944), *Dragonwyck* (1946), *Sleep, My Love* (1948). This sense of European decadence also occurs in the period's rare instances of Gothic horror. In *Son of Dracula* (1943), the 'undead' aristocrat, emanating from a 'dry' and 'decadent' eastern European homeland, is visited upon a 'young' and 'virile' small-town America on which he must now depend for his survival.

²⁴ 'Bohemian,' suggests a Romantic conception of 'artist' and implies a vaguely mythologised Eastern European territory far removed from 'conventional' Western society.

ships with all of them is played out in a routine series of casual seductions. When he stops to buy a rose for Lisa, the old flower seller addresses him by name because he has done the same for other women so many times before.

Stefan's world of 'beautiful things' is also a social *milieu* of refinement, grace and elegance to which Lisa aspires. She sets about learning the necessary accomplishments for admittance to this society and undergoes a 'Pygmalion' makeover to gain access to this world and to him. She contrives to attain a 'finishing school' education and learn to speak the language of 'class.' She attends dancing school only incidentally to learn dancing, but primarily to become a lady. She similarly needs to know about his musical world so she studies 'the lives of the great musicians of the past.' But all her efforts to gain entry to this society confirm her exclusion from it. Although they have similar apartments, the partition between their social positions is highlighted by their different interiors.²⁵ In social, cultural and economic terms, she is literally an outsider looking in on 'high' society. Unable to attend Stefan's concerts herself, she can only 'borrow' the experience through a 'borrowed' programme. In this way, she 'pretends' herself out of her 'inferior' background as she aspires vicariously to the 'superior' one.

Although Lisa clings to her cherished idealisation of Stefan as the Romantic artist, he is seemingly, for her, more of an imaginary construction drawn from a sense of European art and culture which are themselves shown to be delusional and counterfeit. This illusion is played out in the fairground scene. In a wintry, snow-covered landscape, the fairground appears dark and deserted but a few of the amusements remain open. Lisa and Stefan come upon a glass case containing life-sized wax figures and Lisa imagines a day when there might be such a figure of Stefan. When he asks her if she would pay to see him, she replies, 'If you'll come alive.' She imagines a future for him which will see him famous but, at the same time, his fame will find expression in an exhibit which presents itself only as a form of lifelessness. His association with the waxwork here sug-

²⁵ The shooting script describes the floor plan of the Berndle apartment as 'a truncated duplicate of Stefan's apartment across the hall. However, the contrast between his furnishings and the frugal middle-class pieces of the Berndle's is as great as the contrast in their lives.' Hollinger, 'Notes on the Shooting Script,' in Wexman and Hollinger, eds., *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, 139-40.

gests that there is already a sense of deadness about him, that he exists only as a likeness, as a semblance of life.

Afterwards, they embark on a fairground train ride, a 'European' tour, and Lisa recalls here the imaginary childhood travels of her past. Her *Baedeker*-like description is drawn from childhood games and the fairground ride becomes a similar picture-book fantasy. A sequence of painted back-cloths depicting European scenes is seen from the window of their compartment where the passing scenes, of Venice and Switzerland, are quaint and picturesque. These representations are also two-dimensional, suggesting a 'Europe' which is flat, *ersatz* and unreal, reducible to a series of outsized picture postcards. These effects are whimsically created with antiquated apparatus operated by a tired-looking old man and the ride comes to an end when he announces, 'End of the line!' The scene suggests a condition of stasis where the idea of motion, especially forward motion, can be seen only as a theatrical contrivance, where there is no possibility of actually going anywhere and they can only repeat the same journey. The scene is one of a sequence in which the romance between Lisa and Stefan is played out in a series of visual clichés. They are seen together in a series of *tableaux* which, for her, seems to offer the realisation of her romantic dream but which, for him, is only another kind of amusement. These episodes show all the conventional preliminaries of routine romance: a lobster dinner in an opulent restaurant, the impulsive purchase of a single white rose, a ride in an open carriage, dancing the last waltz, and so on.²⁶

If Lisa presumes that by these blandishments she is uniquely entering into Stefan's world, she will only do so as a temporary and disposable addition to his 'collection.' Drawn irresistibly towards his world of culture and privilege, she is also drawn ineluctably into the ruinous aspects of this world. This isn't, however, because

²⁶ We can see in all these 'unreal' narrative sequences representations of what Daniel Boorstin called 'pseudo-events,' a significant concern in the critique of conformity. Boorstin criticised what he saw as an American modernity defined by the unreality of its image-saturated culture. 'The Grand Canyon itself,' he claimed, 'became a disappointing reproduction of the Kodachrome original.' Boorstin, *The Image*, 14. See also, in particular, 'From Traveler to Tourist: The Lost Art of Travel,' 77-117. Boorstin's 'world of the image' was subsequently elaborated by Jean Baudrillard as the (postmodern) world of simulacra in which the distinction between what is 'real' and what is simulated collapses into a common condition where everything is experienced as simulation. See, for example, Baudrillard, *America*, trans., Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000).

she is innocently deceived. Although characterised as hopelessly lovelorn and naive, she can nevertheless see through Stefan's brilliant reputation and detect deficiencies in his playing. Although she quotes a review which favourably compares him with 'a young Mozart,' she can already see in him a sense of incipient failure and a premonition of the failed artist he will become. This failure is linked to the decline of the 'old' world to which Stefan belongs, a degenerating *fin-de-siècle* world. The social and cultural provenance of 'Europe' here is a backward looking city weighted by its cultural past (Mozart's Vienna) and echoing with its tradition (*Die Zauberflöte*). The comparison between Stefan and Mozart implies a cultural tradition from the eighteenth century to the 'present' but it is becoming a corrupted and atrophied tradition through Stefan's representation of a decadent society with a decadent culture.²⁷

This sense of decadence can be seen many years later when, after an 'unexplained' absence, Stefan turns up at a performance of *Die Zauberflöte*. Some operagoers gossip disparagingly about his wasted talent and hedonistic lifestyle. He sees Lisa again, but scarcely remembers who she is and when she later goes to see him at his apartment, to renew her devotion to him - to offer him her 'whole life' - she learns that he has all but forgotten her. Stefan by now has abandoned any pretence of being a concert pianist. When Lisa tries to question him about it, he evades the issue by paying perfunctory compliments about her appearance ('You're very lovely. Beautiful dress'). He admits that he has given up playing and, since then, has 'found other things to do, more amusing things.' Here, as the jaded sensualist, with little more than the vestiges of his class and celebrity, he is abandoned to a life of dissipation in which his routine seductions

²⁷ This association between social and cultural decadence and a European sensibility can be seen *in extremis* in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945). Here, in an English upper-class *milieu*, hedonism and narcissism are combined to produce a culture of aestheticised perversity underwritten by its implicit homosexuality. Dorian Gray (Hurd Hatfield), under the tutelage of Lord Henry Wootton (George Sanders), enters a world in which art takes precedence over life. As his own life becomes transformed into art, his aestheticised and dehumanised self decays from within until it literally disintegrates. This aestheticism, represented through the fastidious 'uniforms' of aristocratic dress, operates as a kind of cultural analogue to Fascism. The figure of the perverse 'foreign' aesthete occurs in several of the period's narratives. See, for example, Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb) in *Laura* (1944) and Ballin Mundson (George Macready) in *Gilda* (1946). This figure is invariably countered by 'American' antagonists characterised by their 'unequivocal' working-class masculinity, here, respectively by Mark McPherson (Dana Andrews) and Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford).

periodically alleviate his *taedium vitae* (so when he sends out for a late supper, it is for 'the usual things'). As Lisa tries again to get through to him, he persists in evasive frivolity ('champagne tastes much better after midnight, don't you think?') Mentioning that he has just returned from America ('a fascinating country'), he inquires, 'Do you travel a great deal?' The question evokes their fairground ride and unequivocally confirms for Lisa that he can't remember her.

This decadence is signified in a wider sense through the typhus epidemic. As Lisa is drawn into this condition by Stefan, she is destroyed by it, as is their son, Stefan Junior (Leo B. Pessin) and, ultimately, Stefan himself. Lisa's love for Stefan has always been an expression of sacrificial devotion ('Quite consciously, I began to prepare myself for you') and her letter is narrated from the perspective of *dying* through the narrative 'present' sequences in which she is *already* dead.²⁸ Stefan, too, is introduced under the shadow of his own impending death and the opening part of the sequence shows his arrival in a horse-drawn carriage at a deserted cobblestone street in heavy rain. This is the old, dark nightworld to which he has increasingly withdrawn and the site which gives expression to his dissipation and ruin, the point of intersection at which the artist and the aristocrat are seen to culminate in a state of decay.

Stefan has been challenged to a duel by Lisa's husband, Johann Stauffer (Marcel Journet). For Stefan and his friends, starchily attired in formal evening dress, the imminent duel is the subject of frivolous amusement. Stefan affects an attitude of languid indifference ('I don't mind so much being killed ... but you know how hard it is for me to get up in the morning') because he has no intention of going through with the duel and prepares to slip away before his friends return for him. The prospect of the duel becomes a defining moment in the narrative representation of 'European' in contradistinction to 'American.' The ritual of the duel, predominantly associated with a European

²⁸ Lisa is comparable here with Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in *The Third Man* (1949) which also draws on the enigma of a figure already 'dead' in a narrative which also sees a (postwar) Vienna colonised by military forces and similarly riddled with corruption and decay. See also *Berlin Express* (1948), the first postwar American film to make extensive use of location shooting in a war-shattered Germany where, despite the presence of the occupying powers, a resurgent Nazism was actively operating amidst the ruins of Frankfurt and Berlin.

military and aristocratic elite, didn't translate into an American cultural idiom.²⁹ The duelling ritual was objectified through formal codes, strictly determined regulations and protocols, and conducted as a discreet ceremonial. The practice was most strongly associated with those European states having a militaristic tradition.³⁰ This military culture and its code of honour is personified by the high-ranking army officer, Stauffer. When he learns of Lisa's liaison with Stefan, he issues her with an ultimatum while framed on the wall behind him are prominently displayed crossed swords and duelling pistols together with other military accoutrements. Vienna may be the centre of art and culture but it is also bound by military order and this sense of military culture is a pervasive force throughout the narrative.

In Vienna, the military tradition is linked to the aristocracy through the officer class represented by Stauffer while in Linz,³¹ it is shown as middle-class society. Frau Berndle (Mady Christians) announces her intention of marrying Herr Kastner (Howard Freeman) who has a 'comfortable business' in Linz as a military tailor. Linz is a small, provincial, garrison town.³² Lisa reacts to its insufferably lifeless society with incredulity. The narrative ridicules the town and the risible prospects it affords: a stilted proposal of marriage from Lieutenant Leopold von Kaltnegger (John Good) and his 'qualifications for an outstanding military career.' Her mother continues to nag and scold

her as if she were still a child, especially regarding Kaltnegger because she is concerned

²⁹ The most obvious American counterpoint to the European duel is in the Western gunfight, but there are significant cultural distinctions between them. Although the gunfight is staged, it is invariably an impromptu ritual. It is also 'democratic' in that it is socially unrestricted and enacted in a public space (usually main street), without any retinue of official attendants.

³⁰ Most obviously, Germany and Austria. For a narrative account of the duel as an expression of 'Prussian' militarism, see, for example, the British wartime film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). The film shows a highly developed duelling culture in Berlin at the turn of the century. Here, duelling scars, like military insignia, constitute badges of honour ('It's a proud father that has a scarred son, and *vice versa*'). Its code of honour is meticulously elaborated in its authoritative 'Codex.' The duel here is between officers who have not even previously met, provoked by an insult to the Imperial German Army and, hence, to all its officers. The narrative suggests that the traditional systems of such codes, exemplified in the duel, belong to an obsolete military order which cannot compete with the new Nazi ideology which it helped to produce.

³¹ For a discussion of the Linz sequence, see, Perkins, 'Letter From an Unknown Woman,' 61-72.

³² Linz, which replaces Innsbruck in Zweig's novella, is significant for its Hitlerian associations and coded here as a source of German nationalism. Vienna also played a crucial social and cultural role in the formation of Nazism. The city, as Brigitte Hamann has argued, wasn't necessarily the 'artistic-intellectual' *fin-de-siècle* Vienna associated with cosmopolitan modernity but one in which the 'degenerate' implications of such modernity gave rise to fears which found expression through German nationalism. See, Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship*, trans., Thomas Thornton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); on Linz, see, 3-6, 12-18.

that her daughter's conduct should be regulated in accordance with the strict social codes required for the purpose of marriage and, in Linz, everything is a means to this end. Women are decorative and demure, wear elaborately pretty hats and dresses and carry parasols as they parade in public. Men, mostly soldiers, appear meticulously attired in dress uniforms. Civilian society takes its tenor from the military and social intercourse is governed by the punctilious formality of military etiquette: there is strict adherence to title and rank, accompanied by ubiquitous salutes, bows, curtsies and kissing of hands. This combination of stiff-backed, militarised formality and over-determined social *politesse* is rendered as a series of ludicrous protocols. The narrative representation of Linz is of a mechanically regimented town garrisoned by clockwork soldiers. Indeed, the entire sequence operates as a *reductio ad absurdum* by which the formal patterns of social relations are subject to visual and aural disruption. A cart crosses the street in the foreground, forcing the characters to get out of the way and awkwardly obstructing the frame while the sounds of a passing carriage and church bells become intrusive distractions.

Lisa's rejection of Linz is a refusal to conform to the conventional options it offers her, an 'arranged' marriage in a stultifying world of bourgeois provincialism and military regulation where life is conducted to the regimented tempo of martial waltz-time. Lisa's *amour fou*, for all its destructive wretchedness, is as much about her rejection of the overdetermined respectability and commercial expediency represented through her mother's coy opportunism ('you know how hard it is for us to get along on my small pension') and Kastner's penny-pinching 'third-class' outlook. Her marriage to Stauffer (an arrangement to provide security for her son) is similarly enacted in accordance with the proprieties of 'honour and decency' inscribed in Vienna's *ancien régime* which Lisa readily renounces on meeting Stefan again, even as the hopelessly failed *roué* he has now become.

