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Co-opting Culture: State Intervention in and Party Patronage of Literary and Popular Culture, 1929-1941

Graham William Barnfield

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the requirements of Sheffield Hallam
University for the degree of Doctor of
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Abstract

The economic slump of the 1930s heralded a new era of crisis in the United States. It also led to innovative strategies of cultural patronage, the latter being defined herein as the relationship between a provider of protection and material support, and a cultural practitioner, whose production was oriented toward the needs of the patron. Such patterns form the basis of this study. Although initially examining the federal government's attempt to fund artists and writers, a specific cultural strategy that was part of the Roosevelt administration's more general counter-crisis activity, the study introduces a comparative dimension by discussing the responses of the organised literary left to the Depression. This emphasis also unearths a significant secondary problematic, that of the selective amnesia concerning the 1930s which has constructed a number of 'orthodox' readings of the period. Given the 'common sense' character of such mythology, the study has drawn upon an intentionally broad range of sources in order to present an alternative narrative. This has allowed for the identification of a number of common themes across federally-funded culture and that of the left: namely, egalitarianism, a realist approach to representation, and an underlying 'documentary impulse'. We can then see how a sense of crisis became embedded in cultural production, serving as a permanent reminder of economic breakdown and its consequences. An assessment is made of the influences and interplay of various factors, primarily crisis and patronage, which through the medium of the state and the organised left intelligentsia are brought to bear on the direction, appropriation, form and content of cultural practice.

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Needless to say, whatever mistakes, unclear formulations and unsound interpretations exist in this work are all of my own making.

Introduction - *Culture and the Crisis* Revisited

Perceptions of the 1930s are in constant flux. Shaped and reshaped to fit the priorities of the present, a decade's images and experiences are a potential treasure trove for those using history as a contemporary resource. At the time of writing, the spectres of fascism, appeasement, war in Europe and even Franklin D. Roosevelt are repeatedly dragged out of the past and endowed with an often spurious capacity to explain the present. Inaccurate analogies are widespread; thus, Saddam Hussein is presented as the 'new Hitler', while President Bill Clinton's short-lived 'New Covenant' was said to resemble the New Deal of FDR. Other aspects of the period, such as mass unemployment, white supremacy or pre-war diplomacy, have been quietly ignored, lost in a seemingly incessant preoccupation with wartime anniversaries. As Richard Pells suggests, 'any effort to re-examine the conflicts and passions of the 1930s becomes, inevitably, a commentary on contemporary problems as well'.[1] This theme is explored at length in the chapters which follow.

This is a study of the legitimation crisis predominant in the inter-war years. It focuses upon the question of cultural patronage, i.e. the patterns of protection, support and dependency that occur between cultural practitioner and cultural patron. (A more extensive definition is considered below.) Such patronage occurred against the backdrop of the major upheavals that afflicted the major Western powers after the post-1918 settlement: the slump, fascism and Soviet prestige, and global war, climaxing in another far-reaching post-war settlement. These unwieldy historical entities allow us to impose order and continuity on our understanding of history, alert us to key changes in social development.[2] In our study of patronage we consider the impact of legitimation crisis upon cultural politics. More precisely, we seek to address the capacity of arts patronage to *typify* these broader trends.

It may appear that this use of 'typify' implies 'ordinary', in that we are proposing a study of the most average features of cultural patronage. Had we chosen this route, the study would probably reflect the climate of the 1930s, where patronage - here used loosely to denote a direct relationship between cultural production and public institutions - grew to unprecedented levels. Indeed, it was a decade when it became 'typical' (i.e. ordinary) for writers to sign political statements and for artists to embellish government buildings. However, this study attempts to go beyond such generalities, perhaps in contrast to the body of works given over to describing 'literature on the barricades' and 'art on relief'. Discussing the capacity of cultural patronage to 'typify' the key crises of the inter-war period entails an acknowledgement of its extraordinary character. In the historically specific forms that it assumed in the 1930s, patronage represented a key 'moment' in social development. Not only were there responses in the arts to the Depression, but the Depression and its attendant features shaped - and to a lesser extent were shaped by - a dialectic of cultural patronage. It is this pattern, of interaction between culture and crisis, cultural production and state intervention, that forms the object of this study.

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[1] Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p.*xi*.

[2] John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties: A Decade in the Making, 1930 to the Present.*(London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-2.

In short, discussions of this interaction force us to distinguish between historical developments in the years 1929 to 1941 on the one hand, and the received image of the 1930s on the other. Throughout this study we refer to the latter of these historical and discursive constructs as 'the Thirties', denoting a mythology (unlike its chronological counterpart). This second period denotes not merely the passage of ten years, but a selection of a number of trends and events, semi-consciously reconstructing the decade according to particular interpretations.[3] Throughout this process, a decade - itself often presented as adrift from any previous influences - is discussed in terms that, taken collectively, further solidify an extant 'master narrative'. As a result, one-sided interpretations have been a staple feature of both radical and conservative cultural historiography, producing a familiar sequence of polarities: democracy against totalitarianism, high culture against mass culture, Europe against America. Such binary oppositions can mystify the inter-war period while maintaining 'the Thirties' as an entity whose self-evident nature obviates the need to learn from it. Barriers to understanding the past impair our capacity to learn from it in order to transform the present.

Historical facts are subject to new interpretations, often conditioned by the preoccupations of the period in which they were made. This suggests at best fundamental differences of interpretation, at worst mystification. Even the interpretation of the decade as an entity in its own right is problematic. Do we adhere to strict chronology, or treat some key event as a turning point, differentiating 'the Thirties' from its predecessors? Do we enact narrative closure amid uncertainty, at the onset of European war in 1939, or at the point of allied victory in 1945? It seems that 'the Thirties' can only serve as a motif for numerous social, political, and cultural crises if adapted to fit specific national experiences. Claims to universality become forfeit, yet such particularism rests uneasily alongside the generalised character of the crisis which, to varying extents, served to destabilise and discredit the dominant strata of every major western society.

Given that its life as a discursive construct is the product of years of debate, why another thesis on the 1930s/ 'the Thirties'? It is certainly beyond the scope of this study to analyse the components of the decade's crises in all their variety. Although it attempts to engage with the totality of ideological and cultural relations characteristic of the period, what follows is necessarily selective. The investigation revolves around issues of cultural production and cultural politics in the United States between 1929-1941. Nevertheless it alights upon broader concerns, not least the breakdown and negotiation of central tenets of Western ideals and social thought. Thus 'the Thirties', as a distinct entity and ideological construct, reflects the historical facts underlying the traumatic 'moral impasse'[4] precipitated by war and slump. Such disruption makes the period a crucial site of historical contestation, even today; neither culture nor the relations of its production are able to stand aloof from the controversy. Hence, the study which follows investigates the state and the intelligentsia, concepts which become the twin pillars of support for many key accounts of the period.

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[3] A parallel process precipitated 'the Sixties', a construct symbolising political turmoil in the years 1968-1974. See Fredric Jameson, 'Periodising the 60s', *The Ideologies of Theory - Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2: The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.207. Frank Furedi presents antagonism towards the period as a distraction from a serious discussion of the inter-war years; the 'other Sixties ' was a period in which key assumptions about the nature of social order were undermined. *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age* (London: Pluto, 1992), pp.152-161.

From this abstract and 'macro' level, we build up an increasingly detailed picture of the interactions between state, crisis, and questions of tradition and aesthetics. Outside of Hollywood, such relationships were a zone of engagement where some of the key changes of the 1930s were negotiated. 'Culture and the crisis' is not solely a theme of this study; it is also the title of the manifesto launched by prominent American intellectuals supporting the Communist Party's presidential slate in the 1932 election.[5] The launch of *Culture and the Crisis* was an event significant not in its own terms, but indicative of a broader shift in the popular consciousness of the decade. That America's best and brightest sponsored the Communist slate suggests a profound uncertainty within the American elite; conversely, a focus on literary developments in a period of crisis can be enriched by an understanding of the crisis itself. Designed to supplement William Z. Foster's *Towards Soviet America*, which served as the official Communist platform, the manifesto's effects at the polls were minimal. Yet in its own way, *Culture and the Crisis* highlights the '*zeitgeist*' of the inter-war period.

Here it is important to make a point on methodology: in order to engage with cultural patronage in the 1930s successfully, our account will need to go beyond a simple interrogation of key myths. It must identify the forces driving cultural production and consider their impact upon society. Some trends are evident empirically; thus, the existence of a 'documentary impulse' is preserved in countless photographs, newsreels and government archives. Other trends are 'hidden from history', their existence embedded deeper in such archives or shredded along with incriminating letters and documents during the McCarthy era. Emphasising both types of archival evidence is important, but an overemphasis on empirical findings, perhaps at the expense of theory, can also sever the theme under discussion from wider concerns. Moreover, both kinds of overemphasis have contributed to the central dichotomies that characterise many studies of the era: history from above is counterposed to history from below. This raises an important methodological question, concerning the different degree of importance to attach to particular objects of study. How much priority should 'official' archival sources be accorded, as compared to oral history, personal memoirs and the private correspondence of 'witnesses to history'? As we attempt to demonstrate throughout, much of this process can be as bound up with the preoccupations of the present as it is concerned with the past.

However, before exploring the rewriting of history, we should first consider some of the historical forces at work during the period itself. In so doing, the contours of this thesis should become clear. Several issues of terminology warrant immediate attention. Already a distinction between the 1930s and 'the Thirties' has been made; the former refers to a specific decade, the latter to a more general, and ideological reconstruction of that decade's features. It can loosely denote a style or sensibility, or more specifically become the target of vilification or praise depending on one's political perspectives. It can encompass events not strictly occurring between 1930 and 1939, several of which this study concerns. Such inclusion is an entirely legitimate endeavour, as cultural historians are not bound to the calendar in the manner of astrologers: such numerical devices are largely arbitrary in relation to human experiences, whereas the use of historical periodisation is not, as it allows us to generalise common concerns.

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[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 88-126.

[5] League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, *Culture and the Crisis* (New York: League of Professional Groups, 1932).

Avoiding meaningless chronological restrictions also allows us to pinpoint some of the continuities across decades. What legacy did the political crises following World War One bequeath to Herbert Hoover and FDR? Did New Deal funding for the arts emerge in a vacuum, or were there antecedents? When detective fiction articulated the crises characteristic of the 1930s, was this a new departure? Did the writers and artists backing the Communist Party slate in 1932 commit the 'treason of the intellectuals', as was subsequently claimed, or were they simply amplifying the alienation felt by their 'Lost Generation' predecessors? Taken together, how did these cultural concerns relate to America's entry into world war and its subsequent superpower ascendancy? A grasp of these inter-relationships is the key to overturning 'the Thirties', the better to reinterpret the totality of one of the bleakest phases in what Eric Hobsbawm describes as the *Age of Extremes*.[6] In short, bad periodisation, selective memory and the concerns of the present all make 'the Thirties' into a compelling yet inherently unstable construct, forcing one to clarify terminology in order to clear the decks for a more detailed exposition.