The distinction between 'American' and 'European,' implicit in the relationship

between Lisa and Stefan, is the subject of more explicit development in *The Emperor Waltz*. Like *Letter From An Unknown Woman*, *Emperor Waltz* is set in Vienna at the turn of the century. A ball is in progress at the court of Emperor Franz Josef (Richard Haydn). The prologue lists the Emperor's grandiose array of titles proclaiming his sovereign power over the Eastern European states comprising the Austro-Hungarian Empire ('His Majesty Francis Joseph the First, Emperor of Austria, Apostolic King of Hungary, King of Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia, and so forth and so forth'). From a balcony above the dance floor, some elderly members of the nobility provide a commentary on the proceedings below, acting as a 'chorus' as they watch Virgil Smith (Bing Crosby) approach the Countess Johanna von Stolzenburg-Stolzenburg (Joan Fontaine). Their relationship is the subject of scandalised outrage which has 'rocked' Vienna. To Viennese society, Virgil is a contemptible upstart, described as 'the most vulgar, impossible, obnoxious ...' until the Dowager Princess Bitotska (Lucile Watson) interjects with a more precise objection: 'In a word, he's an *American*.'

In a narrative concerned with *breeding*, European aristocratic pedigree is displaced onto its dogs. The Emperor wishes his dog to mate with Scheherazade, the French poodle belonging to the Countess, because the match will provide for the optimum pedigree (as it does for the aristocracy). The narrative juxtaposition of the canine and aristocratic worlds makes them seem almost interchangeable and, indeed, Johanna initially misconstrues the Emperor's intention and assumes that she, rather than Scheherazade, is to be the subject of the desirable match. Later, the Emperor asks whether they are talking about the Countess or the dogs while for Virgil, 'it amounts to the same thing.' It is into this exquisitely modulated world of genealogical determinism that Virgil and his 'vulgar' Americanism, together with Buttons, his mongrel dog, intrude. Buttons mates with Scheherazade, Virgil and Johanna fall in love, and so the social order - canine and aristocratic - is disrupted.

The narrative posits a conflict between 'European' and 'American' with a

'Europe' patterned on an old patrician order of dynastic succession supported throughout its nation states by an aristocratic infrastructure. Hence, the Countess can claim a correspondence in Scheherazade's blood-line back to the 'royal families' of France through Marie Antoinette, and of Russia through Czar Nicholas. Because class distinctions are uncompromising, absolute, and based exclusively on lineage, Buttons is described by the Countess as 'low-bred' and 'a revolting little plebeian.' The same 'vulgar' status is attributed vicariously to Virgil, characterised through his distinctively American status. He represents American commercialism through his job as a travelling salesman which, from the perspective of Viennese society, typifies all that is brash, unseemly and vulgar about American business. And, as Europe is defined as 'old,' America is 'new' and Virgil is a purveyor of its modernity (His home is in *Newark, New Jersey*). His merchandise, the phonograph, is incomprehensibly *new* at the palace where it is believed to be a time-bomb and, in a sense, it is. It symbolises American inventiveness, technological innovation, industrial manufacturing, mass production and commercial advertising. Moreover, with its specific reference to the RCA Victor logo, the phonograph presages the incursion of an American popular culture which is already beginning to threaten the European social and cultural order. The turn of the century is the crucial point at which a backward-looking Europe is confronted by a forward-looking America. The phonograph *is*, then, a time-bomb, ticking away to signal the imminent explosion of modernity and democratic populism in the midst of an old sequestered Europe. In the ensuing panic, the palace guards scramble to disarm the device, assuming it to be an attempt to assassinate the Emperor. 'You're scared of anything new,' Virgil tells them.

The Emperor embodies the old aristocratic order which, as he admits to Virgil, is in decline. He can also see an inevitably 'Americanised' future which will derive not from another kind of social elite represented by an 'Astor or a Rocker ... whatever it is,'

but from the likes of the 'quick, clever, enterprising' American Everyman, Virgil Smith.³³ 'Ultimately,' he tells Virgil, 'the world will be your's.'³⁴ In the meantime, however, the Emperor refuses to countenance the marriage between Virgil and the Countess, and eulogises over the distinction of their class. 'We are like snails living in lovely twisted shells,' he tells Virgil. 'Have you ever observed a snail, Mr Smith? They are majestic creatures, with small coronetted heads that peer very proudly from their tiny castles. They move with dignity. I imagine they have a great sense of their own importance. But you take them from their shells and they die. That is us, Mr Smith.' The Emperor also describes the disastrous consequences for those removed from their 'shells,' to be deprived - in an indirect reference to the Jamesian index of 'high civilisation' - of their Ascot and Biarritz habitat.

The 'shell' of the Emperor's world can be seen in the palace ball where the 'Emperor Waltz' provides its symbolic structure. The 'waltz' itself, with its smooth, light, gliding steps, is a model of formal grace and elegance and, with its exquisite pattern of circularity and harmony, constitutes a figure of social order, propriety and decorum. Its formal pattern, seen in the 'present continuous' sequences, is visually disrupted with Virgil's entry to the palace. He is literally an outsider, scaling the palace wall and forcing an entry by smashing a window. In the latter part of the sequence, he is even

more conspicuously out of place amongst the assembled nobility. As he moves through

³³ With his straw boater and insouciant whistling, Crosby's 'Everyman' characterisation here draws on a series of previous roles in which he invariably plays an 'ordinary' American type, styled with a relaxed, easygoing, unstuffy screen persona. In *The Bells of St Mary's* (1945), for example, Crosby's Father O' Malley is the gently progressive priest responsible for the modernisation of the church's old fashioned organisation. His characteristically 'unchanging' persona was cumulatively derived from a combination of radio, recording and film appearances. It is worth noting that in the period 1946-49, Crosby was listed in the combined annual rankings of both *Variety* and the Exhibitors' Poll as the top star. See Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 358.

³⁴ Crosby's 'portable' star persona can be read as a kind of cultural envoy purveying American popular culture abroad which represented in itself a form of American cultural hegemony. His Virgil is reminiscent of his 'Road' film roles which assume particular significance here. See, for example, *Road to Morocco* (1942); *Road to Rio* (1947). Hence, his narrative persona can be read in the context of the postwar dissemination of American popular culture in Europe, especially in the occupied territories of Germany and Austria. Reinhold Wagnleitner has analysed the ideological function of American culture in occupied Austria through the establishment of the '*Amerika Häuser*' (cultural distribution centres) serving 'as a primary weapon in the struggle against the residues of fascism and ... the current "danger" of communism.' Wagnleitner, 'The Irony of American Culture Abroad: Austria and the Cold War,' in May, ed., *Recasting America*, 289, 285-301. This cultural offensive, underwritten by enormous government resources, was linked to a much wider programme of 'cultural propaganda' in Western Europe, administered through covert operations. See, for example, Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 2000).

the still, silent assembly, he disturbs the visual integrity of the scene. The hierarchical order of the court is also disrupted as he continues to approach the Emperor at the top of the grand staircase to confront him with the consequences of his rule and call into question the legitimacy of his authority and the 'shell-world' of the Empire.

Virgil and Buttons have returned to the palace for the birth of Scheherazade's puppies, but when Johanna's father, Baron Holenia (Roland Culver) discovers they are mongrels, he orders them to be destroyed. The veterinarian, Dr Semmelgries (Sig Ruman) is about to carry out the Baron's command ('Orders have been given!') and the narrative emphasises the clinical nature of the 'operation.' But at the last minute, Virgil rescues them and brings them before the Emperor. Now, the Emperor's court can no longer be seen merely as a whimsical anachronism or Ruritanian fiction. The traditional royal pre-occupation with pedigree and breeding has suddenly been connected to Nazi ideology, Nazi 'science' and 'racial' genocide. When Virgil enters the ballroom, the orchestra is playing '*Deutschland über Alles*' as he confronts the Emperor with the rescued puppies and inveighs against the embryonic Nazi ideology implicit in his imperial rule: 'They're not pure enough for you, huh?'

Chapter 10

Big Business and Little People The Organisation and *Force of Evil*

For many social commentators, large-scale forms of corporate organisation began to loom large as cause for concern and, in the critique of conformity, 'The Organisation' was often seen as a model for postwar American society. It was often assumed that the postwar corporation, like the wartime military, was beginning to define American identity in terms of 'Organization Man.'¹ In the discourse of 'readjustment,' it often seemed as if the ex-serviceman had left one type of 'total institution' only to find himself situated in another. In this chapter, I suggest that these concerns with an endangered individualism, systematically subsumed within a 'total' corporatist order, become particularly apparent through shifting narrative representations of criminality. By tracking the changing figure of the gangster from the early 1930s' 'classic' period to his postwar 'corporate' counterpart, I demonstrate how social concerns with the 'little' man in the 'big' system are indexed to narratives in which 'legitimate' business and criminal organisation often seemed mutually and reciprocally corrupt.

A scene in *I Walk Alone* (1948) shows the gangster Frankie Madison (Burt Lancaster) recently released from prison. Having served out his sentence, he returns to see his former partner from the old bootlegging days, Noll 'Dink' Turner (Kirk Douglas), to claim his share of the proceeds from their night club. Frankie's brother Dave (Wendell Corey), now the accountant for Dink's new business, enters the room carrying a set of account books. Dink sardonically refuses Frankie's demand.² The scene self-consciously highlights a transition in the narrative representation of 'the gangster' of the early

¹ Whyte's phrase describes those who not only work for 'The Organization' but '*belong to it as well.*' Whyte, *Organization Man*, 8.

² As in many postwar film narratives, absence and return is a recurrent trope. A character like Frankie, who has recently 'been away,' implies the figure of the returning serviceman whose 'return' necessitates coming to terms with a society which has changed in his absence and to which he no longer belongs. Postwar gangster narratives, as Jonathan Munby has pointed out, were often 'built around the metaphor of return' which can be seen as 'allegorical structures for the GI returning home to find it irrevocably altered.' Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8. Moreover, this 'metaphor of return' often evoked a past in which, significantly, the absent figure had been falsely imprisoned. See, for example, Bradford Galt (Mark Stevens) in *The Dark Corner* (1946); Vincent Parry (Humphrey Bogart) in *Dark Passage* (1947); Joe Sullivan (Dennis O'Keefe) in *Raw Deal* (1948).

1930s to a new, postwar criminal type and his position in a transformed criminal order.³ As the traditional figure of the gangster was becoming unrecognisable, so too was his traditional setting. The meeting between Frankie and Dink takes place in a room which bears no resemblance to the archetypal venues of the preceding decade. As one of Frankie's henchmen exclaims on entering the 'businesslike' boardroom - 'What a lay-out!' - a reaction which inadvertently describes a comprehensively different kind of business set-up with a new kind of structure and organisation. While we know these are gangsters, they no longer *look* like gangsters and there is nothing in the scene which offers any confirmation of this role and status. The conventional iconography of earlier Prohibition era narratives has become obsolete and the old-time gangster an anachronism. Postwar criminal enterprise is seen to have acquired a corporate organisation in which the criminal now looked more like a businessman than a gangster.⁴

Frankie angrily demands redress in the only way he knows how, through tough-guy bravado ('There's only one way to handle you ...'), now reminiscent of a bygone era. Dink, however, is unmoved as he asks derisively, 'Kill me?' Frankie perseveres with his confrontational stance: 'If I have to, yeah! A guy's got to fight for what's his.' Dink, in turn, taunts Frankie with his obsolescence in the new corporate order, scornfully evoking the old Prohibition days. 'You and your boys ...' he says, with a wry glance at Frankie's gang. 'This isn't the Four Kings, no hiding out behind a steel door and a peephole. This is big business. We deal with banks, lawyers, and a Dun & Bradstreet rating. The world's spun right past you, Frankie. In the '20s, you were great. In the '30s, you might've made the switch. But today, you're finished. As dead as the headlines the day you went to prison.' Frankie desperately attempts to make sense of this 'big business' and demands a straightforward explanation but quickly finds there aren't any 'simple

³ For the inaugural characterisations in the period's 'classic' gangster films, see Cesare 'Rico' Bandello (Edward G. Robinson) in *Little Caesar* (1931); Tom Powers (James Cagney) in *The Public Enemy* (1931); Tony Camonte (Paul Muni) in *Scarface* (1932). On the cultural construction of the 'early' gangster, see, David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴ Daniel Bell, for example, saw a correlation between postwar social and criminal organisation. 'As American society became more "organised," ... so did the American racketeer.' Bell, 'Crime as an American Way of Life' [1953], in *End of Ideology*, 129.

answers.’ He questions his brother about the new organisational structure, beginning with what he takes to be an obvious assumption: ‘Dink’s got the full say around here, right?’ ‘Yes ...’ replies Dave, who has been reciting a list of their corporate interests, ‘except that it’s revocable by a vote of the board of directors of Reeds & Associates.’ Frankie demands, ‘Just what does Dink own?’ Dave replies: ‘In which corporation?’ Bewildered and uncomprehending, Frankie can’t understand this new ‘big business’ organisation which has rendered him redundant, nor even speak the same ‘*Wall Street Journal*’ language.⁵

Dink’s synoptic account of gangster history from the 1920s to the 1940s charts the trajectory of Frankie’s criminal career from ‘great’ to ‘dead.’ Robert Warshow has analysed the ideological implications of this kind of trajectory in ‘The Gangster as Tragic Hero,’ published in *Partisan Review* in 1948. Warshow identified in the narrative structure of the gangster film a trajectory of the gangster’s progress which typically traces a rise and fall pattern, driven by the pursuit of success and defined through the expression of his *individuality*. This can be seen, Warshow suggests, in the opening scene in *Scarface* which shows the assassination of ‘a successful man,’ Big Louie (Harry J. Vejar) as the inevitable consequence of allowing himself to be momentarily alone, a moment which signals his imminent death. ‘And yet,’ Warshow says, ‘the very conditions of success make it impossible not to be alone, for success is always the establishment of an *individual* preeminence that must be imposed on others. ... The gangster’s whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies *because* he is an individual.’⁶

Warshow’s emphasis on individualism assumes particular significance in a post-war discourse which saw American individualism increasingly at risk within corporatist

⁵ In what Munby describes as the period’s ‘gangster-syndicate cycle,’ there is a narrative focus on ‘the dismal fate of foot soldiers in anonymous gangster syndicates’ which, he accurately surmises, ‘passed cynical comment on the disempowering features of corporate culture.’ He identifies a thematic concern with ‘the dramatization of maladjustment to a changed world’ and discusses the figure of the veteran returning to find that the old gang has been transformed into a new form of criminal organisation. Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, 8, 130-2. On the ‘incorporation’ of criminal organisation (what Bell calls ‘the “institutionalized” criminal enterprise’), see, 115-43.

⁶ Robert Warshow, ‘The Gangster as Tragic Hero,’ *Partisan Review*, 15 (1948), repr. in *Immediate Experience*, 133.

organisational structures and, by extension, in society at large, to emerge as a central issue in the critique of conformity.⁷ We can also identify in the narrative transition from old-fashioned gangster to new corporatist order a connection with more longstanding concerns about the capitalist logic of machine-age rationalisation. These concerns are represented in Max Weber's metaphor of an 'iron cage' to symbolise an 'order ... bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism.'⁸ Weber's all-encompassing 'mechanism' prefigures the totalising systems of technology and bureaucracy which would later be designated as 'Fordism.'⁹ The increasingly predominant organisation and its subjugation of the individual were already becoming the subject of anxieties before the postwar consolidation of the corporation, anxieties which repeatedly surfaced in prewar film narratives.¹⁰ Reading 'the gangster' in postwar narratives we can identify a more problematically-situated figure, indexed to a discourse in which individualism was being threatened by corporatism, a process mediated through the transformative figure of the gangster himself. As postwar criminality was itself becoming 'incorporated,' the cultural meaning of 'the gangster' transmuted into an altogether different kind of figure from that of his earlier counterpart. Although 'gangster' can be defined as a member of a criminal gang, this isn't how a critic like Warshaw was reading the gangster cycle of the early 1930s in which the gangster is identifiable *not* by his membership of a gang but, conversely, by his distinction from it. Hence, the gangster is uniquely identifiable, distinguishable from his gang by the trajectory of preeminent individualism which carries him above it.

The narrative representation of the gangster in this period was dynamically new

⁷ See, for example, Whyte, *Organization Man*; Mills, *White Collar*; Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*.

⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904-5], trans., Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1995), 181.

⁹ See, Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 125-40.

¹⁰ For example, the monolithic office building in *The Crowd* (1928) shows the serried ranks of innumerable desk-bound clerks working at some unspecified clerical routines with a Kafkaesque sense of social identity lost in the impersonal space of bureaucratic machinery in a dystopian corporatist state. In *Modern Times* (1936), modernity is a technological dystopia where the factory worker is an insignificant cog in the corporation's industrial mechanism, becoming literally subsumed by the assembly line machinery he operates. There is also an Orwellian sense of panoptic surveillance as workers are monitored through the corporation's omnipresent 'telescreens.'

and emblematic of urban modernity. He was compelling because he did what he wanted and, moreover, he *looked* like he did. Bold *and* elegant, he had *chutzpah* and it was stylish. He was attractive because he was different from everyone else and wasn't afraid to show it.¹¹ Here, as Richard Pells suggests, the gangster film can be seen 'as a parody of the American Dream.'¹² The ascendant gangster became distinguishable through the acquisition of power and authority which, by the very nature of its illegality, was conducted covertly. But in order for the gangster 'to draw himself out of the crowd,' he also wanted public recognition of his 'success.' As Robert Sklar has suggested of *Little Caesar*, 'the criminal became a public man.'¹³ All these early gangster films are 'biographical' narratives of the criminal as a 'public man' and the biographical narrative centralised the figure of the gangster in terms of his public persona.

These films, and others which followed, were patterned to a lesser or greater extent on Al Capone.¹⁴ Drawing on contemporary sources, not least from the rhetoric of newspaper headlines and editorials, the screen gangster was constructed through an intertextual complex of 'public' narratives from news stories about his real-life counterpart. 'With Capone as the supreme model,' Thomas Doherty has suggested, 'the gangster was stolen from the streets, the tabloids, and the courts and remade as a motion picture star.'¹⁵

These narratives were instrumental in the construction of the 'celebrity gangster'

¹¹ On gangster style and consumer culture, see, Ruth, 'Dressed to Kill: *Consumption, Style, and the Gangster*,' *Inventing the Public Enemy*, 63-86.

¹² 'In his longing to escape from the anonymous urban mass and impose his personality on events, in his ambition to eliminate the opposition and rise to the top, in his willingness to use any means no matter how aggressive or ruthless, in his disdain for the timid and conventional, in his insistence that he was merely a "businessman" giving the public what it wanted, the criminal became a kind of psychopathic Horatio Alger embodying in himself the classic capitalist urge for wealth and success.' Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, 272-3.

¹³ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 179.

¹⁴ On the social construction of Capone, see Ruth, 'The Invention in the Flesh: Al Capone of Chicago,' *Inventing the Public Enemy*, 118-43.

¹⁵ Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 139. Tracking the relation between Capone and his screen counterpart became a kind of intertextual exercise: '*Scarface* ... teased audiences to connect the dots between the Chicago mobster and his Hollywood double.' *Ibid*, 148. For an analysis of *Scarface* in relation to Capone and the discourse of gangster criminality, see Richard Maltby, 'The Spectacle of Criminality,' in J. David Slocum, ed., *Violence and American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 117-52. Gangsters played an influential role in the production, distribution and reception of *Scarface* (Capone had his own print of it). See, Joseph McBride, *Hawks on Hawks* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 45-50.

who was often characterised by a conspicuous visibility expressed particularly through his dress. For example, a scene in *Scarface* shows Tony Camonte attempting to impress Poppy (Karen Morley) with an ‘exhibition’ of his shirts (‘What I’m going to do is wear a shirt only once, and then give it right away to the laundry. A new shirt every day’). Tony’s stacks of shirts are not so much articles to be worn as exhibits to be displayed, flamboyant expressions of his personality. It was no longer enough for the new ‘public man’ to be expensively attired in fine fabrics and elegant tailoring: rather, it was the act of consumption, offered for public display, which demonstrated success, and the profligate scale of consumption which confirmed its magnitude. This was a world in which a shirt was conceptually meaningless, where only multiples counted, by the dozen.¹⁶ For Tony, the ultimate proof of success was measured not only by voluminous consumption of the new, but by an equally flamboyant disposal of the once-worn old.

The episode is a virtual replication of a scene in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Published at the height of Capone’s Chicago ‘empire,’ the novel parallels Warshaw’s gangster trajectory through the rise and transformation of Gatsby from his alter ego, the bootlegger, Gatz.¹⁷ Like Camonte, Gatsby invites admiration for his opulent clothing, making a theatrical display of his shirts, ‘piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high.’¹⁸ This narrative emphasis on clothing as a means of individuated expression assumed particular significance from a postwar perspective in which ‘conformity’ was often seen, quite literally, in terms of *uniform*. Bearing in mind concerns with the ‘conformist’ effects of wartime military service, the postwar period was often characterised by the uniformity of civilian clothing when terms such as ‘white-collar’ and ‘grey

¹⁶ Capone himself had a similar predilection and habitually bought shirts ‘literally by the dozen.’ See, Lawrence Bergreen, *Capone: The Man and the Era* (London: Pan, 1995), 584.

¹⁷ Bell uses Gatsby as a model to analyse the transformation of criminal organisation. See, ‘Gatsby’s Model’ in Bell, ‘Crime as an American Way of Life,’ 129-32.

¹⁸ The passage suggests a fetishised concern with luxuriance which offers ‘visual’ proof of Gatsby’s success and his ‘monogrammed’ individuated status. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* [1925] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), 99. All these narratives showcase the gangster *through* his dress. In *Public Enemy*, for example, the heist scene cuts immediately to the tailor’s (‘... and remember, six buttons’) as Tom Powers aspires to the status of ‘Nails’ Nathan (Leslie Fenton), appearing in a succession of fastidious ‘costumes.’ Similarly, in *Little Caesar*, Joe Massara (Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) anticipates the sartorial potential of city life (‘Gee, the clothes I could wear!’); and when Rico sees ‘Diamond’ Pete Montana (Ralph Ince), he can’t help but glance at his ostentatiously jewelled tie-pin and ring, pointedly shown in close-up.

flannel suit' became emblematic of the postwar years.¹⁹

It is significant, then, that Warshow sought evidence for the 'last' individual hero not in contemporary postwar narratives but in those at the beginning of the previous decade where the 'old' gangster could be seen as a figure of defiance in the face of an 'official' national culture, a figure drawn from the Horatio Alger mythology of the self-made man with its ideology of individual success.²⁰ Warshow suggests that the gangster expresses 'that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects "Americanism" itself.'²¹ If the gangster film represented a critique of American individualism, its failed success story provided an exemplary figure for a failed Americanism. In this sense, the 'classic' gangster narratives served to 'advertise' a defunct Americanism and its mythology of individualism and success. As Andrew Bergman has suggested: 'That only gangsters could make upward mobility believable tells much about how legitimate institutions had failed - but that mobility was still at the core of what Americans held to be the American dream.'²²

Success, in other words, was defined simultaneously as an 'active' myth *and* as an unattainable goal, achievable only by illegitimate means. For C.L.R. James, writing in the late 1940s, the gangster's heroic status was no longer viable. He had become an obsolete figure, romanticised out of the present, 'the persistent symbol of the national past which now has no meaning. ... Now,' says James, 'the man on the assembly line, the farmer, know that they are there for life; and the gangster who displays all the old heroic qualities ... is the derisive symbol of the contrast between ideals and reality.'²³ If the gangster of the past had become a 'derisive symbol,' it was because he couldn't exist in the present: the 'old heroic qualities' failed to find expression in the postwar world. The potential for a trajectory of success - the very notion of 'individualism' itself - is ren-

¹⁹ The terms are from Mills's *White Collar* and Wilson's *Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*.

²⁰ On the discourse of media representations in the construction of Capone as archetypal 'heroic role model,' see, Maltby, 'Spectacle of Criminality,' 125.

²¹ Warshow, 'Gangster as Tragic Hero,' 130. See also, Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, 272-3.

²² Bergman, *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* (Chicago: Elephant, 1992), 7.

²³ James, 'Popular Arts and Modern Society' [editors' attributed title], in Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, eds., *American Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 127.

dered as an impossible dream when, in the new corporatist order, there is only the possibility of undifferentiated identity and status, institutionally circumscribed by an 'assembly line' world. Moreover, 'for life' implies a life sentence whereas, ironically, the 'classic' gangster *never* ended up in prison.

This discourse of corporatist determinism is mediated through many postwar film narratives which often emphasise the architectural enormity of the cityscape. Certainly, one of the most recurrent tropes in films of the 1940s and 1950s is the establishing shot of a city which, in itself, often insinuates a sense of spatial uncertainty and instability, which seems unsympathetic and inhospitable, especially in the institutional inscrutability of its office buildings. In many of these narratives criminality represents an assertion of individualism against the corporation and the criminal act constitutes a challenge to corporatist authority and control.²⁴

With the rise of corporatist organisation, many intellectuals saw the individual subjected to new institutional determinants which not only restricted personal potential, but also repudiated the very notion of individuality itself. C. Wright Mills, for example, identified a series of organisational structures which operated to efface individualism, especially of the 'white-collar' employee. 'He is always somebody's man,' Mills claimed, 'the corporation's, the government's, the army's. ... The decline of the free entrepreneur and the rise of the dependent employee on the American scene has paralleled the decline of the independent individual and the rise of the little man in the American mind.'²⁵ With a rhetorical insistence on *scale* - the 'little man' situated in 'big' organisa-

tions - Mills saw the 'white-collar man' as an essentially submissive figure, owned and

²⁴ In *Double Indemnity* (1944), for example, the insurance salesman Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) plans a criminal scheme designed to 'take on' his employer, the Pacific All Risk Insurance Company. There is an implication that his transgressive impulse is a reaction against the routines of long-standing corporate employment with the stultifying prospect of 'a desk job' and that this, as much as money or sex, is the *raison d'être* for his crime. It is noteworthy, however, that Neff, with only a few hours left to live, should choose to return to the office building, and that his dying confession should be given in the form of an office memorandum. In other 1940s' narratives, the physical landscape often looms large as an implicit expression of corporatist America. For example, in both *High Sierra* (1941) and *Colorado Territory* (1949), the transgressive 'outsider' is rendered as a solitary fugitive, hopelessly at odds with a vast, towering landscape, diminishing the stature of the renegade figure and emphasising his insignificance. Identity becomes lost in such a landscape where defiance can only be a gesture of heroic futility as the landscape itself becomes part of the process by which the outsider is ultimately overpowered and destroyed.

²⁵ Mills, *White Collar*, xii.

manipulated by institutional forces. In an echo of Warshaw's 'tragic' hero, the white-collar man can only aspire forlornly to the trajectory of individual ambition which he had become helplessly incapable of achieving, 'living out in slow misery his yearning for the quick American climb ... pushed by forces beyond his control, pulled into movements he does not understand.' He represents 'the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand.'²⁶ For Mills, the white-collar world was so uniformly meek and small that it could produce only undifferentiated anonymity.²⁷ The situation of the 'little' man within the 'big' organisation - Mills's 'dependent employee' - figured in many of the period's narratives in which the 'little man' was often characterised as a clerical figure.²⁸

Other intellectuals were similarly predisposed to elaborate on the societal determinants which they saw as instrumental in the decline of individualism and the rise of conformism. David Riesman, for example, saw the individual as 'other-directed' and too readily susceptible to the 'signals' of others, a condition of 'behavioral conformity' derived from 'an exceptional sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others' together with a 'psychological need for approval.'²⁹ For the 'other-directed person,' he says, 'the border between the familiar and the strange ... has broken down. As the family continuously absorbs the strange and so reshapes itself, so the strange becomes familiar. ... the other-directed person is ... at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a superficial intimacy with and response to everyone.'³⁰ For William Whyte, the individual was actually defined by the organisation and its 'Social Ethic' which 'rationalizes the organization's de-

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 252.