Other terminological matters are more straightforward. Thus, once capitalised, the terms 'Communist' and 'Communism' signify an allegiance to the Third International or Comintern, a 'franchise' held by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) during the period under consideration. (Unlike the traditionalist historiography of US Communism pioneered by Theodore Draper, this nomenclature does not, at least in our study, denote a foreign institution characterised by its total subordination to Moscow.) However, frequent references to communists and communism also appear, which we use to suggest a commitment to human liberation *despite* the collapse of this project in the Soviet Union. As we argue below, the profile enjoyed by these political traditions in both the 1930s *and* 'the Thirties' is in part reflective of the extent of crisis within the United States, and it forms the basis of the second section of this study.

The 1930s and 'the Thirties', communists and Communists; such issues of terminology indicate the extent to which we are entering highly contested territory. However, such struggles perhaps pale into insignificance next to the battles over the category 'culture'. In a study of the relationship between culture and crisis, an elaboration of what we mean by the former is necessary. Indeed, in the 1930s it was no coincidence that a quest to breathe a satisfactory meaning into this category concerned federal arts administrators and self-professed Marxist critics alike. (In turn, this antagonised adherents of a more conventional view of culture, who restricted its use to describing 'the best' in high, usually European, culture.) The widespread preoccupation with culture and cultural policy in the midst of the Depression is central to our investigation, both as an historical phenomenon and as a constitutive element in the subsequent construction of 'the Thirties' as a generic historical narrative. It also obliges us to attempt a working definition and to locate the study in a broader, interdisciplinary tradition of cultural studies.

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[6] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), esp. pp. 21-222.

Today the question of culture is inescapable. On one hand it is the focus of the most expansive sectors of social theory. On the other it is used to describe all manner of ostensibly cultural conflicts, where some societies self-destruct in a re-enactment of 'age-old ethnic hatreds', or threaten more stable societies with a 'clash of civilisations'.[7] With the disintegration of conventional political life, culture has come to the fore as a means of understanding the world. It is both perceived as a site of liberation and as the embodiment of society's fears and insecurities. Given its near universal descriptive applicability, its ubiquitous character in current discussion and its susceptibility to multiple interpretations, it would be appropriate to explain its usage, not least in the present study's title.

According to Raymond Williams the process of culture is 'that of the essential relation, the true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions, and institutions'.[8] In short, 'culture is ordinary',[9] notwithstanding Williams's call for us to keep this definition from being applied so loosely as to make obsolete the term 'society'.[10] Williams's analysis marked a break with Matthew Arnold's definition of culture as 'the best', a canon of the highest range of human achievement to be explored through disinterested speculation.[11] In contrast to this relatively narrow approach developed in mid-Victorian Britain, Williams coupled a defence of culture as 'lived experience' with a commitment to progressive public intellectuals reworking it around truly democratic priorities and principles.

Significantly, the approach pioneered by Williams was subjected to the trenchant critique of Edward Thompson, with whom we would concur. In a 1961 essay responding to *The Long Revolution*'s separation of society into such different 'systems' as production, culture and so forth, Thompson theorised a basic 'kernel' of characteristic human relationships:

> Within the limits of the epoch there are characteristic tensions and contradictions, which cannot be transcended unless we transcend the epoch itself *and* a moral

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[7] See Samuel P. Huntingdon, 'The Clash of Civilisations', *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, *passim*. In passing, we should note the similarity between Huntingdon's emphasis on conflict over cultural difference and the writing of Oswald Spengler, who enjoyed a considerable US audience in the inter-war period.

[8] Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p.89.

[9] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in Norman McKenzie (ed.), *Convictions* (London: MacGibbon and Gee, 1958); reprinted in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 3-18.

[10] *The Long Revolution*, p.58.

[11] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864), reprinted in Stephan Collins (ed.), *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 42.

> logic and it is futile to argue as to which we give priority since they are different expressions of the same "kernel of human relationship".[12]

A recent exposition summarised Thompson's conception as 'a refusal of any analytic distinction that conceals the social character of the "material" itself ... a way of discouraging analytic procedures that tend to obscure historical relations'.[13] Williams never freed himself entirely from the Arnoldian notion of culture and its inherent idealism. In short, we need to build upon his approach to culture by locating it within a broader totality of social and historical relations.

While the meaning of culture is controversial, there is no *a priori* reason for this. In certain periods of British history the development of the 'best self' was not deemed a necessary safeguard against anarchy, due to a self-evident division of society into rulers and ruled. Conditions of uncertainty fuelled a demand for cultural theory of the type propounded by Arnold. Paradoxically, the perceived lack of culture in the United States - which, according to Arnoldian criteria, was absent on account of a predominantly middle class US elite - circumvented much discussion of culture in these terms.[14] It is not until the recent period that 'culturalism' has significantly influenced American thought, partly informing the contemporary debate over higher education.[15]

This is not to suggest that the United States had no tradition of analysing culture; indeed, quite the opposite. Writing during the build-up to the 1939-1945 war, F.O. Matthiessen sought to locate a national literary tradition, in part to establish the parameters of what America stood for.[16] Previously, 'American literature in its entirety was condescendingly regarded by American as well as British professors of English as a minor offshoot of British high culture. Rather than attack the dominion of the Brahmins, Matthiessen simply applied the method of close reading to demonstrate the clarifying power and pleasure available to readers of his five major writers: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville'.[17] In the process he explained how the form and function of this quintet's prose and poetry was more than the sum of its parts, paving the way for the formation of an American canon. This signified the onset of *national* cultural rehabilitation, in that US culture was beginning to climb out from under the shadow of Europe.

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[12] E.P. Thompson, 'The Long Revolution, II', *New Left Review* 10 (1961), pp. 28-29.

[13] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 74.

[14] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp. 89, 91, 99, 181-182; 198-199.

[15] Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*, (London: Routledge, 1990), *passim.*

[16] *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); see also Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 305.

[17] Leo Marx, 'Double Consciousness and the Cultural Politics of F.O. Matthiessen', *Monthly Review*, February 1983, p. 39. See also Richard Bradbury, 'F.O. Matthiessen's "Devotion to the Possibility of Democracy" and his Place as an American Intellectual', in David Murray (ed.), *American Cultural Critics* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995); George Abbott White, 'F.O. Matthiessen', in Mari Jo Buhle *et al* (eds.) *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), p.454.

Although formally devoted to culture, Matthiessen's subject matter was primarily literature, but this paved the way for a broader discussion, analogous to that engaged in by Williams and Thompson in Britain. Although the United States lagged behind Britain in the evolution of cultural studies as a distinctive 'school', within two decades this process found a broader resonance. On both sides of the Atlantic, 'the discovery of popular culture was also an expressly political move, related to ideas of nationhood; thereby linked to a third constitutive feature of modernity, the formation of national identity in addition to industrialisation and democratisation'.[18] In sum, the rise of cultural studies expressed a particular moment of transition in the West. Simultaneously, it also provided theoretical perspectives from which to explore the crisis-ridden era that helped to constitute the post-war world.

These examples demonstrate the polymorphous character of the category 'culture', the source of its strengths and weaknesses. The category is forever torn between its timeless aspects - a short-hand reference to tradition and quality or to a much larger totality - and its historically specific content; at times a pseudonym for race and nation,[19] at others a symbol of compromise, but most often a site of contestation and challenge. On balance, whether considered from the 'top down' (high culture, 'Kings and Queens' history), 'from below', or in the mediated forms which constitute its appearance, we use the term culture to denote the sum total of human activity and experience, suggesting a dynamic social process which eludes fixed definitions. Simultaneously, the focus of this study is very much concerned with culture in the slightly narrower sense of the term, recalling Williams's opposition to using it as interchangeable with 'society'.

Rather than labelling culture as a thing, we attempt to identify the relationships which constitute it. From this perspective, one is struck by its recurrent connections with crises. From the examples cited above, it is clear that concerns about culture are often expressive of wider social trends. Thus, while the form of a particular discussion may revolve around a particular practice or aesthetic convention, it does not take place in isolation from other developments. In practice, this meant that Prohibition (1919-1933), ostensibly concerned with the habits of city populations, often involved the authorities presenting social control and mass politics as an attempt to protect the national 'way of life' from alien influences. Meanwhile, small town-based, predominantly Protestant citizens experienced social change as a 'clash of cultures'.[20] As Chapter One argues, the state in the 1920s appealed to and actively fermented such divisions, the better to legitimise its hegemony by constructing a base of support. Essentially conservative, such intervention sought to ossify civil society - the market excepted - within a narrow pattern of unchanging relationships. If successful, such policies could be almost naturalised, seen as entirely traditional and 'common sense'.

The arguments we shall develop in this study seek to establish the mediations between social crisis and specific cultural practices, primarily - in this study - the fine arts, the novel, and literary criticism. Such pursuits evidently presuppose cultural practitioners behind them, which in turn would extend the analysis beyond individuals - no matter how 'typical' of their era - and into the factors leading to their demarcation from the rest of society. As we see below, the arenas in which such tensions were played out range from the 'little magazine' to the machinery of state (itself seldom associated with cultural production). Although working critically within the traditions of British cultural studies, mention of the state should also remind us of the importance of overcoming the 'schism between the hermeneutic mainstream of British cultural studies and the political economy of culture'.[21] Likewise, the specific features of cultural manifestations of crisis in the 1930s should not blind us to the underlying economic relations. Echoing Thompson, we suggest that 'ideology and culture have a "logic" of their own which constitutes an "authentic" element in social and historical processes', while maintaining that if 'the determinative effects of the mode of production are simultaneously operative in both the "economy" and in "non-economic" spheres, they are also ubiquitous'.[22]

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[18] Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 10.

[19] See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993); *passim*, esp. p.259.

[20] See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Conversely, we should avoid a vulgar determinism which parcels out the economic and the cultural into discrete spheres of 'base' and 'superstructure'.[23] Instead, our investigation is concerned with relationships, the expressions of dual crises of legitimacy and accumulation within a distinct social milieu, reverberating throughout the latter's cultural production and beyond into wider society, 'a totality comprising separate but interrelated levels which do not develop at the same tempo'.[24] In this instance the 'levels' involved include the state, the market, the intelligentsia and a range of aesthetic practices, each operating with varying degrees of relative autonomy from one another. In other words, we need to assess 1930s cultural politics as both subject to and expressive of a process of combined and uneven development.

Historical Forces 1: Patronage

We have begun by identifying the specific theme of this study as crisis and its relationship to culture. It has been further suggested that understanding such interactions could both be advanced and retarded by 'the Thirties', that collection of dominant tropes and selective memories that has hegemonised mainstream historical interpretation of the inter-war years. Hence, a sensitivity to crisis and to the central paradigms is a precondition for the investigation of a particular decade. However, it is also too broad a topic to be explored adequately in a single work. Without eschewing a sense of the 1930s as a totality, we attempt to engage with the trends outlined above through a specific theme; that of cultural patronage. In examining the ways that crisis tendencies registered within the sphere of cultural production and shaped political strategies and activities within that sphere, the concept of patronage appears repeatedly. At this stage, it warrants a more detailed explication.

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[21] McGuigan, *Cultural Populism*, p. 214.

[22] Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p.63. We would also add that ideology is both of necessity contradictory and that it requires a certain internal consistency.

[23] A significant methodological influence on this study is Franz Jakubowski's 1936 work, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism* (London: Pluto, 1989) and Georg Lukács, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?', in *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1974). On the fragmentation of this approach in the post-war period see Frank Richards, 'Marxism in our Time', *Confrontation* 1, Summer 1986, pp. 4-31; Richards, 'Revisionism, Imperialism and the State: the method of *Capital* and the dogma of State Monopoly Capitalism', *Revolutionary Communist Papers* 4 (1979).