²⁸ For example, the cashier Christopher Cross (Edward G. Robinson) in *Scarlet Street* (1945) is drawn into a criminal act which is only nominally a crime of passion. As the scene of his testimonial dinner suggests, his working life has been one of unremitting tedium and the presentation of the watch - a sardonic symbol of dutiful service - is a derisive tribute to a life measured out in stultifying office hours. Similarly, the cashier Henri Verdoux (Charles Chaplin) in *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) finds that for the past thirty-five years the very tempo of his life has been regulated by his employment ('my existence a monotonous rhythm, day in and day out, counting other people's money'). He subsequently becomes a 'clerical' serial murderer, a role which exploits the Chaplinesque 'little man' persona.

²⁹ Riesman, *Lonehy Crowd*, 22-3.

³⁰ Ibid, 26.

mands for fealty' through 'a belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual.'³¹ In the new organisation, the 'isolated' and 'meaningless' individual derived his identity 'by sublimating himself to the group.'³² The modern organisation, says Whyte, doesn't just want 'your sweat' but 'your soul.'³³

Concerns with 'The Organisation' underwrite several of the period's narratives, often with an emphasis on an inherent gangsterism in corporate organisation, concerns which are prevalent in *Force of Evil* (1948).³⁴ Here, individualism and conformism are played out in terms of capitalist rationalisation. An establishing shot shows the office buildings of New York's financial district while an accompanying voice-over announces: 'This is Wall Street.' Image and narration work together to establish through a documentary style an 'authentic' sense of time and place so the cityscape looks familiar and seems real. The scene is viewed from an elevated perspective from which the camera pans down slowly to the street far below where the diminished sidewalk figures look incidental and insignificant. This is a picture of the city *as* business, where the towering buildings dominate both street and skyline. But the 'real' city here is also a symbolic one and, as 'city' also means 'business,' 'Wall Street' is both the city location *and* the focal expression of the free market in American capitalism.³⁵

The city's symbolic structure can be seen in the exteriors of its buildings which seemingly offer architectural confirmation of the intrinsic legitimacy of its enterprise. Its buildings are monumental, both in their massively imposing presence as well as in their

³¹ Whyte, *Organization Man*, 11.

³² *Ibid.*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*, 365.

³⁴ For the film's source, see, Ira Wolfert, *Tucker's People* [1943] (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and, for a discussion of the novel, see, Alan Filreis, 'Introduction,' *ibid.*, xv-xliv. The film's director, Abraham Polonsky, has discussed the film in several interviews, often in relation to his blacklisted career. See, for example, 'Abraham Polonsky in correspondence with William Pechter, 1962,' *Film Quarterly*, 15 (1962), repr. in Andrew Sarris, ed., *Hollywood Voices: Interviews With Film Directors* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), 135-48; 'Abraham Polonsky interviewed by Jim Cook and Kingsley Canham,' *Screen*, 2 (1970), 57-73. See also, David Talbot and Barbara Zheutlin, 'Abraham Polonsky,' in *Creative Differences: Profiles of Hollywood Dissidents* (Boston: South End Press, 1978), 54-99. The film has invariably been categorised as *film noir* and critically evaluated within the limitations of the *noir* paradigm. See, for example, Carl Macek and Alain Silver, 'Force of Evil,' in Silver and Ward, eds., *Film Noir*, 105-6. On *Force of Evil* as a 'gangster-syndicate' narrative, see, Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, 126-30.

³⁵ For a discussion of realism and symbolism in the film's narrative representation of Wall Street, see Christine Noll Brinckmann, 'The Politics of *Force of Evil*: An Analysis of Abraham Polonsky's Pre-blacklist Film,' *Prospects*, 6 (1981), 369.

permanence: they seem both vast and lasting. While the skyscrapers signify business as modernity, they are also seen side by side with the district's older buildings. This is a significant juxtaposition by which the neoclassical facade of the Stock Exchange and the gothic spire of Trinity Church would seem to suggest a stately, venerable tradition by which modern business is historically legitimated. However, as Jack Shadoian has suggested, the narrative's 'force of evil is American business, symbolized by Wall Street.'³⁶ Here, at the very centre of the national economy, 'business' has become an undependable descriptive term, standing for both legitimate *and* illegitimate enterprise, now seemingly indistinguishable. If 'business' was structurally integral to the notion of American national identity ('The business of America is business'), the implication that Wall Street and organised criminality were more or less synonymous made perceptions of legitimate business liable to ambivalence and uncertainty.

The opening narration is spoken by Joe Morse (John Garfield), a 'corporation lawyer' who works for Ben Tucker (Roy Roberts) in his business organisation, Tucker Enterprises Inc.³⁷ Joe is first seen arriving at his Wall Street office, conservatively dressed in a dark business suit. The office is depicted as a conventional business. However, Joe's counterpoint narration reveals that Tucker's 'legitimate' corporation is a criminal organisation which operates as a large-scale gambling enterprise, the 'numbers racket.'³⁸ Like the accountant, Dave in *I Walk Alone*, Joe looks conventional and legitimate as the corporation lawyer. His role is to supervise the transition of the corporation's illegal gambling operation to a legitimate business footing, 'to make it legal, respectable, and very profitable.' Banking on the prediction that the next day's lottery - the Fourth of July - will entail heavy betting on the number 776 ('the old Liberty number'), Tucker and Joe plan to fix that result so that all the small-time numbers operators will be hit so

³⁶ Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster/Crime Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 138.

³⁷ Like the intertextual construction of 'Capone,' Wolfert's fictional account of Tucker's corporate gangsterism was drawn from his experience as a newspaper reporter when, in 1938, he covered the trial of James 'Jimmy' Hines, boss of New York's largest illegal betting organisation. See, Filreis, 'Introduction,' xvii-xviii.

³⁸ The film's original title, 'The Numbers Racket,' was changed because the Motion Picture Code Administration disallowed any title's incorporation of the phrase. See, for example, Silver and Ward, eds., *Film Noir*, 105.

hard by the ensuing pay-out that they will be forced out of business. The corporation will then move in and take over.³⁹

Joe's description of the scheme, for all its ruthlessness, remains within the limits of 'normal' corporate enterprise as an ordinary instance of corporate takeover in a free market economy: 'Tomorrow night every bank in the city is broken. And we step in and lend money to who we want while we let the rest go to the wall. We're normal financiers.'⁴⁰ Joe's older brother, Leo (Thomas Gomez), is one of these small operators and Joe forcefully attempts to persuade him that he can only survive *within* the corporation and that if he chooses to remain outside, he will be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of corporate power. There can be no question of any competition, nor of any choice: 'Something very serious is about to happen to your business,' Joe tells Leo. 'You're one of twenty or thirty banks in the city, one of the small ones. Now suppose a combine moves in, suppose it organises and merges these banks, eliminating the little ones like yours ... Suppose it reduces the overhead on legal fees, bail bonds, reduces the costs, guarantees the profits. A man like you would be out of business, wouldn't he? You couldn't compete, could you?' Joe's language all but conceals the criminal nature of the enterprise because it is expressed so precisely in business terms. Moreover, such euphemistically ambiguous language remains in such standard usage throughout the narrative that it acquires a normative, quasi-legitimate inflection.

Like 'business,' 'bank' also becomes an ambiguous term, describing not only the real institution, but also its illicit 'collection' counterpart, as Joe describes: 'These collection offices were called banks and they *were* like banks because money was deposited there.' The appropriation of the term from its legitimate application also suggests that the two different usages might not be so far apart. As Brinckmann points out, the term

acts not only descriptively, but also 'metonymically, as representatives of the real

³⁹ The narrative draws on the novel's account of events occurring on 'Black Wednesday' (November 23, 1931) which, according to Filreis, 'were written straight out of the [Hines] trial.' Filreis, 'Introduction,' xix. (Cf., Wolfert, *Tucker's People*, 209-32).

⁴⁰ For Bell, the increasing 'incorporation' of illegal gambling in the 1940s was indexed to the general 'rationalization of industry' in which 'the field of "institutionalised" crime' underwent a transformation 'parallel to the changes in American enterprise as a whole.' Bell, 'Crime as an American Way of Life,' 129-30.

banks.’⁴¹ Both are very much the same. Joe is insistent on this similarity but Leo, with his own independent business, sees himself as different (‘I do my business honest and respectable!’) This, he believes, has its own kind of moral legitimacy because it is small and independent, situated outside the criminal-corporation personified by ‘that gangster Tucker’ and his brother, ‘a crook and a thief and a gangster.’ Leo sees himself as a small businessman and, as such, claims a kind of ethical stance against Tucker’s corporate expansionism. He also claims the integrity of a ‘family’ business in which an employee like his secretary, Doris (Beatrice Pearson) is ‘like a daughter’ to him and whom he treats with benevolent paternalism. But Joe sees Leo’s refusal as the act of ‘a small man’ who is nevertheless implicated as much as he is in the same ‘racket.’ With the emphatic repetition of another appropriated business term, ‘policy,’ Joe insists that everyone is ‘incorporated’ in the same system: ‘Don’t you take the nickels and dimes and pennies from people who bet, just like every other crook, big or little, in this racket? They call this racket “policy” because people bet their nickels on numbers instead of paying their weekly insurance premium. That’s why - policy. That’s what it is and that’s what it’s called. And Tucker wants to make millions, you [to Leo] want to make thousands, and you [to Doris], you do it for \$35 a week. But it’s all the same - policy.’ As far as Joe is concerned, there is no difference between ‘big’ or ‘little:’ there is only the inevitability of absorption, at whatever level, in a universal system of corporatist ideology.

For all their seeming differences, their mutual estrangement and antagonism, Joe and Leo are really alike: their respective values, apparently at odds, are only different expressions of the same condition. With a social background reminiscent of the early gangster cycle, they suggest a similar kind of urban ethnic poor.⁴² Leo sacrificed his own career opportunities in order to send his younger brother to law school. But even this

traditional route to professional status and respectability leads inexorably to a role in the

⁴¹ Brinckmann, ‘Politics of *Force of Evil*,’ 369.

⁴² Garfield’s star persona implies an empathetic identification with these social groups. A poor Jew, brought up in ‘tough’ urban neighbourhoods, he signified ‘hard life’ and ‘outsider’ status. ‘Garfield,’ Howard Gelman has suggested, ‘was a symbol for a large segment of the American population, but especially for the immigrant urban poor.’ Gelman, *The Films of John Garfield* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1975), 37. For an analysis of Garfield’s persona, see Robert Sklar, *City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

service of the criminalised organisation. After all, Joe's partner, Hobe Wheelock (Paul McVey), was at Harvard. For Joe, the corporation provides the means to acquire success, while for Leo, the small business is the means by which he can renounce the corporation and resist its predatory expansionism. But each is tied inescapably to the same determinants of the corporatist system. Leo can only delude himself that he is 'an honest man' by clinging desperately to the fantasy of a small business ethic, even when confronted with irrefutable evidence to the contrary. As Joe spells out for him: 'Are you telling me, a corporation lawyer, that you're running a legitimate business here? What do you call that? Pay-offs for gambling, an illegal lottery, policy, violation 974 of the Penal Code, policy, the numbers racket.' The small business ideal, as a national vehicle of individualism and success, had become hopelessly illusory.

Even prior to his involvement in the numbers, Leo's 'legitimate' business ventures seemed ineluctably tainted with criminality. In an exchange between Leo and his wife, Sylvia (Georgia Backus), his identity as a businessman is called into question when, following Joe's arrival, Sylvia insists that Leo should have nothing to do with him because, unlike Joe, he is a legitimate 'businessman.' For Leo, however, 'business' has always had a questionable meaning. 'I've been a businessman all my life and honest, I don't know what a business is,' he tells her. Sylvia, clinging to her belief in the integrity of her husband as a businessman, reminds him of his former successes ('Well, you had a garage, you had a real estate business ...'). But as Leo admits in his embittered account to Sylvia, 'business' was always a delusion and small business was tantamount to petty larceny. 'A lot you know! Real estate business! Living from mortgage to mortgage, stealing credit like a thief. And the garage! That was a business! Three cents overcharge on every gallon of gas ... two for the chauffeur and a penny for me. A penny for one thief, two cents for the other. Well, Joe's here now. I won't have to steal pennies any more. I'll have big crooks to steal dollars for me.'⁴³

All 'business' is tainted with criminality and everyone is implicated in the system.

⁴³ Cf., Wolfert, *Tucker's People*, 62-5.

Although the narrative is predominantly concerned with Joe and Leo, it is also concerned with the effects of the system on the 'little people.' As the opening scene has visually implied, the exterior environment is architecturally dominated by the corporation office buildings. Wall Street might provide a prestigious front for the numbers' organisation, but it operates through an underground network of insalubrious cells, located, as Joe describes them, 'behind pool rooms, in lofts and cellars, or hidden in slum apartments like Leo's.' Leo's 'bank' is dingy and shabby with the blinds furtively drawn and the door permanently chained. It is small and overcrowded, like a sweatshop, with an odd assortment of employees, all involved in its nickel-and-dime operations. But there is nothing about them to suggest they are criminals and they are characterised in both appearance and demeanour by their ordinariness. The miscellaneous characters include the old, the sick and the phobic, together with the young Doris. They are characterised as 'innocents' although, of course, they are all active participants in the office's illegal operations.

The premises appear particularly narrow and confined, especially when they are raided by the police. Here, the 'bank' is like a claustrophobic trap in which everyone is caught. This is most evident in the bookkeeper, Freddy Bauer (Howland Chamberlain). Freddy is clerical-looking: slight, bespectacled, balding and dressed in a rumpled suit. With his hunched posture and haunted look, nervously clutching his hat, Freddy is a figure of acute anxiety. During the police raid, he is like a cornered animal, frantic with fear, desperately trying to escape. As the corporatist world begins to close in on Freddy, he will do anything to quit. But, as Johnson (Tim Ryan) unequivocally informs him: 'The combination will stop you, Bauer, stop you dead ... in your tracks.' Escape is impossible once the 'bank' has been incorporated. For Freddy, 'quit' becomes an incantatory refrain of unremitting hopelessness as he begs Leo to be released ('Please, Mr Morse, all I want is to quit, that's all, nothing else. They won't let me quit and I want to quit. I'll die if I don't quit'). This is prophetic, both for Freddy and Leo. Sickness, fear and an-

xiety are seen throughout the narrative as symptomatic of the institutionalised condition of intrinsic corruption as the corporation produces its own pathology. When Freddy says, 'I'm sick of this place,' it is literally true. Leo, too, is sick and dying ('I'm a man with heart trouble. I die almost every day myself. That's the way I live.') Even Joe, for all the vigour of his self-conviction, experiences fear as an absolute and permanent condition. For Freddy, Leo and Joe, locked into the corporatist structure, there is no escape. As Tucker says: 'Nobody quits, understand, not even the janitor.'⁴⁴

This structure is represented through the narrative's recurrent images of ascent and descent. *Force of Evil* had begun with a high perspective of the corporation building in which the trajectory of Joe's success could be measured visually by his office 'up in the clouds.' Following his 'rise,' the film ends with his 'fall,' represented visually through a sequence of descent. Leaving his office for the last time, Joe is seen from a similarly high perspective as a diminutive and solitary figure, walking along the deserted street in the grey light of dawn. Later, by the river and beneath the George Washington Bridge, he descends yet further, to find Leo's body: 'I was feeling very bad there when I went down there. It was all going down, and I went down. I was by myself and I went down. I just kept going down and down there, down to the bottom of the world.'

We can see in this insistent emphasis on diminution and descent a denial of the 'classic' gangster's trajectory where even violent death is at least a spectacular finale to an ascendant life. For Leo, in contrast, there is only the degradation and anonymity of an unseen death 'down there.' This power of the organisation to diminish and overwhelm is a recurrent narrative trope in representations of criminality. In what can be seen as a postwar mutation of the 'classic' gangster, Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) in *White Heat* (1949) represents the 'old' gangster, now unable to survive against the modernised technological and bureaucratic forces of law and order which have themselves been transformed into new forms of organisational power to rival the criminal ones. But

⁴⁴ Other narratives similarly emphasised the organisation's inexorably encircling power as inescapable, often through *bodily* performative expressions of languid resignation. See, for example, Swede (Burt Lancaster) in *The Killers* (1946) and Jeff Bailey (Robert Mitchum) in *Out of the Past* (1947).

Jarrett isn't just an anachronistic reprise of Cagney's 1930s' roles: now, as the postwar gangster, he can become the nonconformist outsider only through a kind of nihilistic madness, through his spectacular self-immolation on top of the exploding gas tanks.⁴⁵ The law is personified by FBI agent, Hank Fallon (Edmund O'Brien), a bland and impersonal figure characterised by the institutionalised banality of the agency he represents.⁴⁶ The forces of law and order close in on Jarrett and ultimately destroy him, but his 'fall' is an ambivalent one. The narrative, as Munby has pointed out, is capable of quite contradictory readings. On the one hand, it could suggest 'a valorization of institutional power and its "organization man,"' while on the other, Cagney's Jarrett could be seen as a 'rejection of the sinister aspects of a conforming culture embodied in ... O'Brien's faceless ... agent.'⁴⁷ If we side with Munby's second (more convincing) option, Jarrett's defiance can be seen as a kind of heroically crazy gesture in the face of an organisational force which Dana Polan has described as 'a cold, calculating, encircling rationalism.'⁴⁸ Moreover, Jarrett's 'insane' proclamation - 'Made it, Ma! Top of the world!' - is oddly reminiscent of the neon sign's message in *Scarface* - 'THE WORLD IS YOURS' - and, hence, the 'old' gangster trajectory remains implicit, in mutated form, through him. In contrast to the organisation which has brought Leo and Joe 'down to the bottom of the world,' Jarrett's psychopathic self-destruction is at least a momentary assertion of ascendancy over the 'encircling rationalism' of organisational power.

⁴⁵ Jarrett's characterisation retains the 'old' Cagney gangster persona, drawn cumulatively from the succession of his 1930s' roles, but also stands distanced from it. His last 'big shot' gangster role had been a decade earlier, as Eddie Bartlett in *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) and, hence, we can detect in the markedly older Cagney and his 'new' incarnation a sense of 'lost time' intervening between his 'absence' and 'return.' A parallel process can be seen in *Key Largo* (1948) where Edward G. Robinson's 'swan-song' gangster, Johnny Rocco, is reminiscent of his role in *Little Caesar*. The ageing Rocco, however, retains only the residue of a 'classic' reputation which, in the postwar world, can only find anachronistic expression through monstrous viciousness and a deranged, nostalgic yearning for the return of Prohibition.

⁴⁶ As the 'man' was named for the 'organization,' so, too, was the law enforcement officer: hence, 'G[overnment]-Man' and 'T[reasury]-Man' were often characterised as components in the techno-bureaucratic apparatus of their agencies in narratives which emphasised procedural rather than human agency. See, for example, *T-Men* (1948) and *He Walked By Night* (1949). This version of the 'organization man' was taking over from the 'classic' 1940s' private-eye, a figure whose *private*, nonconforming individualism situated him against official law enforcement agencies. Previously a detective himself, he was a maverick outsider who didn't fit into the police department organisation and was contemptuous of its 'flatfoot' procedures and 'by-the-book' bureaucracy. See, for example, Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941); Philip Marlowe (Dick Powell) in *Murder, My Sweet* (1945); Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) in *The Big Sleep* (1946).

⁴⁷ Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, 118-9.

⁴⁸ Polan, *Power and Paranoia*, 165.

Chapter 11

'In Harper, there's nothing to be afraid of ...' Renascent Fascism and *The Stranger*

The 'organization' was often seen as model of postwar American society with the power to circumscribe social identity, a model which implied affinities with the totalitarian state: the term 'organization man' suggested in itself a kind of totalitarian inscription for a model of Americanism as the antithesis of democracy. Concerns with postwar America as a *failing* democracy repeatedly surfaced in narratives where the democratic principles supposedly inherent in American national identity often appeared remote. Wartime narratives had often extolled the (American) values implicit in 'home' and, in the discourse of homecoming, 'home' was often represented by the intrinsic quality of 'ordinary' American small-town life. For many social and political commentators, small-town America was the locus of community and it was here, through the everyday life of the local community, that the fundamental principles of democracy were enacted at the grass-roots level of national life. The local community had often been the issuing source of resistance to the 'organization' and its depersonalised systems of institutionalised power. Hence, the power of 'community,' inscribed with an irrefutable 'organic' quality, would be invoked to challenge 'the system.' Community, in this sense, was seen to be constituted by the 'Vital Center' heartland of the 'diversified society' envisaged by Arthur Schlesinger. But in the discourse of 'readjustment,' it was feared that the 'conformist' serviceman was returning not to a 'diversified' society at all, but to one in which the very notion of 'community' appeared to be slipping away and, hence, incapable of mounting the 'democratic counter-offensive' which Schlesinger saw as imperative to withstand the threat of encroaching totalitarianism.¹

As postwar narratives would often show, it was precisely here, in the 'ordinary' small-town 'community,' that Americanism was seen as especially vulnerable to

¹ Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, 10, 186.

incursive totalitarian influence, where small-town life was repeatedly attributed with a dubious sense of community. As we have seen in *It's A Wonderful Life*, the value implicit in the 'community' of Bedford Falls is an unstable one, ever foreshadowed by its Other, Pottersville. In this chapter, I examine how the resurgent Nazism in *The Stranger* (1946) was capable of making inroads into American society through its exploitation of small-town vulnerability. Incursive Nazism is an obviously external threat, but one which here capitalises on the internal complacency - and complicity - of an ineffectual, irresponsible 'community.' I want to highlight the terms of the narrative's postwar perspective through a comparative analysis of a prewar narrative account of incursive Fascism, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939).

Warner Brothers' *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* was Hollywood's first explicit treatment of a Fascist threat to America and openly advocated interventionist action when national sentiment inclined towards isolationism.² The film is a characteristic Warners' 'topical' and, like the studio's gangster cycle of the early 1930s, drew on tabloid narratives of actual events.³ Following the 1938 German spy-ring trial in New York, FBI Special Agent Leon Turrou's account of the case, published in the *New York Post*, provided the source of the narrative and the model for Ed Renard (Edward G. Robinson) who reprises his Warners' 'G-Man' persona, here in opposition to Nazis rather than gangsters.⁴ Robinson was himself a prominent anti-Nazi activist.⁵ The film was denounced by Nazi officials and banned throughout the Third Reich. Moreover, as

² Although the isolationist-interventionist debate is implicit in several Warner Brothers' films of the period, for example, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939); *The Sea Hawk* (1940). John Davis has identified in the former film an isolationist position represented by Elizabeth (Bette Davis) which prevails against the interventionist Essex (Errol Flynn). In the latter, however, the isolationist position held by Elizabeth (Flora Robson) has become tantamount to appeasement, here in the face of Spanish expansionism. As Spain's network of fifth columnists infiltrates the English court, Geoffrey Thorpe (Errol Flynn) exposes the threat of the enemy within and convinces the Queen of the need for retaliation. Davis, 'Notes on Warner Brothers Foreign Policy 1918-1948,' *Velvet Light Trap*, 17 (1977), 24-5. The film shows the Spanish king's black-clad quasi-Fascist court before an enormous wall-map of the world it intends to conquer, recalling a scene with Goebbels in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. The Spanish galleys imply 'slave-state' concentration camps, opposed by the 'democratic' constitution of Thorpe's ship.

³ On the narrative affinity between gangsterism and Fascism, see Eric J. Sandeen, 'Confessions of a Nazi Spy and the German-American Bund,' *American Studies*, 20 (1979), 75.

⁴ See, for example, Dick, *Star-Spangled Screen*, 51. Robinson was credited in one review as 'Edward (G-man) Robinson.' Frank S. Nugent, 'Confessions of a Nazi Spy' [review], *New York Times* (April 29, 1939), 13: 2.

⁵ Doherty, *Projections of War*, 39.

Eric Sandeen has noted, the German-American Bund's official newspaper (*Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*) listed many of the film's credits prefixed with 'Jew.'⁶

Dr Kassel (Paul Lukas) is a *Führer*-like demagogue, a histrionic speechifier whose performative rhetoric demonstrates a studied approximation to Hitler's own declamatory style. National Socialism is filtered through the German-American Bund, a front for Kassel's rabble-rousing speeches, the dissemination of Nazi propaganda, and co-ordination of covert operations. Its activities are directed from Berlin by the Minister for Propaganda, Dr Goebbels (Martin Kosleck) who represents the intellectual-as-administrator, the bureaucratic face of the propaganda offensive as rationalised planning and organisation. The Nazi regime, constituted by totalitarian order and unity, demands submissive acceptance of Party diktat. As Schlager (George Sanders) says, 'the Party doesn't want criticism, only obedience.'

The narrative emphasises the imagery of mass conformity to Party ideology especially in the scenes of the Bund meetings. After the initial focus on Kassel's speech, the camera tracks back to reveal a Munich-like hall crowded with exuberant supporters, highlighting the enormous scale of attendance, the uniformed ranks of its members and, especially, the unanimity of their response. The hall is decked with Fascist trappings and the swastika is starkly juxtaposed with the Stars and Stripes.⁷ At a subsequent meeting, dissenters are beaten up and thrown out by Party thugs with Kassel's tacit approval.⁸ A later scene shows Kassel's *Führer*-like motorcade arrival at Camp Horst Wessel and his inspection of the massed ranks of uniformed youths, all paying eager homage to the tenets of National Socialism. Their replies to his questions demonstrate a thoroughgoing indoctrination as they reproduce official Nazi ideology by rote. Kassel is gratified by this orchestrated demonstration of Germany's embryonic militarism which

⁶ Sandeen, 'Confessions of a Nazi Spy and the German-American Bund,' 74.

⁷ This narrative representation corresponds to the *Amerika-Deutscher Volksbund*, the predominant pro-Nazi organisation in America where the juxtaposition of paramilitary emblems and insignia was standard practice. Alton Frye has described how '[t]he swastika received a place next to the American flag, and German anthems, including ... the Nazi *Horst Wessel Lied*, rang out more often than the Star-Spangled Banner.' Frye, *Nazi Germany and the Western Hemisphere 1933-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 81.

⁸ The scene draws on a 1938 Bund rally at Madison Square Garden. See, Dick, *Star-Spangled Screen*, 59.

has been so efficiently transplanted in America ('It makes me feel I'm really in Berlin').⁹

The film's documentary style incorporates stock newsreel footage in montage sequences patterned after *March of Time*, depicting actual events such as the 1937 Congress of National Socialists at Stuttgart and Nuremberg. The narrative representation of Nazism repeatedly emphasises the visual dimension of a national culture which showcases national unity as an ideological form of industrial mass production and displays on an overwhelming scale the machine-like national organisation of the state apparatus. The rally is staged to demonstrate national fusion through the spectacle of *formation* as a figure of geometric perfection as images of the *Wehrmacht*, marching in unison, are juxtaposed with those of massed crowds, saluting and flag-waving. Images of Hitler are superimposed on these scenes which show the mass replication of citizenry and soldiery where, under the cult of *Führer*, the state is orchestrated as a total entity of mass uniformity and conformity.¹⁰ Attorney Kellogg (Henry O'Neill) describes the spy-ring participants as, 'little cogs in a vast intricate machine.'