[24] Alan Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 32.

At its most basic, patronage is a relationship of support and protection, in which a more powerful and well-resourced body creates the scope for others to pursue particular goals. More contentiously, it suggests a peculiar combination of freedom and dependency. On one hand, the patron can defend its beneficiaries from hardship and from external predations; on the other, the possibility that such support can be withdrawn attests to the limited autonomy that such arrangements allow. Moreover, one could go so far as to highlight the assumed balance of superiority and subordination between the two parties; i.e. it was not necessarily a free relationship between two equals. As we see in later chapters, parts of cultural production were drawn into a framework approximating the one described above in response to the Great Depression. Before we continue, this framework warrants greater elaboration. Sceptics may question whether the category is too general to explain the wide range of developments that we consider here. Likewise, given the European setting in which conventional models of patronage developed, its applicability to the United States appears equally suspect. In considering this question at length, we can further elaborate upon the tensions between general trends and their specific manifestations that play a substantial part in this study.

The development of the arts in pre-industrial Europe relied upon a system connecting institutions to individual craft producers. Sections of the aristocracy had a near-monopoly on society's leisure time; a portion of their resources were expended purchasing the services of a variety of craft producers. From theatre at the medieval court to the interior decor of churches, public authority drew upon aesthetic practices for its own ends. In the process, the patronage relationship, an unequal balance of interdependency, was established. Moreover, it evolved in a manner similar to that described in classical theories of the intellectual.

The artist in feudal Europe was a producer like any other, but one whose work was conducted on the basis of remuneration by a patron. In so far as it is appropriate to discuss freedom under feudalism, patronage implied a formal freedom, in that the patron rarely controlled an artist's chosen *mode* of production; apprenticeships aside, a composer of sonnets for an aristocratic court entered that trade not out of direct compulsion (in the sense that his basic skills were often learnt prior to entering the relationship with the patron). However, the *content* of a piece of work was primarily dictated by the needs of others. As with his continued subsistence, a poet's production was subject to the dictates of church, state or individual aristocrats. Likewise, according to Julien Benda, the medieval 'clerk' was in a loosely analogous position, free to pursue intellectual speculation, conditional on his abstention from 'earthly matters' (see below). Thus, the abiding feature of European conventions concerning patronage and the intellectual was that of permission; public authority, regardless of whether embodied in individual aristocrats or local monopolies on violence, established the parameters of cultural production. No doubt this relationship was empirically more complex than it appears in the feudal schema rehearsed above; the point is that the feudal framework informed subsequent discussions of patronage and, indirectly, of the intelligentsia.

Feudal Europe's methods of patronage outlived the feudal era, but industrialisation marginalised them within cultural production. By the close of the 19th century, an artist's potential sources of employment had expanded considerably. While the possibility of backing by individual aristocrats remained, its stature was greatly diminished. Not only had the gentry lost its near monopoly on leisure time, but cultural production itself became industrialised and commodified; the possibilities increased for the work of art to be mechanically reproduced. This reflected the development of industries that centred upon cultural production - publishing, illustration, theatre - each capable of integrating craft production into its workings, as far as was possible within specific industries. (Likewise, functions analogous to those of the feudal patronage were often performed by wealthy philanthropists or private foundations.) Coeval with economic growth was the development of an increasingly sophisticated capitalist state, which began as the coercive absolute monarchy that broke up feudalism, and culminated in state forms at the cusp of modernity. Functions of such state activity included the funding of museums, libraries and even art galleries.

Here it is necessary to further qualify our use of 'patronage': if a model based on feudal Europe is questionable in the light of modernity, its applicability to the United States is equally dubious. Indeed much of the discussion of 'American exceptionalism' in the 1930s was framed by a recognition that US capitalist development did not correspond to that of its European competitors.[25] The absence of feudal models of patronage heightened the novelty of its emergence during the Depression. In short, while the forms of patronage that developed had little in common with the European model, the latter's general features - protection, supervision, provision - are sustainable as descriptions of specific activities pursued in response to the slump. While the present author's category of patronage is derived in part from the European model, this in no way suggests that the European model existed in the United States. It serves as a convenient shorthand, itself further complicated by the debates using the term 'patronage' that ensued.

In this study we identify two key 'patrons'. They are the state and the intelligentsia, and we discuss them below. Before introducing a brief synopsis of this second category, it is useful to note that the issue of the intelligentsia in the 1930s overlaps with cultural production in support of political parties and their objectives. We consider the impact of such 'patronage' across several areas of cultural life: government-sponsored art and writing, in contradistinction to an earlier, regulatory phase of cultural policy; the so-called mass culture industries, primarily hard-boiled fiction; and the genres and practices developed in a broad culture of the left, partly hegemonised by the CPUSA. All of these sites of production become 'zones of engagement', embodying both a democratic element and, as we see in later chapters, a 'documentary impulse'. As we shall see, some of these trends also foreshadowed the image of 'the Thirties' in the Cold War. For instance, conservative critics conflated natural-realist modes of representation with Soviet Social Realism, while the emphasis upon 'cultural freedom' that developed *within* the literary left became an anticommunist rallying point. Behind the scenes, shadowy government departments - the 1950s equivalent of the so-called 'intelligence community' - promoted a form of patronage that orientated such themes towards political goals that were directly antithetical to those that were popularised in the 1930s.[26]

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[25] As later chapters suggest, the question of 'American exceptionalism' was a central concern in 1930s cultural politics. See Phillip Abbott, *Leftward Ho! V. F. Calverton and American Radicalism* (Westport, CN.: Greenwood Press, 1993), p.162; Michael Kazan, 'The Agony and Romance of the American Left', *American Historical Review* Vol. 100: 5, December 1995, pp.1488-1512.

Historical Forces 2: The State

By the state we refer to an instrument of extra-economic regulation, able to modify but not transcend the dynamics of the prevailing social order. The federal machinery of state came to prominence in a nation-wide slump. Prior to the Coolidge and Harding administrations (1920-1924), this formation had seldom ventured outside of Washington DC., deferring to the initiatives and limited autonomy of its member states in matters of domestic policy. Washington's post-1918 attempts at an inter-state role had tended to alienate sections of the urban majority, undermining potential loyalties to central authority even prior to the 1929 Crash. More precise characterisations of the state, including an investigation of its earlier lack of political legitimacy, are developed in Chapter One. For now, it is sufficient to present one aspect of state activity, namely its nascent role as a cultural patron.[27]

In the 1920s, federal 'cultural' activity was directed toward limited regulation of broadcasting networks and more comprehensive control of the inter-state transportation of certain films, notably those that which depicted interracial prize fighting. A number of coercive measures was also implemented under the direction of the Postmaster General, such as censorship of the mail, which affected numerous bohemian and radical publications. 'Cultural policy' in the form of the regulation of parks and the public space frequented by homosexuals was devolved to local state and city authorities.[28] The exception to this pattern was the Commission of Fine Arts, which we consider at length in Chapter Two; otherwise the provision of resources for cultural production was an issue viewed with indifference. Although such functions continued under the New Deal, the state also provided resources to large numbers of cultural practitioners, primarily artists and writers. The motivations for this are explored later; for now it is sufficient to note that such provision insulated them from financial hardship while incorporating their creative practice into the prerogatives of those in authority. If anything, the results of such interaction defied the expectations of its participants.

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[26] Hugh Wilford, 'Winning Hearts and Minds: American Cultural Strategies in the Cold War', *Borderlines* Volume 1: 4, Summer 1994, pp. 315-327.

[27] In no way should this somewhat blunt presentation minimise the importance of ongoing shifts in policy and personnel; rather, this emphasis on the state can be justified in relation to the *continuity* which we find, especially post-1933.

[28] See Louise M. Benjamin, 'Defining the Public Interest and Protecting Public Welfare in the 1920s: parallels between radio and movie regulation', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 12: 1, 1992; Robert McChesney, 'Press-Radio Relations and the Emergence of Network Commercial Broadcasting in the United States', in *ibid.*, Vol. 11: 1, 1991; George Chaucey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic, 1994), pp. 333-334.

Artefacts and aesthetics developed which reflected, without being directly determined by, continual collisions of social crisis, state intervention, and cultural production. Such patronage contingently bound its beneficiaries to those social forces which increasingly exercised influence synonymous with the nation state. This formation, widely known as the New Deal Coalition, is often assessed as an outgrowth of its chief architect, President Roosevelt. Under FDR's auspices, a portion of the intelligentsia became explicitly identified with the administration. This development spawned the label 'Brains Trust', used derisively or as a mark of respect, depending on the viewpoint of the critic. Under the tutelage of the Works Progress Administration and the aesthetic and political supervision of a *de facto* Brains Trust, art and writing engaged with the state in a hitherto unheard of fashion. The institution most closely associated with such policies was WPA Project Number One, more commonly known as Federal One. Its art, theatre, writing and music divisions represented an attempt to transcend the existing forms of state cultural policy (i.e. mainly censorship).

Economically, the labour of the craft producer was supplied in return for public assistance. As such relief was administered it fuelled a debate over the acceptable limits of government provision for the arts. State intervention had intruded into those areas of civil society formerly regarded as aesthetic and private, and this intrusion foreshadowed the seismic economic changes that were necessary to bring the slump to an end. Supporters of the free market *per se* reinforced their criticisms of such initiatives on the grounds of their (allegedly) limited use value. Hindsight suggests that the reaction to Federal One, with the possible exception of its music division,[29] was in part an embryonic stage in the genealogy of Cold War hostility to 'big government'. Federal experiments in literature and art serve as a continual reminder of the failures of economic liberalism. The existence of murals and other artefacts embodying the experience of the slump can call into question the legitimacy of either responses to the slump at the level of policy, or the totality of relations within which it occurred. In other words, counter-crisis measures - including cultural patronage - may have assisted the state, but they also served as a reminder to all concerned of the system's shortcomings.

Federal One, like the Public Works of Art Project before it, cannot simply be reduced to the provision of resources to ensure that 'at least no-one starved' among cultural practitioners. Despite the assertions of its Congressional antagonists, those on the projects found that political and aesthetic controls were often inseparable; it would also appear that the political controls often foreshadowed Cold War discourses, although it was perhaps unrealistic to expect to maintain government employment while belonging to an organisation consisting of alleged or self-professed advocates of the destruction of the state. The considerable prestige of the 'Soviet experiment' among federal employees and other professionals did not automatically translate into CPUSA membership, but it highlights the lost political legitimacy of the social order. Widespread perceptions of the necessity of state intervention in response to economic crisis often coexisted with a belief in the Soviet Union's moral equivalence with, or superiority to, the United States. The intelligentsia was among the most responsive to such suggestions, which was to prove embarrassing in Washington circles.[30]

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[29] The Federal Music Project is outside the scope of this survey, but the present author would like to thank Arthur R. Jarvis Jr. for a fascinating afternoon spent discussing this topic.

Political controls were controversial and frequently ineffective, but they represented one aspect of a conscious attempt to supervise and regulate the form and content of the 'official images' produced. It would be mistaken to view the artefacts produced simply as a consequence of political planning; instead they should be considered as products at the centre of a web of economic, political, ethical and aesthetic considerations. Thus, New Deal art emphasised realism and commonplace subject matter; New Deal writing the folkloric, the documentary and the demotic. The intention was to project a national art and culture, in contrast to an earlier emphasis on the great works of individual artists. Within limits, the culture of New Deal was implicitly democratic.

It was suggested earlier that the changes exemplified by the rapid growth of federal power under the Harding and Coolidge administrations had imprinted the social significance of the nation state on to the individual, federated states which were its component parts. Federal One was an outgrowth of this expanding power, which attempted to establish the criteria and practices in reference to which a national cultural canon could be assembled. Hypothetically such a canon, given adequate means of popular participation and identification, could assist in the socialisation of the American masses. Logically, the controversy surrounding the Projects should have helped to define the terms by which the working class would be accepted into, or rejected from, official membership in that polymorphous entity, the American people. However, for reasons explored in Chapters Three and Four, this was not to be the case.

Federal One documentary primarily depicted the working class, but the central protagonists in the discussion of such representation were drawn from the intelligentsia. Like the workers, and the 'New Immigrants' especially, they were prone to exclusion from the national family, as a significant strand in American culture was suspicion of intellectuals, in contradistinction to 'practical men'.[31] This exercised considerable influence over perceptions of communist-influenced dissent, where the 'parlour pinks' were to become total outcasts. However, the question of political allegiances was not the sole controversy in defining a national American culture.

Another dispute arose when those administrating this new culture found themselves defining nationhood against the artistic norms established in Europe. For instance, federal planners were aware of the work of their official predecessor, the Commission of Fine Arts.

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[30] According to Frank A. Warren, planning became an 'ideology' synonymous with liberalism which suggested a lack of the latter (*Liberals and Communism: The 'Red Decade' Revisited* (1966) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.106.

[31] Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 15-17.

The Commission had monitored national monuments and artefacts since 1910, most extensively in the District of Columbia, to ensure conformity to a predetermined paradigm of taste and decorum. While imposing high cultural aesthetics, it sought to imbue official imagery with the influence of classical antiquity.[32] This framework led to tension as new artistic conventions developed; how, for instance, were European standards to be maintained while Europe's influence was rejected? Indeed, how could forms of *national* high art and literature be developed when a particularity of American culture was itself leaning towards the demotic, the popular and the mass-produced? Throughout the 1930s, attempts to square this circle even led to widespread dismay that government art had rejected Western European innovation for an Eastern-influenced Social Realism.

Yet, despite such criticisms, the murals, prints, posters and guidebooks which survive to this day concretise the aspirations of the changing state. In depicting a unified nation, pulling together in the face of common adversity, the artefacts of Federal One show us an aspect of state intervention designed to shore up popular loyalties at a time of social dislocation. Whereas historians of the New Deal point to numerous policies and economic changes as the basis for Roosevelt's coalition-building, the patterns of patronage that accompanied this process of integrating the masses into political life are more neglected. The cornerstone of our study is the argument that the cultural projects concretised this broader political programme. However, experimentation with such patronage raises crucial questions about the *form* of arts policy, beyond whether or not it was legitimate to have one at all. Moreover, the issue of a national arts policy forced a debate on the new aesthetics necessary to make this into a genuinely national art, i.e. one distinct from that of Europe. This had implications both for the appearance of the artefacts produced and the applicable critical and investigative criteria. The underlying theme of such debates, insofar as one existed, could be schematised as a binary opposition of Europe versus America. Among others, it was to perplex many cultural commentators of the New Deal era.

Historical Forces 3: The Intelligentsia

Throughout the development of this study, it became clear that the construction of 'the Thirties' involved an underlying reconstruction of the intelligentsia. The forms taken by this process were both objective and subjective. The social function of the intelligentsia was modified by the Depression, and in tandem, the legitimacy and image of the intelligentsia was transformed. The present study considers the cumulative effects of the cultural politics of the inter-war period; we describe the mechanisms that allowed for the telescoping of a number of the intelligentsia's sectional functions into a loosely coherent narrative of the 1930s. When Senator McCarthy fulminated against 'pointy-headed intellectuals', he targeted both the avant-garde artist and the government bureaucrat. In accentuating one aspect of the experiences of the New York literary left, the predominant response of a variety of commentators was to conflate a selection of 1930s archetypes into a composite figure. This mythical character supposedly typifies a 'low dishonest decade', combining the machinations of Stalinist apparatchik and the New Deal Brains Trust with the perverse idealism of a misspent youth spent 'going through a phase'. Such assertions accompany more academically oriented references to the 'treason of the intellectuals', and have served as a vantage point from which to castigate the 'New Left' of the Sixties and contemporary 'Political Correctness'.

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[32] See Richard D. McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 6-9.

Subsequent chapters address this process of selective memory at length; for our present purposes, let us consider the intelligentsia from the standpoint of historical sociology. Such scrutiny should remind us of the intelligentsia's substantial presence in the modern world, not least that it was only synonymous with the literary left in the Cold War imagination, and not in reality. To elaborate this position further, we turn to the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, who theorised the position of intellectuals in his *Prison Notebooks* in a manner that is pertinent to our present discussion.

Rather than treating the intelligentsia as a self-evident category, Gramsci interrogates its historically specific relationship to a broader social totality. Clearly this approach is superior to the philistine criticisms of 'ivory towers' that accompanied the McCarthy era; moreover, it avoids the unconscious blunder of the League of Professional Groups, a significant coalition of fellow travellers in 1930s that treated 'professionals' and 'writers' as interchangeable. In contrast to thinkers of an earlier generation such as Croce,[33] Gramsci's explorations developed in connection with a commitment to social change; although his expression 'the philosophy of praxis' was designed largely with the prison censor in mind, it provides a compelling summary of his approach.

Gramsci accords intellectuals an organising function across society, not merely a cultural one. Opposing the tradition of seeing intellectuals as above 'production', his starting point is their position in social relations, not their specific activities *per se*. Connecting civil society *and* the state, intellectuals are seen as 'deputising' for dominant social groups.[34] In Gramsci's analysis, the intelligentsia is endowed with the capacity to mediate between the hegemonic bloc and wider society, grounding the intellectual sphere in everyday life and linking it to popular consciousness.[35] He suggests that certain sections of the intelligentsia are better placed to make these connections than others, hence the distinction between '*organic*' and '*traditional*' intellectuals. Whereas the development of organic intellectuals is dependent upon the formation of a new hegemonic group, their traditional counterparts are products, like the feudal modes of patronage mentioned previously, of pre-capitalist social formations, albeit co-opted into modern society. Both groups can play an instrumental role in maintaining the political legitimacy of a particular system; whereas the traditional intellectual offers a sense of continuity with the past, the organic intellectual's position depends upon the survival of the social order, providing an incentive for the reproduction of the status quo.

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[33] Croce's shift from rational historical engagement to the 'drastic narrowing of the historian's intellectual sphere' is described in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (1958) (Sussex: Harvester, 1979), pp. 430-431.

[34] Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 134-135. Much of the introduction to the present study draws upon Gramsci's *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds.) (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

[35] Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto, 1976), pp. 76-78.

The rise of fascism in Italy alerted Gramsci to the danger that reactionary counter-crisis measures might gain a degree of popular support. It appeared that the traditional intelligentsia - organised around a programme acceptable to the old order - was procuring consent for Mussolini's attempts to restore stability. Gramsci's alternative to such reaction was based on the need for progressive forces to develop organic intellectuals of their own. Given the general role accorded to intellectuals as organisers, such figures would need to unite two apparently contradictory forces, namely a theoretical critique of society with the consciousness of workers and peasants, termed the 'national popular'. As we discuss later, the specific national circumstances in the United States mitigate against the blanket transfer of Gramsci's categories and strategy across continents. However, this cautionary note does not outweigh the merits of an interpretation of the intelligentsia which is not restricted to the notion of cultural practitioners, but considers it as a particular social layer linked to a broader social totality. Such analysis is a compelling antidote to the conflation of New York literary warfare with the intelligentsia as a whole that became such a potent image during the McCarthy years.

A prominent Cold War response to the cultural commitment that accompanied the slump was a rediscovery of the traditional intellectual. The abortive flirtation of US intellectuals with Communism was seen as a betrayal of an *a priori* loyalty to detached speculation. The emerging Cold War consensus claimed as one of its totems the French commentator Julien Benda and his *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927), although more as a slogan than as the object of serious analysis.[36] Like Gramsci, Benda attempted to summarise what he saw as one of the most pressing problems facing his generation. Along with many of his contemporaries, the experience of the Great War had led him to a pessimistic assessment of the changes that occurred, not least the intense upheaval in the aftermath of war. The focus of his concerns was the emergence of what he saw as a disturbing trend in the intelligentsia, which transformed it from a social group dedicated to contemplation into a focal point for social conflict. He argued that the alignment of the thinker to a political project, whether socialist or nationalistic, was undesirable. Compared to Renaissance philosophers or medieval clerics, with their deliberate distance from 'political passions', it was a retrogressive step. According to Benda, the only acceptable form of engagement for such figures was to lead by moral example. Although one could argue that this position was a consequence of the experience of war-torn Europe, the basic paradigm in this seminal work is one that recurs in many negative assessments of 1930s literary practice.

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[36] Thus, writing in *Partisan Review*, Arthur Koestler argued that the intelligentsia was 'irresponsible' in the 1930s, in part because it was deprived of its traditional role. Likewise, Irving Howe insisted that intellectuals in the 1950s could not accept the entrapments of power without losing their distinct function, which was somehow outside of power relations. See Koestler, 'The Intelligentsia' (1944), reprinted in Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips (eds.), *Writers and Politics: A* Partisan Review *Reader* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p.88; Ronald Radosh, 'On Irving Howe', *Partisan Review*, Vol. LX: 3, 1993, p.344.

To Benda, intellectuals are 'men whose function is to thwart the realism of nations'. In the medieval world, they exchanged their citizenship for immunity from civil law, placing them above the humdrum concerns of an ordinary existence. This allowed them to transcend particularism, reflecting upon a universe to which they owed no specific allegiance. One of the advantages of this standpoint was that it allowed authors to make 'their heroes act in conformity with a true observation of human nature'. The intellectual's social position made him into a repository of knowledge; Benda's thesis is that this neutrality was jeopardised by action in a partisan or practical capacity. Hence his concern that 'the modern "clerk" has entirely ceased to let the layman descend alone into the market place'.[37] Once committed to a particular political or social worldview, the intellectual's judgement was forever impaired.

In this scenario, neither society nor the intellectual remain unchanged by the latter's transformation into a layman. The skills of clerisy find new and dangerous application in the material world. Not least was their ability to cohere the antagonisms of one section of society against another, giving shape to what would have otherwise been base and instinctive. In Benda's famous phrase, 'our age is indeed the age of the *intellectual organisation of political hatreds*'.[38] In an American context, this meant pragmatist philosophy's 'cult of the strong state and the moral methods which ensure it'.[39]

Subsequent commentators have drawn out some of the shortcomings of the thesis. Edward Timms suggests it lacks internal consistency. He notes that Benda's second model for appropriate intellectual life, those who intervene to uphold an abstract principle (Voltaire, Zola), becomes increasingly marginal as his thesis develops.[40] According to Timms, Benda 'paints himself into a corner' by eschewing a strategy of engagement through which the rational 'clerk' can counteract the influence of the treacherous ones; or, in Gramscian terms, organic intellectuals of the working class oppose those of the elite. Likewise, several conceptual flaws arise from the work's broad historic sweep so that, for example, in the commentary on Britain, Rudyard Kipling emerges as a typical *clerc*.[41] To sociologist Karl Mannheim, Benda was one-sided in his appreciation of the intellectual's potential:

> Politicisation also entails an important advantage. The traditional cult of the exclusively self-oriented, self-sufficient intelligentsia is in the process of disappearing ... Fundamentally, the intellectual should recognise that his intellectual identity prescribes certain duties: he must learn to cherish the fact of his intellectual education as an obligation.[42]

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[37] Benda, *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927); translated as *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 126, 52, 32.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 21; emphasis in original.