The narrative shows a Nazi propaganda offensive operating systematically to infiltrate and subvert America's social, cultural and political national identity. The newsreel commentary warns that the American national *body* is vulnerable to attack from propaganda which 'insidiously attempts to penetrate every nerve and fibre of American life.' The newsreel highlights the vulnerability of everyday life as propaganda material is slipped surreptitiously into newspapers, grocery bags and children's school boxes by 'enemies within.' A map sequence depicts a cluster of swastika-tipped tendrils issuing from Germany and creeping towards targeted American towns and cities.

⁹ Based on the '*Hitlerjungen*' Camp Siegfried at Long Island. See *ibid*, 58. The Bund undertook the 'training' of German-American youth, Frye says, 'to instruct them in the militant practices of the new Reich.' Frye, *Nazi Germany and the Western Hemisphere*, 81.

¹⁰ These scenes include sequences taken from *Triumph of the Will* [*Triumph des Willens*] (1935), Leni Riefenstahl's 'documentary' encomium of the 1934 Nazi Congress at Nuremberg. *Triumph of the Will* had a significant presence in America through sequences frequently interpolated in newsreels, War Department films and mainstream features. See, 'Leni Riefenstahl's Contribution to the American War Effort' in Doherty, *Projections of War*, 16-35. The film provided for American consumption an 'authorised version' of Fascist culture's 'mass' aesthetic, authenticated at source. Doherty cites Riefenstahl's visit to Hollywood in 1938 as one of the factors provoking the industry out of its 'apolitical' stance. See, *ibid*, 39. Riefenstahl's propagandist treatment of the event provided source material for Anatole Litvak's counter-propagandist narrative.

The film is structured as an *exposé* narrative revealing the covert operations by which Nazism attempts to gain power in America, an enterprise which depends on how effectively it can exploit American susceptibility to Fascist tendencies. In this sense, Kurt Schneider (Francis Lederer) isn't simply the stock figure of the fanatical Nazi he appears to be, nor merely the deranged product of the German ideological machine. Rather, as a German-American of the Depression era, he is as much a product of disaffected, disenfranchised prewar America. A poor and unemployed no-hoper, Schneider's life is a mundane struggle to make ends meet and support his family. Unable to find a role for himself in society, he is drawn to the Bund partly because the Party provides a focus of political commitment, partly because it provides a source of badly-needed income, and, most significantly, because he thinks it will provide him with recognition and status hitherto denied him. His delusional and narcissistic self-image is a compensatory reaction to his impoverished circumstances and, with no other viable outlet, he becomes a self-obsessed fantasist whose ludicrous aspirations become projected onto the Party. Schneider admires Kassel, significantly, less for his politics and more for his success, as 'a man who *is* somebody,' unlike the nobody he is himself.¹¹

Although Schneider is the narrative's central figure, it is a minor character, Werner Renz (Joe Sawyer), who represents the most dangerous form of susceptibility to Fascism. Renz is a German-American serviceman stationed in a munitions plant. Characterised as 'ordinary,' he is also gullible and suggestible. For Renz, the Bund's meaning is less political than social, offering him a link with the old country through German-American 'community' and its nostalgic cultural ambience of music, dress, beer and food. At the Bund meeting, Renz is bemused by Kassel's speech which makes him feel uneasy. Uncertain of what his own reaction should be, he glances at Schneider who vigorously endorses the proceedings and, taking his cue from him, begins to applaud along with everyone else. Renz is not really a Party member in any political sense, nor is he particularly interested in the Party as such. Renz is characterised by a vacuous kind

¹¹ Renard recognises this trait and extracts Schneider's confessions by appealing to his vanity.

of ordinariness which allows him to drift along with the Party. Although reluctant to compromise his position by obtaining classified military intelligence for Schneider, he nevertheless does so out of a sense of friendship and obligation to a fellow German who, supposedly, has helped him out in the past.¹²

But as the Fascist offensive systematically exploits the 'ordinary,' so, too, does the democratic counter-offensive. America is defensively constructed not only *as* a democracy but, as the newsreel commentary affirms, 'America *is* democracy.' When Renard and Kellogg ruminate on the political implications of the trial, they do so not in any official building but in a nondescript diner and it is here, significantly, that Kellogg describes America as 'a careless, easygoing, optimistic nation.' As they listen to others talking about the case, they hear 'the voice of the people' speaking out and, hence, the mobilisation of popular democratic sentiment towards interventionism. Nevertheless, America has been exposed as vulnerable to Fascist ideology because of what Kassel has described as the 'chaos' endemic in its democratic constitution and the narrative sees 'careless, easygoing' Americanism at risk not only from an external threat but from an internal one of isolationist complacency in the face of an enemy within.

The Stranger also deals with a Fascist threat to America but from a postwar perspective with significantly different concerns. Franz Kindler (Orson Welles) is a Nazi fugitive who has eluded capture in Germany and fled to America where he has assumed the identity of Charles Rankin and established himself as a school teacher in the Connecticut town of Harper. He is about to be married to Mary (Loretta Young), the daughter of Judge Longstreet (Philip Merivale), a Justice of the Supreme Court and a prominent liberal. Kindler is pursued by the Allied War Crimes Commissioner, Wilson (Edward G. Robinson).¹³

Kindler's American identity, like Kassel's, is authenticated through the guise of a

¹² Critical accounts of the film generally fail to mention Renz at all, and yet his 'ordinary' role - both as citizen and serviceman - is crucial to the narrative's treatment of Nazi ideology and its potential appeal in America.

¹³ Robinson's performance as War Crimes Commissioner reprises his FBI Agent in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* and implies a recontextualisation of that role.

professional role in the community. Kassel had lived in America for ten years, working 'legitimately' as a doctor. Nevertheless, his Nazi identity had always been readily identifiable through his highly visible Bund role. Kindler, in contrast, has no public profile whatsoever and, to all outward appearances, is exactly what he seems to be, an ordinary small-town 'American.' However, Wilson reveals that, 'it was Kindler who conceived the theory of genocide' and, as the principal architect of the 'Final Solution' (*Endlösung*), 'Kindler' is linked explicitly to Adolf Eichmann and other leading Nazis.¹⁴ Moreover, as Wilson explains, Kindler's Nazism is uncharacteristically unidentifiable: 'Unlike Goebbels, Himmler and the rest of them, Kindler had a passion for anonymity. The newspapers carried no picture of him.' Fascism, here, as a postwar force, has divested itself of all its typical paraphernalia, its distinctive iconography and its narcissistic exhibitionism. Kindler's Nazism is now unrecognisable, transmuted into an *invisible* force. The narrative shows nothing of Kindler's arrival, nor his metamorphosis into Rankin, nor his assimilation into Harper's small-town community where he is already integrated, chameleon-like, into the familiar patterns of everyday life.¹⁵ Moreover, Welles's performance as Kindler-Rankin has none of the conventional inflections which characterise stereotypical screen Nazis. Rankin remains a credible American because, through Welles, that is precisely what he is.¹⁶

Hence, as a familiar figure in the local community, Kindler-as-Rankin establishes a series of connections to the fundamental institutions of American society which serve to authenticate and legitimate 'Rankin' by providing him with the cover of ordinariness and respectability. At the same time, he exposes the vulnerability of these institutions to which he readily gains admittance. His forthcoming wedding will enable him to insinuate himself yet further into the social fabric of Harper through the domestic sphere of

¹⁴ Eichmann escaped from American military internment in 1945 and fled to Argentina where he lived under an assumed identity.

¹⁵ Wilson lists all recent arrivals in Harper, each classified by occupation, and as we see his list, we see his difficulty in ascertaining Kindler's identity. With their ordinary names and ordinary jobs, none is likely to attract attention and each could be readily assimilated in the town.

¹⁶ 'The effect,' suggests Palmer, 'is to downplay the sense of Rankin being a stranger, or an impersonator who does not truly belong to the small-town environment we discover him in.' Harper becomes 'the locus of dangerous ambiguity, because the stranger ... is the one who is too well known, too familiar.' Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema*, 122.

marriage, home and family as his marriage to Mary makes Judge Longstreet his father-in-law, further consolidating his connections to the Judge's world of law and liberal politics. The prestigious school provides the cover of elitist respectability ('Who would think to look for the notorious Franz Kindler in the sacred precincts of the Harper School, surrounded by the sons of America's first families?') Moreover, his role in undertaking the restoration of the church clock puts him quite literally at the centre of the town's civic and religious institutions.¹⁷

This sense of national vulnerability to a new kind of incursive Fascism is manifest throughout the narrative. Konrad Meinike (Konstantin Shayne) is a war criminal held prisoner by the Allies whose 'escape' is planned by Wilson as a means of tracing Kindler. Meinike obtains a postcard establishing Kindler's whereabouts and our initial view of Harper is this postcard image, a view of small-town America. Meinike stares at the postcard's depiction of a town centre dominated by a church. The scene seems flat and lifeless before it dissolves into an establishing shot of the town itself where Meinike, trailed by Wilson, arrives by bus. The still image becomes animated as the score (by Bronislav Kaper) attributes a sense of alacrity to the town. But although the townscape is punctuated by occasional automobiles and passers-by, it seems curiously vacant and lacking in any social dynamics. The following scene, at Potter's drugstore, also suggests a kind of social remoteness, where social interaction seems desultory, where customers seem detached and incommunicative. Potter (Billy House), a central figure in Harper, not only runs the drugstore but also officiates as town clerk. But he is also one of the town's most unprepossessing citizens: gossipy, lazy, mean-spirited and devious, there is little about Potter which offers a positive view of Harper's community.

¹⁷ Of all the key institutions of American society to which Kindler gains access, his occupation of the church assumes particular strategic significance in the *modus operandi* of Nazi ideology. Historians of the Third Reich have theorised Nazism as a form of political religion. Michael Burleigh, for example, has argued that 'Nazi ideology offered redemption from a national ontological crisis. ... Nazism offered intense inclusivity in a society that had been scarred by deep divisions, dynamism where there was stagnation, and a sense of lofty purpose, almost a national mission, in a society where material interests seemed all-pervasive. ... All people had to do was to make the quantum leap of faith; unified national self-belief was the solution to every mundane problem.' Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 12. See also, 'Introduction - 'An Extraordinary Rape of the Soul': National Socialism, Political Religions and Totalitarianism,' 1-25; 252-67.

Indeed, there is little sense of any 'community' at all.¹⁸ The townspeople will only be seen in any collective sense at the very end of the narrative when they are shown *en masse*, converging mob-like at the church tower to witness Rankin's death.

Moreover, the family, as exemplified by the Longstreets, is found as wanting as the community. Mary herself is pleasant and attractive, but little more than a stalwart adherent to conventional small-town life. On the afternoon of her wedding, she is first glimpsed through the window of Rankin's house, putting up curtains. Although Meinike's sudden arrival there is bizarre and threatening, she nevertheless tells him about her wedding and explains to him why she is there ('I wanted to get these curtains up'). The scene not only illustrates Mary's domestic preoccupations but also points to a proclivity which will recur later: a sense of domestic insularity which insists on shutting out external realities. At home, she scarcely demurs at her husband's pronouncements, even when these betray traces of his past. Although she is vaguely disconcerted by his vicious political views, she doesn't intervene, and although she resents his brutal treatment of her dog, her protest is muted. She wilfully persists in believing her husband's increasingly outlandish lies and perversely repudiates the accumulating evidence of his war crimes. Unresisting, she becomes implicated in his acts, as he tells her ('in failing to speak, you become part of the crime'): she knowingly and willingly embraces her complicity in his uncertain past ('I'm already a part of it because I'm a part of you').

We can see in Mary's domestically-centred world a connection with the postwar discourse of totalitarianism in which women were emphatically associated with

¹⁸ This sense of a declining 'community' occurs in other postwar narratives. For example, in *Colonel Effingham's Raid* (1946), small-town life is characterised by easygoing complacency where the exercise of grass-roots democracy has atrophied, enabling local government to contravene townspeople's interests with impunity. Colonel Effingham (Charles Coburn) challenges the authority of a corrupt and unrepresentative government by mobilising the 'dormant' community against it and his 'raid' is as much against popular indifference to local democracy (with the deliberate intention of making the town fit for returning servicemen). We can see an interesting contrast here with some prewar narratives in which 'community' was represented as the value-base of 'plain folks' who subsequently combat oppressive power systems. For example, in *Mr Smith Goes To Washington* (1939), Jefferson Smith (James Stewart) evokes a (Jeffersonian) democratic citizenship ideal, but as the supra-citizen hero with quasi-Fascist potential, later reprised through George Bailey's populism in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

domesticity and, hence, conformity.¹⁹ The critique of conformity repeatedly stressed the influence of what was seen as a *feminised* mass culture, implicitly and explicitly associated with totalitarianism, in which women were characterised as passive consumers of a standardised, mass-produced culture.²⁰ In this context, Mary is figured as an archetypal proto-Fascist, coded through her overdetermined domestic zeal. At the same time, she represents the Other of Fascism: its victim. Where Fascism is identified with masculinised individualism and 'heroic' leadership, the feminine world of ordinary domesticity is subordinated. Hence, it is significant that Mary should be introduced in the act of putting up curtains and that she should find it necessary to excuse her presence to Meinike (a complete stranger) through an attempt to justify what she feels may be seen as a breach of social etiquette ('I know it's most unconventional, my being here today ...') when she is virtually defined by the hyper-conventionalism of her domestic world. Mary's complacent conformism allows her to become susceptible to, and complicit in, her husband's Fascism.²¹

The narrative later works through Wilson to 'psychiatrise' Mary's condition as a conflict between her conscious disavowal of the truth about her husband and her repression of it. However, Wilson's psychoanalytical explanation fails to address the social and political implications of her crisis which remain embedded in the narrative. We can see in Mary a particular kind of weakness and vulnerability which is evident precisely in those areas which would seem to provide stability and security. Her outlook is based on a naive and complacent acceptance of superficial appearances as she takes for granted that in the conventional world of Harper (and, by extension, in America) all is well because that is how it seems to be. Even when directly confronted

¹⁹ See, for example, Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*.