[39] Cited in Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, p.415.

[40] Timms, 'Treason of the Intellectuals: Benda, Benn, and Brecht', in Edward Timms and Peter Collier (eds.), *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde culture and radical politics in early twentieth century Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 22.

[41] See Tony Pinkney, 'Nationalism and the Politics of Style: Julien Benda and Samuel Beckett', *Literature and History,* Autumn 1988, p. 182.

[42] Karl Mannheim, 'The Sociology of Intellectuals', *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 10, 1993, p. 79.

The status of the intellectual is such that he is required to display commitment, in the form of *civitas* exercised within the public sphere. Moderating Benda's stance, Mannheim argues that such public ethics remain concomitant with endangering 'the encapsulation of free thought under the constraint of church, state or class organisation ... The intellectuals who find such dictatorial regimentation attractive and venture in this direction, are clearly sacrificing their intellects'.[43]

More pointedly, a recent study has cast doubt upon Benda's key category, claiming 'even a cursory acquaintance with history shows that the detached clerk is a figment of the imagination. Intellectuals were no more and no less part of society than today ... It is evident that the main purpose of the romanticisation of the traditional clerk is to discredit the involvement of the modern one'.[44] Benda was not peculiar in his use of the past as a political resource in the present; what is significant here is the way that his attempts to account for the crises of the inter-war period were purloined in the construction of 'the Thirties'. His thesis remains useful as it prefigures a number of the themes that gathered momentum in subsequent attacks on the New Deal and the literary left. As Timms notes of the 'apostle of political detachment', Benda's account 'defines the absent centre from which the polarised positions of left and right diverged'.[45] In short, the 'betrayal of the intellectuals' is both intrinsically flawed and expressive of the longing for a crisis-free inter-war period.

Thinking about intellectuals is both a minefield of selective amnesia and a reminder of the need for historical specificity and the peculiarities of the US intelligentsia further complicate this investigation. It is clear that, just as there was no cultural patronage along the lines of feudal Europe, there could be no traditional intellectuals of the Gramscian model. Developmental patterns in the New World should force us to be hesitant before using models that are not necessarily applicable to the United States. Gramsci himself contrasted America to Europe, noting that in the former, 'there do not exist numerous classes without an essential function in the world of production, that is totally parasitic classes. European "tradition", European "civilisation" is on the other hand characterised by the "richness" and "complexity" of past history which has left a pile of passive sediment through the phenomena of saturation and fossilisation of the state officials and of the intellectuals'.[46] America did not have such a burden to support and, as we see in later chapters, these dynamics and historical legacies shaped a number of the concerns of 1930s intellectuals, from the documentary impulse of the 1930s to the literary left instrumental to its construction.

Such formations would have been unthinkable had not the US economy moulded its intelligentsia in a particular way. In short, its organic intellectuals were concentrated far more in civil society than in the state; managers outweighed administrators, and the Chamber of Commerce was a more respectable path to power than Tammany Hall. At a national level, as Ellen Meiksins Wood reminds us, the semantic gulf separating the European emphasis on 'the state' from the US love of 'the country'[47] was based on real, material relations. Economic abundance helped to minimise state intervention in American life, in appearance if not always in practice. In consequence, American 'organic intellectuals' tended to be professionals in the sphere of production, rather than administrators living off government revenues. As we shall see, a significant number of organic intellectuals, such as Charles Moore[48] and Lionel Trilling, modelled themselves on their traditional counterparts in Europe.

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[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, p. 183.
[45] Timms, 'Treason of the Intellectuals', p. 20.
[46] Cited in James Joll, *Gramsci* (London: Fontana, 1977), p.106.

In America as elsewhere, cultural practitioners occasionally straddled the division between organic and traditional intellectuals, such as those in the teaching professions. It was more common to find them concentrated in the commercial sector - writers, professional artists and dramatists - often living a hand-to-mouth existence. The availability of freelance employment in fields as diverse as detective fiction, literary criticism and popular journalism all made for a precarious existence. However, it also created the basis for the public intellectual, a non-specialist commenting on every aspect of public affairs. Like Benda's 'clerk', such figures could subjectively take on the mantle of universal oracles. During the slump this briefly assumed the form of according oneself a world-historic role, sentiments expressed in the League of Professional Groups' *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto. In later years these aspirations were dismissed in the process of the symbolic 'return to Benda' outlined above. The post-war period saw the economic conditions allowing one to become a public intellectual alter considerably, often to the point of disappearance. However, many of those who had previously benefited from such opportunities continued to operate as general social commentators; Daniel Bell, William Phillips, Norman Podhoretz and, from a very different perspective, Studs Terkel, to name but four survivors of the period. Assessing the careers of such figures - Terkel excepted - also reveals the constitutive influence of the Communist Party over their subsequent trajectory. To this we now turn.

The construct 'party patronage' serves as convenient short-hand for the relationship between a specific portion of the intelligentsia and the political currents which emerged in the United States in the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution. There is certainly no shortage of accounts of the interaction between writers and leftist politics during the inter-war years; since the 1970s the study of such matters has been a veritable growth industry in publishing and academia. Such literature expresses the preoccupations of two groups of post-1930s protagonists in American intellectual history: the New Left and the so-called neo-conservatives. The former often seek to reassess the radical intelligentsia of the 1930s to account for the decline of the radicalism of 1968, while the latter, including a dwindling band of veterans of the period, have reinterpreted their pasts through the prism of Cold War sensibilities.[49] In 1961 art critic Clement Greenberg opined that 'some day it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism", which started out more or less as "Trotskyism," turned into art for art's sake';[50] the contemporary proliferation of material on this matter suggests that he need not have worried. This also begs the question as to why the US left (especially the CPUSA) has such a high profile in accounts of the inter-war years.

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[47] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 33-35.

[48] See Chapter Two, below.

[49] For instance, James T. Farrell informed a correspondent in 1956 that 'I have been an active anti-communist for many years, over two decades' (Letter, Farrell to Norman Jacobs, August 28, 1956; Folder 9 American Committee for Cultural Freedom archive, Tamiment Library, New York). He was in fact actively aligned to

The power and social weight of the New Deal Coalition was such that it dominated American politics until 1968. As we saw from the process outlined above, the state was the central historical actor in this coalition's formation, although historians differ widely as to the precise character of this influence. In contrast, numerous assessments of literary politics in the 1930s accord a central role to the intelligentsia as an autonomous social layer. Superficially, the proposition that a generation of professionals were the key to the new order seems irrefutable, and sections of the social layer concerned were pivotal to the implementation of the New Deal, not least Federal One. Drawing on Gramsci, they can be seen as organic intellectuals in content, given their material dependency on an expanding capitalist state, but the forms of this process are more complex. In a style suggesting the traditional intellectual, some were involved in the craft production of fine arts, albeit in a machine age. Others appeared to be the organic intellectuals of subaltern classes, given their class origins, political aspirations and/or attempted connection to a popular audience through documentary work and mass communications. Any accurate account of 1930s cultural production would need to consider this state-sponsored dimension, if only to avoid over-emphasising the literary left.

Upon reading the literature on culture's institutional relationships in the 1930s we find it strangely weighted towards the cultural production which occurred in the orbit of the CPUSA. Indeed, it is no exaggeration that the burgeoning library on America's cultural life during the Depression has a virtual sub-branch devoted to commentary on the diversity of such literature! In 1971 an historian complained that 'a spate of recent publications' have 'merely compiled a series of lengthy footnotes to Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left*'.[51] Over two decades later, an appraisal of Alan Wald's extensive research in this field noted that 'a growing circle of scholars has begun to probe the Great Depression culture that allowed artists a few spectacular years with a large popular constituency which believed in the probability or inevitability of a different sort of American society ahead - and anguished when the hopes of the 1930s turned sour in the late 1940s'.[52] Symptomatic of this is 'an unprecedented outburst of academic interest in American Communism ... produc[ing] more doctoral dissertations, books, and articles on the subject during the past five years than in all the previous sixty years of American Communist history.'[53] If critical investigation was conducted in proportion to the significance of that which is under scrutiny it would appear,

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the Trotskyist movement in 1936, and remained so for several years thereafter (See Alan M. Wald, *James T. Farrell: the Revolutionary Socialist Years* (New York: NYU Press, 1978).

[50] Clement Greenberg, 'The Late Thirties in New York', *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (1961) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 230.

[51] David Singer, 'Ludwig Lewisohn: The making of an anticommunist', *American Quarterly*, December 1971; p. 73. Works cited include James B. Gilbert's *Writers and Partisans* and anthologies edited by Harvey Swados and David Madden.

[52] Paul Buhle, 'The Cultural Left Reconsidered', *Monthly Review*, March 1993; p. 46.

[53] Theodore Draper, 'The Popular Front Revisited', *New York Review of Books*, May 30, 1985; p. 44.

in the case of CPUSA-based scholarship, that this order of priorities has been reversed. Estimates of CPUSA membership vary, reaching 28 849 in December 1933;[54] yet, despite these limited numbers, it remains one of the most scrutinised aspects of the period. What explains this uneven balance between the different areas of specialisation in the study of the cultural politics of the Great Depression?

In the assessments of 1930s culture written in subsequent decades, it often appears that the reconfiguration of the social order during the period was determined by factors entirely different from those discussed in the opening chapters of this study. Numerous accounts seem to minimise the significance of the New Deal and downplay the impact of the slump, focusing instead on the nefarious influence of the radical American writer. At worst, references to 'red' and 'pink' decades imply that the trajectory of radical writers was that of the whole of society. Such literature tells us more about the political preoccupations of its producers than it does about the subject under study, implicitly posing the question as to *why* such significance is attached to the cultural production of the crises. The Communists and their allies were the state's subjective critics, irrespective of the particular 'party line'. As such they expressed much of the general dissent which emerged from the slump. The participation of the young and educated in such a movement was symptomatic of the old order's moral collapse in the late 1920s. In later years such participation was read not as an indictment of American society but a defection by disloyal elements within. The framework used to make sense of such events drew heavily on Julien Benda's *Betrayal of the Intellectuals* thesis, as outlined above, at least as a slogan. Such conceptions became more frequent in later years, a direct result of much of America's conservative intelligentsia being composed of former communists.

The study of these historical episodes has been dominated by two broad schools. The first seeks to locate a scapegoat for social ills in the 1930s, ranging from conventional right-wing accounts to those ex-Communist 'renegades'. Traditionalists like Theodore Draper and his protégé Harvey Klehr have depicted the Communist movement as a monolith organised from the top down, with Stalin at the centre of its firmament. In contrast, those exploring the 'new histories of American Communism' have assessed the local activities of its supporters, stressing rank and file initiative and denying the existence of a coherent 'school' in this field. In the study of literature and culture (and, bridging the gap, of oral history), the second of these approaches has proliferated in recent years. While this has provided a useful corrective to conservative misreadings of 1930s culture, it also risks perpetuating a false dichotomy between 'micro' and 'macro' readings of 1930s culture. 'Hidden history' can also beg the question as to why it became hidden in the first place; if worthwhile, surely a cultural practice or form could have maintained a public profile on its own merits? Moreover, given the thorough-going way in which the 1930s' cultural legacy was dismantled the question is facile, yet it displays a sensitivity to some of the limits of 'history from below'. The extensive archival work conducted in the preparation of this study attempts to bridge this apparent chasm, by linking localised developments with the period's more salient, overarching features.

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[54] Rhonda K. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital and the State* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 115.

On the surface, our focus appears to share little with trends in current scholarship. Postmodernism aside, contemporary reconsiderations of 1930s culture are largely devoted to two problematics. On the one hand, the 'recovery' of repressed writers is a priority, in order to vitiate or demolish an extant canonical orthodoxy; alternatively, an established writer or publication is subjected to scrutiny based on entirely contemporary standards, hence a proclivity for the 'greening' or 'queering' of particular authors. In contrast, our analysis begins with a discussion of the state, suggesting an interest in the political economy of culture.

As we see in later chapters, the pressures on the established order were immense. Despite the cushion of prosperity, American society suffered considerable intense insecurity in the aftermath of the first world war. Although the practical problems facing the elite tended to be more apparent than real, Warren G. Harding's promise of a 'Return to Normalcy' reflected an acute sensitivity to social change. Despite winning office with the then highest ever margin over any other candidate (on 49% of the vote), Harding's victory took place against a back-drop of red scares and nativist agitation.[55] Although the integrity of the nation state was virtually secure, the consensus necessary to cohere this was lacking. The 'lost generation' of 1920s intellectuals demonstrated this through their conduct, a mixture of introspection, Parisian 'exile', and a modernist sensibility which challenged the values of small-town Babbitry. When the 1929 crash swept away most of the economic props which had supported three successive Republican presidents, the problem of legitimacy was further exposed.

As if to codify this, it appeared to numerous observers that the 'lost generation' and their young admirers had found a temporary home in the orbit of the US Communist Party. Despite the often equivocal character of this relationship, and despite the often insubstantial character of its attendant cultural politics, a brief protest vote with an *organisational* form[56] helped to set in motion the collapse and eventual reconstruction of modern cultural certainties. The chain of events set in motion in the 1932 election reconstituted the US intelligentsia and endowed the Communists with an influential role in this process. Soviet prestige, always a more significant factor than the CPUSA,[57] added an international dimension to these novel developments. It is in the disparity between the two that we locate our own starting point.

If the antics of rebel writers epitomised the diminished credibility of the authorities, the latter's response to their own loss of legitimacy further compounded this problem. State intervention provided an *ad hoc* basis for grappling with the slump, first with the Hoover administration's Reconstruction Finance Corporation, then with a gamut of 'New Deal' legislation. Such measures were both necessary, in that they sought to resolve the Depression, yet unsettling, in that they violated the principle of the free market and reorganised the relationship between the masses and the state apparatus.

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[55] Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty* (1983) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 ed.), pp. 433-435.
[56] John Dos Passos, cited in David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988 ed.), p. 228.
[57] Murray Kempton complains of historians of the CPUSA 'overblowing its historical significance', noting that the Party's limited membership at Ford Motors coexists with what he calls 'the myth that the Communists built the CIO'. Kempton, 'Notes from Underground', *New York Review of Books*, July 13, 1995, pp. 29-30.

Stability in the political and economic spheres was a central objective of the New Deal, but it did not follow that a package of equivalent arts policies had to be found. In other words, although Roosevelt directed a hegemonic strategy, there was no *a priori* reason for this to include a policy of cultural patronage. However, as we argue throughout this study, federal cultural institutions expressed many of the contradictions of shifting state policy, in the process suggesting an attempt at both managed change and the construction of a durable form of political legitimacy. WPA Federal One and its counterparts also thrived on the margins of broader political changes, which exposed them to the sort of criticisms that were less tenable against other aspects of the New Deal. Commentators who resented state intervention in the economy realised in private that there was no alternative, but felt more confident about berating arts patronage. Hostile responses to state subsidies to culture provided a vehicle with which to assail the New Deal as a whole, and an appropriate vocabulary developed in tandem. (Our closing chapters look at the fusion of such sentiments with the discussion of Communist-influenced intellectuals, itself a precursor of the Cold War and the nascent vocabulary through which its concerns were pursued.) A broad overview of these trends can also help us to deconstruct the conventional orthodoxy which has developed regarding the nature of the crisis itself.

Paradigms at War

As argued throughout the thesis, assessments of the period focus excessively on the political trajectory of the writers involved, producing numerous, almost cyclical accounts of naiveté, commitment and despondency. Too often this schematic allegation of a 'betrayal of the intellectuals' wrenches the radical novelist from a wider social context, while neglecting the specificity of their work. Again, this results in a preoccupation with numerous writers' flirtations with communism, at the expense of analysing the wider pressures facing them as a distinct layer within the intelligentsia. Aspects of the 1930s which do not conform to the *a priori* model are consigned to its margins. Even those writers employed primarily by the Federal Writers' Project are more often remembered in terms of their affiliations and 'after hours' activities, rather than their state-funded creative output.[58]

Why does this study emphasise a thematic unity of New Deal art and literature, and that produced under the auspices of American radicalism? While this cursory introduction reveals some common features and points of convergence, does this justify the construction of 'patronage' as a timeless ahistorical concept? Indeed, are we creating a self-justifying

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[58] A generous attempt to redress this balance can be found in Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: the Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973). See also Graham Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement: Fedral arts patronage and national identity under the New Deal* (Sheffield: CMCRC occasional papers, 1993), pp. 12-40.

Alongside radical milieus and Hollywood,[59] the state could offer subsistence and intellectual stimulation to the cultural practitioner. Of the different sides of this 'patronage triangle' the state is most important, as it set the pace for social change. In attempting to reorganise society around its own priorities, it shaped American culture as we know it today. Thus, in the sphere of arts policy, Federal One can be seen as the precursor of contemporary patronage, such as the National Endowment for Arts. Despite this contemporary legacy, federal artistic production was something of a failure in the sphere of Americanising citizens, but this failure is less evident in terms of aesthetics and innovation. As we see in Chapter Five, even proletarian literature, with its reportage, popular subject matter and stylistic innovations derived from industry, had far more in common with US cultural norms than hostile accounts of the 1930s will acknowledge. In short, later chapters propose that the widespread categories for discussing 1930s writing - federal, documentary, hard-boiled and proletarian - can lead to artificial divisions within 1930s cultural production as a whole. Moreover, as Josephine Herbst complained of *Writers on the Left* nearly three decades ago, much of the discourse devoted to this theme has tended to revolve around New York literary critics.[60] In turn, much of the fiction of the period has been forgotten, while the likes of Malcolm Cowley, Max Eastman and Edmund Wilson have enjoyed a lengthy stay in the critical opinion forming circles of the literary establishment. Thus, assessing America's hegemonic cultural forms and the accompanying counter-hegemonic strategies helps to explain the fission between radical fiction and literary criticism.

Likewise, the discussion of mass culture, counterposed to a canon of European high culture, is frequently presented as having been monopolised by the *Partisan Review*.[61] In the 1930s, the journal's interventions were largely conducted within the political left; i.e. on the basis of disagreements about a common project. In later years, they were presented as part of a clash of diametrically opposed moral perspectives, symbolising the broader twentieth century divisions between left and right. Put bluntly, the retrospective focus of Cold War critics on the radical intelligentsia has the effect of making the latter appear to be a major historical actor, almost by default. In contrast, our study suggests that it is more appropriate to situate *Partisan Review*'s distinctive approach within a continuum of opposition between modern America and European high modernism, albeit in forms that were specific to the Depression years. Secondly, we argue that one cannot understand the radical intelligentsia's passions and motivations in isolation from the state. In the context of crisis, its focus shifted from the advocacy of the state's destruction in the 'Third Period' - political perspectives anticipating an impending revolutionary situation - to its enthusiastic defence, under the influence of the Popular Front.

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[59] Film and cinema are largely outside the remit of this survey. For a more detailed account see John Baxter, *Hollywood in the Thirties* (New York: Zwemmer, 1968).

[60] Cited in David Madden's introduction to *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1968), p.*xxi.*

[61] An interpretation contested in James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: the controversy over 'Leftism' in Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

Those attacking the legitimacy of the state, or offering it simultaneous support alongside backing for the Soviet Union, made convenient scapegoats in accounts of the New Deal era which were drawn up under the influence of the Cold War. In the later period, a substantial body of writers attempted to account for the moral collapse of hegemonic ideas in the 1930s, while avoiding discussing that collapse in terms of global slump and warfare. Instead they reworked 1930s literary politics into a narrative of liberal anticommunism. Thomas Hill Schaub provides a useful summary of this process:

> How closely intertwined with each other both writer and intellectual were in the paralysing logic of this era. Both writer and intellectual shared the conviction of a thwarted socialism and what seemed to have been a naïve liberalism. The critic and intellectual essayist could capitalise on this enervated socialism and did: their group therapy occupies volumes of *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *Dissent* and *Kenyon Review* during the forties and fifties.[62]

One result of these factors was the decline of the social protest novel[63] and an avoidance of organisational commitments, but those announcing the end of ideology were disappointed. Their triumphant declarations gave way to a recognition that no stasis had been arrived at. As the post-war boom subsided, the shockwaves of further social upheaval became widespread. A 'New Left' emerged at the end of the 1960s, hoping to learn from the radical cultural practice of their parents' generation, but much of the surviving 'Old Left' was highly critical of its successor's unorthodox conduct. (However, veteran Communists, Trotskyists and even a handful of 'Shachtmanites' provided expertise and energy for civil rights, campus and anti-war protests.[64]) One of the few 1930s radicals to identify with these developments (and, in the process, refuse to follow the 'different but more orthodox drummer' of neo-conservatism, as had so many former comrades) was Joseph North of the *New Masses*. Writing the prologue to an anthology of material from this once prestigious periodical, North intended 'to set the record straight, to show how much in common the Sixties had with the 1930s. But most vital, the aim of this anthology is to help people get a bead on the Seventies by revealing the power inherent in our people throughout our most embattled times'.[65] Ironically, today we also see the 1960s subjected to opprobrium similar to that once reserved for the 'Red Decade'.

The cultural politics of the 1930s is clearly no longer the 'buried history' it was during the Cold War, an assertion confirmed by an expansive (and expanding) proliferation of books and theses. However, with the decomposition of the Cold War itself, the opportunity arises to bring fresh perspectives to bear on the decade it sought to conceal, discredit and ultimately rewrite. Hopefully, this examination of America's inter-war legitimacy crisis can shed new light on the crisis unfolding today. The chapters that follow are devoted to such concerns.

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[62] Schaub, *American Fiction in the Cold War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p.74.

[63] Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 14-15.

[64] See Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic, 1987). Likewise, the journal *Monthly Review* provided a useful forum for sustaining socialist ideas. It was funded with money left by F.O. Matthiessen, who committed suicide in 1950 following his persecution by the authorities.