²⁰ See, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry.' The 'pessimistic' thesis of 'The Culture Industry' owed much to its authors' justifiably disillusioned view of the tyranny of European Fascism. They had a predisposition to identify the characteristics of an incipient Fascism already *in* the industrial organisation of 'mass' cultural production and consumption.

²¹ Friedan described the condition of domesticated femininity in an inapt and overdetermined analogy with the concentration camp. Adjusting to the domestic role of the housewife, she says, progressively depersonalises individual identity to produce 'an anonymous biological robot in a docile mass.' Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 267. See also the chapter, 'Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp,' 245-68.

with evidence of her husband's guilt, she clings to the notion of his innocence because she won't accept the possibility that appearances can be so thoroughly deceptive. Mary is forced by Wilson to witness newsreels of concentration camp atrocities when, shown in a darkened room, she is caught in the flickering light of the projector and juxtaposed with the screen's horrific images. Although she refutes the documentary evidence of Kindler's war crimes, the scene suggests that she, too ('in failing to speak'), is implicated in them.²² Having lied to both Wilson and her father, to fabricate an alibi for Rankin, she flees from the family home and from her own growing realisation that her unquestioning faith in conventional small-town values is becoming destabilised. She has deluded herself that her town is a haven of reassuring comfort and security ('In Harper, there's nothing to be afraid of') only to discover that it is as defenceless as she is.

Mary's situation is reminiscent of 1940s' Gothic melodramas in which the wife represents a figure of vulnerability susceptible to a malign or ambivalent husband who is, or may be, a threat to her. The husband, usually a European 'foreigner,' is often charismatically attractive and enigmatically unknowable. Marriage in these narratives is repeatedly represented as unpredictable and unstable, where a vulnerable femininity is endangered by menacing masculinity, played out in domestic spaces which themselves become destabilised in the process.²³ As feminine sexuality is inscribed in this domestic space, masculinity becomes a penetrative force, an invasive power which mounts an assault on the feminine. In *The Stranger*, this power penetrates the symbolic structure of home represented by both the marital bed and the dinner table. Like many of these Gothic narratives, *The Stranger* incorporates an hallucinatory, dream-like quality in which a masculinised terror is visited on the feminine, as in Mary's dream. When Rankin darkly enters their bedroom, casting a sinister shadow over Mary, she wakes from a

²² *The Stranger* was the first commercial film to show such newsreel atrocities. See, Peter Bogdanovich, in Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, ed., Jonathan Rosenbaum, *This Is Orson Welles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 189.

²³ See, for example, Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier) in *Rebecca* (1940); Johnnie Aysgarth (Cary Grant) in *Suspicion* (1941); Nick Bédaroux (Paul Lukas) in *Experiment Perilous* (1944); Gregory Anton (Charles Boyer) in *Gaslight* (1944); Nicholas Van Ryn (Vincent Price) in *Dragonwyck* (1946); Richard Courtland (Don Ameche) in *Sleep, My Love* (1948); Henry Stevenson (Burt Lancaster) with Morano (William Conrad) in *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948).

dream in which she has seen Meinike, 'walking all by himself, across a deserted city square. ... Wherever he moved, he threw a shadow ... but when he moved away ... the shadow stayed there behind him.' Mary's ominous nightmare reveals her subconscious anxieties about her unknown husband, where the import of the past haunts the present through its vestigial shadow. The sequence illustrates Mary's isolation and vulnerability, located, significantly, in the deserted town square.²⁴

Mary's particular vulnerability is shaped by the opportunities available in small-town life where she doesn't apparently *do* anything and where, lacking any working role, she is defined in relation to the men in her family, as the judge's daughter and the teacher's wife. Her marriage will cast her in a domestic role as an adjunct to her husband's career, as the elegant and charming hostess giving parties for the school faculty. Her earlier association with the curtains has already implied a preoccupation with screening out the external which later becomes an obsessive, almost hysterical, repudiation of the the outside world. Mary's notion of home is initially one of comfortable complacency, a sequestered domestic realm which refuses to look outside itself. Her introspective view reflects her family's and the town's. After all, nobody in Harper has recognised anything 'different' about Rankin who has been readily accepted within the community. Mary's father has been similarly deceived. Longstreet may appear urbane and sophisticated but he is really quite avuncular and parochial. Seen at home rather than at work, he is associated with its wood-panelled rooms filled with antiques and seems like a connoisseur in a mausoleum where, with his collection of pewter, he retreats into an 'antique' past. Although Longstreet is characterised uniquely amongst the citizens of Harper as politically informed, he is also, like them, politically out of touch. His connection with the Foreign Policy Association may have provided him with reports from Berlin of 'men drilling by night' and other indications of Nazi resurgence, but his 'elder statesman' liberalism seems ineffectual in the face of it.

²⁴ The original version of *The Stranger* incorporated much greater narrative realisation of the onerous elements only described here. For an account of these 'missing' sequences, see James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, rev. edn (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 269-71.

Certainly, his awareness of such intelligence doesn't enable him to detect the presence of Kindler's Nazism at his own dinner table.

Ultimately, only the forces of external agency, through Wilson, can set in motion the processes by which both family and town are obligated to recognise the encroaching threat in their midst. Nevertheless, it is significant that Wilson should want to see Mary play such an active role in bringing about Kindler's downfall. Although Wilson may appear callous in 'needlessly' putting Mary in jeopardy, he does so because her own involvement is crucial to the narrative's wider implications which work towards a shift in the burden of responsibility. Wilson's agency provides the professional expertise necessary for Kindler's detection and apprehension, but it is ultimately through Mary's eventual acknowledgement of her own responsibility that she will be able to assume a more civically-minded role in safeguarding the interests of the town (and, by extension, the nation at large).

Although Harper may be vulnerable to the incursion of Kindler's Nazism, the town itself is already inscribed in various ways with traces of proto-Fascism. The clock tower, for example, may suggest a reassuringly traditional New England townscape, but this is merely a facade, another front for Kindler. He assiduously devotes himself to the restoration of the clock and often prefers to be in the tower rather than at home because the elaborately gothic clock (by 'Hobrecht of Strasbourg'), with its grotesque figures and synchronised movements, provides for him a more symbolic sense of 'home.' Kindler may also feel particular affinity with the boys' school where he teaches. In a telling moment, a group of students are about to set off on a woodland paper-chase when their banter with Kindler is momentarily interrupted as a passing girl is enthusiastically hailed by the youths as 'blondie.'

The school itself is shown principally in terms of its gymnasium and it is here, significantly, that Meinike is drawn in his attempt to elude Wilson. The narrative emphasis on 'sports' implies a parallel with the Nazi ideology of paramilitary

athleticism exemplified through its cult of *Hitlerjungen*.²⁵ When Kindler murders Meinike in the woods and hides his body, his actions are choreographed with the patterns of the paper chase as he changes the course of the trail. The school also provides Kindler with the means to disseminate 'his' German history through the curriculum, as seen in his congenial introduction to a lecture on Frederick the Great.

As the school serves to consolidate Kindler's new identity, so, too, does the clock tower. As Harper's imposing centrepiece, it stands physically and symbolically at the very heart of the town. Prior to Kindler's arrival, the clock had fallen into disrepair and there was consequently no official indicator of time. The townspeople feel ambivalent about its repair: while they are enthusiastic about its restoration as a matter of civic pride and effusive in their congratulations when it begins to work again, they also fear its disruptive effects on the rhythms of town life. This, in a sense, is Kindler's intention, to impose on the town a centrally-determined form of temporal order. Moreover, his fascination for the clockwork mechanism suggests a technological correlative to the Nazi state apparatus and its regimented patterns of order. This further suggests a relationship between time, technology and 'will' as a combined expression of Nazi ideology. If 'will' is the national power of determination and control, it works towards the logic of a planned future ('Till we strike again'). The clock tower is the highest point in Harper from which Kindler can survey the town below and, hence, in both temporal and spatial terms, he seeks to take control of the town. He is ultimately faced down in the same place and by the same means, killed at the top of the tower by the very mechanism which he has restored to use, the emblematic apparatus of a Fascist-Gothic technology.²⁶

The figure of 'The Stranger' as a force of invasive Fascism can also be identified in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *The Stranger*, as James Naremore has suggested, can be

²⁵ See, for example, Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 252-6.

²⁶ These narrative concerns are also evident in *The Big Clock* (1948) where the American corporation is structured as a model of Fascist organisation. The Januth Corporation represents the corporatist state as a form of Fascist modernity symbolised by the inexorable apparatus of the 'big clock' showcased in the lobby with a 'Langian' production design. The clock functions as a 'total' system of synchronisation which centrally determines global time. Earl Janoth (Charles Laughton) runs his 'empire' from the top of the building, an explicitly Hitlerian space described as 'the Berchtesgaden of the publishing world' and 'the tycoon's lair,' a reference to the 'Wolf's Lair' (*Wolfsschanze*), Hitler's headquarters in Eastern Prussia.

seen as a reworking of the earlier film in which Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten) prefigures Kindler.²⁷ Uncle Charlie represents a *domestic* counterpart of 'The Stranger' as foreigner. Like Kindler, he uses an assumed identity to infiltrate small-town America and, like him, eschews any photographic record of himself. Unlike Kindler, Uncle Charlie is seen to arrive at the town (Santa Rosa). He is first seen in a desolate urban landscape (Philadelphia) which, like Harper, appears vacant and remote. Santa Rosa, in contrast to the dismal city, appears as the family home and small-town community where Uncle Charlie's arrival is warmly anticipated, but, as the train draws in, the ominous nature of his arrival is signalled by its clouds of voluminous black smoke, darkly shadowing the station.²⁸ Uncle Charlie is a glamorously attractive figure, especially to his niece, Young Charlie (Teresa Wright) and personifies for her a world of cosmopolitan sophistication lacking in her own home town. Like Harper, Santa Rosa is characterised as a typically ordinary American town.²⁹ But it is also stultifyingly banal and small-minded. Uncle Charlie inveigles his way into this dull, small-town world where he becomes a figure of irresistible allure, a star attraction fêted by the unsuspecting community. But he isn't simply a dandified charmer who exploits his appeal for murderous ends. His popularity derives from a kind of Fascist appeal. Hence, his punctilious dress as military uniform; his guest speaker as orator; his serial murderer as genocidal killer; and his misogyny as a displaced form of racial ideology. Although Uncle Charlie, like Kindler, is ultimately eradicated from the community he threatens to corrupt, his demise differs from Kindler's: in *The Stranger*, the narrative works to expose Kindler's criminal identity and his death, as public spectacle, becomes public knowledge. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, there is no such exposure and Uncle Charlie's reputation remains intact and his memory eulogised as the record of his crimes is

²⁷ Naremore, *Magic World of Orson Welles*, 123-4. For further elaboration on the relationship between the two films, see R. Barton Palmer, 'The Politics of Genre in Welles' *The Stranger*, *Film Criticism*, 9 (1984-85), 2-14.

²⁸ A contrivance signifying the demonic malevolence of his entry which, as François Truffaut has noted, 'implies that the devil was coming to town.' Truffaut, with Helen G. Scott, *Hitchcock* (London: Panther, 1969), 181.

²⁹ There is also a strong narrative emphasis on the archetypal ordinariness of the family. When the detectives in pursuit of Uncle Charlie want to gain access to the family home, they pose as National Public Survey researchers purporting to document the 'typical American family.'

effaced. Santa Rosa remain as it was before, ignorantly susceptible to a recurrence of the same incursive threat.

The Nazi theme of *The Stranger* is related to a discourse in which wider concerns with American Fascism were being enacted through the persona of Orson Welles who played a prominent political role in the 1940s. He wrote a daily editorial column in the *New York Post* which provided him with a platform as a popular political commentator.³⁰ He also gave lectures, made speeches and debated political issues, especially about the dangers of postwar Fascism which, he believed, was the predominant concern in postwar America.³¹ Writing in his *Post* column in June, 1945, Welles insisted that it wasn't communism but Fascism which threatened the postwar world. 'The phony fear of Communism,' he wrote, 'is smoke-screening the real menace of renascent Fascism.'³² Fascism was a recurrent theme throughout his 1940s' films.³³

A quasi-Fascist American characterisation is already evident in *Citizen Kane* (1941).³⁴ The film's self-styled 'March of Time' newsreel sequence ('News on the March') shows Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) as a despotic press baron and self-serving propagandist who rules over a vast, ever-expanding empire. Kane is explicitly associated with Nazism through his meeting with Hitler featured in the newsreel, and implicitly in two narrative set-pieces. The first is political, as Kane, running for State Governor, is shown at a political rally. The scene's iconographic impact, stylised after *Triumph of the Will*, derives from the colossal scale of a set depicting a mass audience in

³⁰ See, for example, Naremore, *Magic World of Orson Welles*, 112-17.

³¹ See, for example, Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1985), 274-5.

³² *Ibid*, 117.

³³ See, for example, *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Journey Into Fear* (1943), *The Lady From Shanghai* (1948), *Macbeth* (1948). Fascism had also been a prevalent theme in Welles's Mercury Theatre productions in the 1930s. Its 1937 production of *Julius Caesar* was stylised with a Fascist iconography. It was costumed with black uniforms in a visualisation of Fascism as 'gangsterised' militarism and described by Frank Brady as 'altogether Fascist in appearance.' Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (London: Coronet, 1991), 121. The production design was patterned on Riefenstahl's 'Nuremberg' effect, described by Martin Gabel (Cassius) as drawn from 'newsreels of the Nuremberg rallies, with the great stream of light going from the ground into the heavens.' Quoted in Leaming, *Orson Welles*, 140. In a production which linked Caesar's Rome with Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, Welles stated in a press-release his concern with the threat to democracy (Brutus) by a Fascist demagogue (Antony) and emphasised that the 'moral' of the production was with the 'education of the masses' which 'permanently removes dictatorships.' Quoted, *ibid*.