[65] Joseph North (ed.) *New Masses: an Anthology of the Rebel Thirties* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), pp. 19, 31.

Cold War cultural politics performed an immense disservice to the American literature of the 1930s. By emphasising the party political, to the detriment of numerous other factors, such assessments have created a 'hidden history' of cultural practitioners squeezed out (if not actively suppressed) by an anticommunist mainstream. Within this narrative the diversity, both of the aesthetic and critical contestations between civil society and the state, and the radical literature of the 1930s, has been neglected, something this dissertation intends to rectify.

As was indicated earlier, Section One is concerned with federal arts patronage, Chapter Two being devoted to the traditionalist Commission of Fine Arts and its response to its loss of influence over state cultural subsidies. Chapter Three considers the relationship between the culture and politics of the New Deal, i.e. the factors connecting the former to a wider process of political mobilisation. In Chapter Four, we assess the issues posed by the existence of a 'documentary impulse' in the 1930s. Taken together, these chapters offer a new reading of government attempts to construct an entire national culture from scratch, as a response to adversity and crisis, felt most sharply at the level of the legitimacy of the state and the underlying social formation. Rationalisations of such crises also form the cornerstone of those accounts we have designated part of the 'Thirties' genre.

Section Two is organised around the theme of 'party patronage'. This category is controversial in its own right, as it suggests that novels and literary criticism were produced in order to function as propaganda for the US Communist Party, but this is not our argument. We introduce the section by engaging with the debate over 'proletarian literature', a prominent left-wing literary movement of the 1930s. We address two distinct discourses: on the one hand, the pervasive allegation that there was a 'party line in literature' which features in numerous mythical accounts of 'the Thirties'; on the other, the practices which underpinned a relationship with CP-associated publications like the *New Masses*. We argue that there was not a coherent policy on creative writing and literary criticism, but that after 1932 cultural practitioners received exposure, peer pressure, fraternal criticism and a sense of moral purpose from their association with the left (i.e. the benefits associated with patronage). As with the element of dependency in traditional patronage, such support had a price, expressed in the pursuit of broader Party political objectives among writers (hence the 'waves of disinvolvement'[66] in response to the Moscow Trials and the Nazi-Soviet Pact). Chapter Six extends this argument, by examining the development of the themes and modes of representation associated with 'party patronage' (as constructed in accounts written under the influence of 'the Thirties'). It notes also a common impetus toward documentary style and moral critiques of capitalism in a range of non-Party authors, which we label the 'proletarian periphery'.

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[66] Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940*, p.2.

Chapter Seven is an individual case study of the rejection of 'party patronage'. Since his death in 1940, V.F. Calverton, the literary and social critic responsible for the *Modern Quarterly*, has been subjected episodically to many of the processes involved in manufacturing 'the Thirties' as a discursive construct informed by selective historical amnesia. This has led to Calverton's political 'independence' being the primary focus for assessments of his legacy. However, in contrast to this orthodoxy, we approach Calverton as the exemplar of many of the key responses to the concerns facing cultural practitioners of his generation. In the process, we draw attention to the artifice of many of the binary oppositions through which 1930s cultural politics and cultural patronage have been understood; high culture/mass culture, proletarian literature/cultural freedom and so forth. Thus, Calverton's writing combines both a form of 'sociological criticism' that was close to the aesthetics outlined in the *New Masses*, with fiction that approximated the tropes of Victorian melodrama. Although this synthesis seldom produced a satisfactory cultural critique, its insistence on basing principled politics upon historically specific conditions provides a powerful example to subsequent generations of committed intellectuals.

Calverton's premature death was but one facet of the tragedy of the 1940s, in which CP-centred left culture entered a period of decline; in the process, a number of its luminaries resurfaced as articulate apologists for a badly compromised social order.[67] Almost simultaneously, WPA Federal One was wound down: the curtain closed on Federal Theatre amid a storm over alleged communist influence, while the remaining projects were quietly absorbed into the US war effort. As we argue in Chapter Eight, the nexus between culture and public institutions, whether the CPUSA or the state itself, was changed utterly once America moved to a war footing. We conclude by reconsidering our initial argument and reviewing important trends in current scholarship.

Our opening chapter concerns the responses of the US state to the dual crises of economic slump and a nascent mass democratic politics, both of which underscored the fragility of the social order. It moves from the general features of this crisis, via the forms through which it was comprehended, to the way such debates highlighted the potential for the nation state to develop an interventionist cultural practice as a corrective to social dislocation. To this we now turn.

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[67] Among the numerous accounts of this process is George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic, 1976), pp. 84-130. An important influence upon our own study is Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: the Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

Chapter One - Legitimation, the State and Cultural Tradition

'The Thirties' is a decade under constant construction and reconstruction. As the introduction to this study suggests, historically specific concerns have helped to recast the inter-war years as the 'Red Decade', 'the Anxious Years' and so forth. This process of historical remembering is highly selective, in that certain aspects of life in the 1930s became accentuated in popular memory, invariably at the expense of other memories. One significant area to evade scrutiny in the construction of 'the Thirties' is the state. The patterns of government intervention that emerged in the Depression went on to occupy a central position of influence in post-war American life. This embedded, on a long term basis, the counter-crisis mechanisms developed in response to the slump, institutionalising the experience of crisis within the state itself.

In this respect, the title of the 1932 *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto provides an accurate snapshot of the sentiments predominant among the intelligentsia. In later chapters, we consider the 'cultural' components of this formulation; here we consider the 'crisis' that formed the backdrop to Depression-era cultural politics. In stripping down this relationship to its key features, we seek to locate the origins of the construction of the 'Red Decade' in the movements of the state itself. In contrast to those accounts emphasising the role of the Communist Party in 1930s culture, this study argues that government-sponsored counter-crisis measures set the tone and pace for the decade's cultural politics, and that of their subsequent reconstruction according to a Cold War agenda. To further develop this line of argument, this chapter considers the crisis of legitmation that now characterises both the 1930s and 'the Thirties'.

In modern history, the question of the state has played a central role in public affairs. First, its true nature was debated endlessly. Thus, the liberal tradition of John Locke argued it should be a minimal 'night watchman', preventing the members of civil society from causing each other harm. This vision was antithetical to that of civic republicans, to whom the highest expression of human development was through one's participation within the affairs of state. Such concepts were a significant part of the Enlightenment's political framework, in that they allowed for a separation of the state (public institutions) from civil society (the market, the domestic sphere, and voluntary organisations). Moreover, they presupposed individual autonomy, in that human beings could operate as free agents, exempt from official interference.

This outlook was further reinforced by developments within Western European states, which moved from 18th century civil rights, 19th century political rights, and 20th century social rights. National specificities permitting, the most advanced patterns of state development saw citizens freed - at least formally - from the arbitrary exercise of authority, followed by reforms and concessions in the form of universal suffrage, culminating in the modern welfare state. Behind the gradual inclusion of the majority in political life, there developed a parallel process of 'ring fencing' public institutions from electoral democracy. The United States had a complex relationship to this process, in that its break with the arbitrary power of an *ancien regime* occurred through a colonial war. This led to the coexistence of 'American exceptionalism' with a European conceptual framework for discussing the state, which bequeathed a confusing legacy to commentators in the 1930s. In short, discussions of the New Deal state were conducted on the basis of largely incommensurate categories. Alternately, they took a fragmentary and often responsive form, expressed by industrialists or farmers, distraught at their collisions with federal authority over business regulation or land rights. A key consequence of this was that controversies over the changing conduct of the state tended to obscure more than they clarified.

Before exploring this theme at length, it is worth considering a third element of the discussion, of central importance to the intelligentsia in the 1930s. A nominally Marxist theory of the state, presenting it as the 'executive committee of the capitalist class' and a 'special body of armed men' committed to the defence of the status quo, circulated in *marxisant* intellectual circles. This functionalist emphasis on the state as a 'monopoly on violence' promoted a degree of suspicion of government among radical intellectuals, and it provided an approach that corresponded to the repressive reality of the 1920s. When state control was direct and almost unmediated, then the conclusions of this theory found ready support. However, when more subtle forms of social control emerged, then this assessment seemed to correspond less to reality. Without further elaboration, it proved less capable of explaining the trajectory of the New Deal state itself. Such shortcomings were significant, in that they offered little to break the deadlock over how best to theorise the question of the state.

Identifying the specific problems of state intervention poses a number of difficult conceptual issues. To begin with, the existence of the state itself - i.e. as a coherent, unified public institution - is often controversial in its own right. Prior to the Civil War, it was common to think of the United States as denoting a plural, rather than singular, content. This was reflected at the level of public institutions, in that - exceptions permitting - the exercise of executive power appeared diffuse. While policies on foreign affairs and American Indians were largely centralised, other decisions were left to individual states. Such arrangements were sustainable when premised on an expanding frontier and, later, a dynamic market economy, but they also contributed to long term problems of social cohesion. By the end of the nineteenth century, a dynamic national economy had been established, and many of the appurtenances of a capitalist nation state were in place. Moreover, the various insurgencies on behalf of reform, beginning in the 1870s and culminating in Theodore Roosevelt's election as the 'Bull Moose' candidate in 1912, resulted more in the reorganisation of business than in the reconstitution of society. An outgoing process of modernisation occurred, in which the language of 'trust-busting' and 'reform' accompanied state intervention that benefited industry as a whole.[1] Even as late as the Harding and Coolidge administrations, the White House represented an ambiguous political resource.

Patronage and Legitimation Crisis

It is no coincidence that Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr's *Age of Roosevelt* trilogy commences with the *Crisis of the Old Order*,[2] reflecting a period when ‘the spectre of cataclysmic disorder' stalked the land. The dislocation caused by the pressures of the inter-war years has generated an acute sensitivity to such breakdown which still resonates in contemporary affairs expressed, for instance, in the widespread comparisons between the present-day Bosnian crisis and the Spanish Civil War or appeasement in the 1930s. Whether debating the acceptable limits of 'big government' or seeking a standard against which to measure modern recessionary trends, the ghosts of the 1930s refuse to vacate the modern imagination. This is clear from the frequent references to the era in discussions ostensibly preoccupied with the present.[3]

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[1] See Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: a Reinterpretation of American History 1900-1916* (1963) (New York: Free Press, 1977).

[2] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

If the crisis-ridden character of the 1919-1941 period is self-evident today, we should also acknowledge the impact of similar historical forces upon the forms of cultural patronage generated by the New Deal. Indeed, the patterns of arts funding catalysed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to the Depression illuminate the broader relationships between cultural institutions and their age. At the same time, the web of connections between such bodies and particular historical moments can often obscure their specific character.

For instance, Works Progress Administration Federal Project Number One (a.k.a Federal One) has become one of the best known arts programs to develop under the New Deal. Its murals still adorn many a public building, while its state guidebooks are widely respected, once numbering John Steinbeck among their admirers.[4] Yet paradoxically, some of this praise has been facilitated by pressures which were antithetical to the spirit of such projects. On one hand, they are remembered as pragmatic welfare relief, ensuring that 'at least no-one starved'. On the other, they have been vilified for a litany of sins, from operating a fraudulent 'boondoggle' by setting new levels for 'big government' largesse to foisting a 'red nest' of tax-funded subversion on the nation as a whole.[5]

Such assessments display a wide-ranging conflict of interpretation. Too often the concerns of the 1950s, or the 1970s, have been incorporated into historical analysis purporting to interpret the New Deal and its broader context. Consequently we must attempt to unravel the concrete problems which faced the initiators of Federal One's arts patronage from the preoccupations of later years. Should we fail to do so, we risk reading history backwards. In the case of Federal One, this would distract us from comprehending the multitude of crises which confronted those seeking to develop policies in response to the slump and engage with the specificities of cultural production. Without this emphasis on the specific, there is also a risk of conflating together the diverse forms which legitimation crisis assumed in the inter-war period.