³⁴ The first draft of *Citizen Kane* was titled '*American*.' See, for example, Robert L. Carringer, *The Making of Citizen Kane* (London: John Murray, 1985), 18.

a vast auditorium where Kane addresses the rally standing before a towering image of himself. Here, his 'K' logo acquires the force of a Fascist emblem. The second is cultural, when Kane builds an opera house in Chicago as a showcase venue for his second wife, Susan Alexander (Dorothy Comingore). The opera is staged like his political rally as a grandiose spectacle for his own cultural (and political) self-aggrandisement. The production draws allusively on Wagnerian imagery.³⁵ But despite his attempts to control the event, he fails to manipulate the audience's reaction. He manically attempts to galvanise the audience's response through the insistent rhythm of his own solitary applause but, for them, the event has been boring and risible.

Kane's Fascist Americanism reemerged at the end of the decade through another characterisation, Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in *The Third Man* (1949). Lime, presumed dead, has been operating as a black-marketeer in postwar Vienna and Lime *redivivus* has become unrecognisable to his old friend, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) who seeks to solve the mystery of his friend's mysterious disappearance. Lime is eventually exposed as a racketeer trafficking in adulterated penicillin, the cause of countless children being maimed and killed. When Lime and Martins eventually meet, Lime justifies his operations as legitimate, describing himself and his 'business' in entrepreneurial terms. From his vantage point on the ferris wheel, high above the city, the people below are reducible to insignificant 'dots' whose fate to Lime is inconsequential. In the same way that Kindler in *The Stranger* had surveyed from his tower the 'little ants' below, Lime looks down godlike on his Viennese empire. He has assimilated in Vienna the vestiges of Nazi ideology and his 'business' there has become analogous to genocide.

At the end of *The Stranger*, Wilson declares, 'It's V-Day in Harper.' This is a revealing expression in a postwar context: firstly, because it deliberately evokes a term

which officially designates the end of a war which, here, has not yet ended; and

³⁵ The opera extracts were scored (by Bernard Herrmann) and visually stylised as Wagnerian pastiche. Wagnerian opera played a significant ideological role in Nazi culture. See, for example, Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 101-2. In the opening sequence of *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl exploited a Wagnerian soundtrack (*Die Meistersinger*) to mythologise Hitler's airborne descent through the clouds before his 'deific' arrival at Nuremberg. In *The Stranger*, Rankin's pretended diatribe against postwar Germany draws on this Wagnerian *mythos* of the German who 'still follows his warrior gods, marching to Wagnerian strains, his eyes still fixed upon the fiery sword of Siegfried.'

secondly, because it suggests that the war has been carried to home which has subsequently become activated as the home front. If Harry Lime's Vienna is the site of a 'renascent Fascism' in Europe, it has also become, through him, a specifically Americanised form of it. But Charles Rankin's Harper, like Uncle Charlie's Santa Rosa, was the site of a 'renascent Fascism' at home. Its perpetrators were no longer the conspicuous foreign Nazis as they were in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* but Americans themselves. Fascism no longer looked 'foreign' as it once did and these later narratives attest to the resurgence of a postwar Fascism which was becoming institutionally and socially assimilated in American everyday life.

Conclusion: 'The Uniform of the Day'

“I don’t know what’s the matter with us,” Betsy said one night. “Your job is plenty good enough. We’ve got three nice kids, and lots of people would be glad to have a house like this. We shouldn’t be so *discontented* all the time.”¹ In *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, Betsy is describing to her husband, Tom, the dilemma which social commentators had identified as the alienation implicit in postwar conformity. The novel, published a decade after the end of the war, references virtually all the standard ‘indices’ in the critique of conformity. Even its nameless title points to the absent individuality of what became the generic figure of uniformed anonymity, the faceless ‘organization man’ who became emblematic of the endemic conformity in the ‘grey’ 1950s.

The opening pages of the novel situate Tom as the decade’s archetypal ‘white-collar man,’ applying for a job as a ‘public-relations man’ with a broadcasting corporation he hates (‘with all its soap operas, commercials, and yammering studio audiences’) because it would enable him ‘to buy a more expensive house and a better brand of gin.’ Tom and Betsy live in a typically ‘uniform’ suburban house, ‘almost precisely like the houses on all sides of it.’ Here, caught up in the ‘trap’ of their ‘detested’ suburban home, wedded to a lifestyle of domestic consumption and indebtedness, drawn into the banality of a mindless mass culture, Tom and Betsy seem like fictional advertisements for the sociological master narrative of 1950s’ alienated conformity. Later, after he gets the job, Tom is resigned to the inevitability of his ‘suit’ role as he comes to terms with dutifully selling himself to the corporation, describing in the form of a self-deprecating office memorandum his own sardonic self-contempt: ‘I’m just a man in a grey flannel suit. I must keep my suit neatly pressed like anyone else, for I am a very respectable young man. ... I will go to my new job, and I will be cheerful, and I will be industrious, and I will be matter-of-fact. I will keep my grey flannel suit spotless.’²

Moreover, the novel is as much about the residual presence of Tom’s military past as it is about his ‘organization man’ present. Recollections of his former life as a

¹ Wilson, *Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 7, 9, 19, 104.

paratrooper continually intrude upon his new executive one and the two are connected by his militarised sense of the postwar 'standard issue' grey flannel suit: 'The uniform of the day, Tom thought. Somebody must have put out an order.' The outcome of the interview depended on Tom's response to the requisite 'autobiography' section of the application form and, in particular, to the candidate's obligatory statement, 'The most significant fact about me is ...' Tom initially attempted to fit in with the conventions of interview role play ('trying desperately to come up with stock answers to stock questions') but, ultimately, refused to provide the requested information. In his refusal to 'sell himself' to obtain the job he wanted, Tom isn't quite the representative figure of 'organization man' orthodoxy which he appears to be. What is 'most significant' about Tom here is his refusal to play his expected role and, in this sense, he is characterised as a more ambivalent and contradictory figure than the quintessential conformist he supposedly represents.³

Tom's position in a public-relations department situates him in relation to post-war sociological concerns with organisational 'readjustment,' exemplified by what C. Wright Mills called the 'personality market.'⁴ Sociologists like Mills were concerned with the ways in which 'personality' was being presently 'readjusted' ('shaped') according to institutional determinants, with the notion of a 'grey-flannel' or 'white-collar' self being tailored to organisational specifications. Mills was concerned with what he saw as the self-estrangement and alienation implicit in institutionalised processes designed to rationalise the production of a commodified self, processes which, by extension, set the agenda for postwar social identity. 'What began as the public and commercial relations of business,' Mills says, 'have become deeply personal: there is a public-relations aspect to private relations of all sorts, including even relations with oneself.'⁵ The self, Mills is saying, is being structured by the internalisation of 'the organization' through processes which we can see as analogous to the wartime 'militarization' of so-

³ Ibid, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

⁴ Mills, *White Collar*, 182-8.

⁵ Ibid, 187.

cial identity, with the same kind of institutional power to absorb the individual within 'the system.' These processes, according to William Whyte, were instigating an increasingly pervasive ideology of 'collectivization.' The totalitarian implications of a state religion were writ large in the power of 'the organization' not only to recruit the institutional self *en masse* but, in doing so, to destabilise the very notion of 'home' itself. 'They are the ones of our middle class,' Whyte says, 'who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions.'⁶

The sociological commentaries which collectively gave rise to the discourse of conformity effectively labelled the period with the titles of their work. *The Organization Man* and *The Lonely Crowd* became epithets for a *Zeitgeist* of conformity and uniformity which were, in themselves, descriptive of the totalitarian connotations of a *mass* society and, in their readings of suburbanisation, consumerism and corporatism, social commentators were wont to identify the inscriptions of an emergent, quasi-totalitarian state. My aim in 'Coming Home' has been to demonstrate how veteran 'readjustment' was constructed and deployed in the discourse of conformity, and how it became instrumental in a nascent national identity defensively constructed against the threat of a totalitarian Other. By treating 'conformity' as a more unstable and unreliable term than is usually allowed, I have attempted to problematise its discursive power to write what became the master narrative of the period. By bridging postwar film and social history, my study has attempted to reconceptualise film narratives through historical recontextualisation and, with its emphasis on narrative ambivalence and contradiction, it has attempted to disturb some of the complacency implicit in the orthodoxy which reads the postwar period in terms of social uniformity. Through a discursive reconnection to the specific historical circumstances in which these narratives were produced, I have sought to evaluate how they have problematised the notions of 'home,' return and 'readjustment' and their relation to the ensuing critique of conformity.

⁶ Whyte, *Organization Man*, 8.

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Film Index

- Act of Violence* (1946), 3
Air Force (1943), 24, 126, 154
Apartment For Peggy (1948), 161

Back to Bataan (1945), 26
Bataan (1943), 26
Battle of Midway, The (1942), 140
Battle of San Pietro, The (1945), 140
Bells of St Mary's, The (1945), 208
Bend of the River (1951), 168
Berlin Express (1948), 203
Best Years of Our Lives, The (1946), 3, 55, 137-55, 156-7, 163, 178-9, 192, 198
Big Clock, The (1948), 240
Big Sleep, The (1946), 226
Blood On the Moon (1948), 27
Blue Dahlia, The (1946), 3, 32

Casablanca (1942), 26
Citizen Kane (1941), 30, 242-3
Colonel Effingham's Raid (1946), 235
Colorado Territory (1949), 217
Confessions of a Nazi Spy (1939), 23, 56, 228-32, 244
Cornered (1945), 32
Cover Girl (1944), 26
Crossfire (1947), 3
Crowd, The (1928), 213

Dark Corner, The (1946), 210
Dark Passage (1947), 210
Dead Reckoning (1947), 32
Destination Tokyo (1944), 26, 114, 154
Diary of a Sergeant (1945), 143, 144, 150
Double Indemnity (1944), 217
Dragonwyck (1946), 199, 237

East of Eden (1955), 8
Egg and I, The (1947), 1-3, 54-5
Emperor Waltz, The (1947), 55-6, 194-8, 205-9
Enchanted Cottage, The (1945), 3
Experiment Perilous (1944), 199, 237

Fallen Sparrow, The (1943), 154
Far Country, The (1954), 168
Fighting 69th, The (1940), 26
For Me and My Gal (1942), 26
Force of Evil (1948), 56, 210-26
Foreign Correspondent (1940), 23
Fountainhead, The (1949), 171
From This Day Forward (1946), 3, 198

Gaslight (1944), 199, 237
Gentleman's Agreement (1947), 154
Gilda (1946), 27, 202
Great Dictator, The (1940), 23
Guadalcanal Diary (1943), 26

He Walked By Night (1949), 226
High Sierra (1941), 217
Holiday Affair (1949), 149
Hollywood Canteen (1944), 17
Hunchback of Notre Dame, The (1939), 24

I Walk Alone (1948), 210-12, 220
It Happened in Brooklyn (1947), 26
It's a Wonderful Life (1946), 55, 156-74, 177, 179, 228, 235

Jane Eyre (1944), 198, 199
Johnny Doesn't Live Here Anymore (1944), 161
Journey Into Fear (1943), 242

Key Largo (1948), 3, 226
Killers, The (1946), 225
Kiss the Blood Off My Hands (1948), 3

Ladri Di Biciclette [The Bicycle Thief] (1948), 20
Lady From Shanghai, The (1948), 242
Laura (1944), 202
Let There Be Light (1946), 140
Letter From an Unknown Woman (1948), 55-6, 193-206
Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, The (1943), 204
Lifeboat (1944), 26
Little Caesar (1931), 211, 214, 215, 226

Macbeth (1948), 242
Maltese Falcon, The (1941), 226
Man From Laramie, The (1955), 168
Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, The (1956), 6
Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress, The (1944), 138-40
Men, The (1950), 3, 147
Meet John Doe (1941), 172
Mildred Pierce (1945), 55, 175-92
Modern Times (1936), 213
Monsieur Verdoux (1947), 218
Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948), 1-3, 54-5, 161
Mr Deeds Goes To Town (1936), 172

- Mr Lucky* (1943), 26
Mr Smith Goes To Washington (1939), 172, 235
Mrs Miniver (1942), 26, 138-9, 147, 153
Murder, My Sweet (1945), 226
My Darling Clementine (1946), 178-9

Naked Spur, The (1952), 168
Nobody Lives Forever (1946), 154

On the Waterfront (1954), 8
Only Angels Have Wings (1939), 24, 26
Only Yesterday (1933), 193
Out of the Past (1947), 225

Picture of Dorian Gray, The (1945), 202
Postman Always Rings Twice, The (1946), 27, 154
Pride of the Marines (1945), 3, 154
Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex, The (1939), 24, 228
Public Enemy, The (1931), 211, 215

Random Harvest (1942), 153
Raw Deal (1948), 210
Rebecca (1940), 198, 199, 237
Rebel Without a Cause (1955), 8
Report From the Aleutians (1943), 140
Ride the Pink Horse (1947), 3, 32
Road to Morocco (1942), 208
Road to Rio (1947), 208
Roaring Twenties, The (1939), 226
Roma, Città Aperta [Open City] (1945), 20

Sahara (1943), 26
Scarface (1932), 211, 214-5, 226
Scarlet Street (1945), 218
Sea Hawk, The (1940), 24, 228
Sergeant York (1941), 23, 26
Shadow of a Doubt (1943), 240-2, 244
Since You Went Away (1944), 24
Sleep, My Love (1948), 199, 237
Somewhere in the Night (1946), 3
Son of Dracula (1943), 199
Sorry, Wrong Number (1948), 237
Stage Door Canteen (1943), 17
Story of G.I. Joe, The (1945), 26
Stranger, The (1946), 56, 227-44
Streetcar Named Desire, A (1951), 8
Suspicion (1941), 198, 237

Test Pilot (1938), 24
Third Man, The (1949), 203, 243-4
This Above All (1942), 26, 198
This Land Is Mine (1943), 26
Till the End of Time (1946), 3
T-Men (1948), 226
Triumph des Willens [Triumph of the Will] (1935), 230, 242-3

White Heat (1949), 225-6
Why We Fight [series] (1942-45), 140, 157
Wild One, The (1953), 8
Winchester '73 (1950), 168