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[3] See for instance Martin Walker, 'The Lost and Lasting Legacies of FDR', Manchester *Guardian* 11 April 1995, p.10; Ed Vulliamy, 'For Whom Does the Bell Toll Now?', Manchester *Guardian* 15 July 1995, p.1 (Outlook section); David C. Wheelock, 'Monetary Policy in the Great Depression: What the Fed did, and Why', *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*, March/April 1992, pp. 3-28; Garry Wills, 'What Makes a Good Leader?' *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1994, pp. 63-80.

[4] John Steinbeck calls the *Guides to the States* series 'the most comprehensive account of the United States ever got together'. See *Travels with Charley* (1962) (London: Mandarin, 1990), p.121.

[5] See the introduction to Dick Netzer, *The Subsidised Muse: Public Support for the Arts in the United States* (1978) (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993 ed.).

Institutionalised Uncertainty

This continuing sensibility of crisis becomes clear if we consult the titles of those works which seek to convey 'the Thirties' as a specific experience or 'moment'. A reader is often struck by their essentially negative character: taken collectively, such accounts constitute a less than flattering bibliographical portrait. The period surveyed becomes the Anxious years, the Red decade, the Fervent years, the Angry decade and the years of Protest.[6] It would appear that there is little respite from a succession of bleak descriptions of a period of immense turmoil in the West. Whereas the anthologies which formed part of 1930s cultural practice sought to challenge the established literary 'star system',[7] those seeking to summarise the spirit of the age - retrospectively - often conformed to, or perpetuated, an established 'masternarrative'. The writings which chronicled the onset of this phase in history, such as anti-war novels detailing the 1914-1919 conflict or tales flouting the moralism of the Prohibition era, are bracketed together as yet another example of the follies of 'the Thirties'. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this intellectual atmosphere is that neither the prosperity of the 1920s boom, nor the interpretation of the war as a triumph, are seen as sufficient to balance out the economic crises with which they are often coupled. Slump and war are not simply the negative mirror images of boom and stability; instead they permeate the totality of their age.

One could argue that a virtual industry has developed around the representation of the 1930s as a collection of events to be avoided at all costs. The central concept is one of crisis. Moreover, the process of characterising the period often leads to the attachment of opprobrium to the intellectual as a social type,[8] if not intellectuals as a social group. Elsewhere in this study it is argued that this approach consists of little more than apologetics for the slump, reflected in a concentration upon the relationship of professionals and cultural practitioners to Communism. This in turn poses the question of why such significance is attached to this section of the intelligentsia, when greater numbers were loyal to the New Deal, if not involved in its active implementation. In the argument which follows, we turn to the wider crisis of political legitimacy which is both symbolised and evaded in discussions of a 'Red Decade'.

Among the major factors emphasised in this study are disaffection and recession, volatility and compromise, all of which informed the cultural politics which were the subject of continual attention in Cold War accounts. Furthermore, taking the stock market crash and US entry into war as our prologue and epilogue, it is possible to create a discrete 'Thirties', as a linear narrative of crisis and its eventual resolution. Yet, especially given the frequency with which the spectre of the slump haunts the present, to restrict our understanding to this narrow focus - to ignore key contradictions - is to tell but half the story. Thus, an important consideration here is that many historiographical assessments of the inter-war years appear permanently distorted by the influence of subsequent events. Until recently, much critical investigation of 1929-39 was locked into a formulaic method which derived its explanatory categories from the preoccupations of years which followed.

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[6] Louis Filler (ed.), *The Anxious Years: America in the 1930's* (New York: Capricorn Press, 1964); Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: the Communist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941); Leo Gurko, *The Angry Decade* (New York: Dodd, 1947); Jack Salzman (ed.) with Barry Wallerstein, *The Years of Protest: A Collections of American Writing of the 1930's* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967).

[7] Walter Kalaidjian, *American Culture Between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism and Postmodern Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 52, 275*n*.

[8] See the discussion of this category in Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. *ix-xviii*.

However, despite each such rewriting of history, one has to simply mention the Depression decade to conjure up a narrative of continual social crisis; the dislocations which intensified the disillusionment, if not the precise problem, of the turbulent aftermath of the First World War. As Leslie Fiedler recalls, 'the imagination of the '20s lived off that remembered feast of terror as well as a mythology of murder and night-time pursuit bred by Prohibition'.[9] Many an assessment of the 1930s assumes that the decade can be adequately presented as a response to never ending series of crises. As was claimed above, the stock market crash and the onset of war in Europe serve as preface and epilogue to each account, jointly conferring homology on the process of historical periodisation.

By working from these surface appearances alone, we can locate three distinct features. Firstly, the economic expansion predicated upon vast resources consolidated the ensemble of institutions integral to the nation state. Secondly, in comparison to the Europe of the post -1918 period, internal stability was more secure in America than elsewhere in the West. Yet despite this relative social calm, we arrive at a third observation, perhaps the starting point for this study. In the decade immediately following the First World War, the normative patterns of state conduct tended to exclude the most dynamic sections of American society. More precisely, both the exercise of public power at a national level and its accompanying political discourses militated against the construction of a socially diverse base of support for the state.[10] This is clear from the 'Great Red Scare', Prohibition, and the Johnson-Reed National Origins Act of 1924. Likewise, insofar as a state 'cultural policy' existed, it was primarily devoted to coercion - such as film censorship - rather than patronage.[11] Such measures of state intervention had a dual character. On one hand they criminalised substantial sections of society particularly the new immigrants who inhabited America's cities and worked in its expanding factories. On the other they generated a degree of popular support among more established - yet ideologically insecure - social groups.[12]

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[9] Leslie A. Fiedler, 'The Un-Angry Young Men', *Encounter*, January 1958, p.6.

[10] For instance, both the appeal of Al Smith's background to the disaffected 'New Immigrant' population and widespread abstention suggest that the working class was far from integrated into the political system. See Jerome M. Clubb and Howard W. Allen, 'The Cities and the Election of 1928: Partisan Realignment?' *American Historical Review*, Vol. 74, 1968-69, p.1205; Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p.14.

[11] In passing, we should note that such measures also informed the hostilities of many cultural practitioners to what they perceived as a decadent society, a sentiment reinforced by the horror which the recent war had inspired. This disillusionment was often expressed through 'exile' in Paris, a temporary rejection of the prevailing values by many writers and artists. These European episodes figure prominently among the antecedents of 1930s literary radicalism, a theme considered in the second half of the present study.

[12] We draw upon the model developed in Jürgen Habermas (trans. Thomas McCarthy), *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann, 1976). A more empirical consideration of this problem, as expressed in the nativist legislation of the 1920s, appears in Graham Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement: Federal Arts Patronage and National Identity Under the New Deal* (Sheffield: CMCRC, 1993), pp. 2-11.

This led, in turn, to one of the key tensions in the legitimation crises which was unfolding. In the 1920s, America was dominated by a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite, who built up wider support through public hostility and repressive policies directed at a variety of 'un-American' influences. Tensions existed between skilled and unskilled, 'old stock' and immigrant, puritan and liberal, country and city, dry and wet.[13] Such divisions, it is argued, became less significant under the New Deal; groups and practices once seen as unreliable citizens became the cornerstone of presidential elections after 1932. In turn, this has fuelled a discussion of the extent to which the New Deal recast American political life. Thus, controversy abounds over whether the defeat of Al Smith as the Democratic presidential candidate in the 1928 elections was the springboard for Franklin D. Roosevelt's subsequent victory. At issue is which election, if any, made the Democratic party's voter base hegemonic in elections between 1932 and 1968, despite the Republicans emerging as the 'natural' party of Cold War government during and after the Truman administration.[14]

This is not the place to become drawn into the various debates over the relationship between Presidential elections, political constituencies and the New Deal. We would note, however, that Smith's very nomination risked splitting his party, most controversially on the question of his status, a New York Catholic who advocated the repeal of Prohibition. Projected onto the national political stage following his convention nomination, Smith embodied the tensions between tradition and modernity which so divided America in the first three decades of the century.[15] His crushing defeat at the polls articulated these divisions; as H.L. Mencken commented, 'the drys poured out in leaping ranks to slaughter the Pope'.[16]

An important political shift occurred, albeit concealed by the vitriolic language of Prohibition and racial exclusion. Smith's candidacy offered new immigrant voters the prospect of an alternative political discourse, predicated upon inclusivity as opposed to nativism. Furthermore, it implied the possibility of a government in sympathy with Catholics and city-dwellers; implicitly, social mobility could develop through government, rather than individual initiative, informal ethnic networks and the largesse of the local political machine or Pork Barrel politics. Thus, the major legacy of Smith, himself a victim of the prejudices and policies which accentuated cultural difference into social division (and vice versa), can be summarised as a shift in the boundaries of political priorities. Those on the wrong side of this cultural divide were offered acceptance and a pathway into national political life.

This provided an important resource for Roosevelt's 1932 challenge to Hoover, in the form of a latent, yet consolidated, electoral base for the Democrats. Moreover the significance of the social groups which constituted this base became greater throughout the 1930s, given their expansive social demographic spread and their employment in the most dynamic industries. None of this proved sufficient to defeat Hoover in 1928, however. Many of the concerns around which this election was fought related to the eclipse of an older America, which maintained moral and political hegemony. Simultaneously, other, less established groups were themselves becoming more influential, yet they lacked much connection to a broader, national political framework.

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[13] However, this is hotly disputed by a number of authors, one of whom denies 'that voter reaction to social issues can be fused into a single dimension of conflict between two American cultures'. Whilst true at a local and empirical level, it betrays a reluctance to theorise general trends. See Allen J. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p.24.

[14] Space does not permit us to explore this issue in detail, so let us concur with the author who claims that 'the vote for Eisenhower was not a vote to repeal the New Deal'. Bernard Sternsher, 'The New Deal Party System: A Reappraisal', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 15, Summer 1984, p.74.

[15] Biographical details appear in Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

[16] H.L. Mencken, 'What is Going On in the World', *The American Mercury*, April 1932, pp. 281-287.

Put bluntly, if the state expanded its base of support by excluding sections of society, it reduced the scope to continue that expansion in future. Furthermore, once the components of this base - such as the rural, Protestant Midwest - declined in influence, this contradiction was posed all the more sharply. Prior to the New Deal, legitimacy was derived, or consent manufactured, through the presentation of government policy as the guardian of traditional values. This led to the entrenchment and legal codification of racial division within the working class.[17] As Stephen Steinberg notes, 'mass immigration had adverse effects on organised labour. The abundance of cheap labour provided an incentive to industrialists to introduce new technology which substituted unskilled machine operators for skilled workers, triggering a nativist reaction among craft workers'.[18]

Despite the problems posed by racial division and a nativist state in the 1920s, the overall conditions of economic expansion mitigated against the sharpening of such tensions into a full-blown crisis. Rising prosperity, whether participated in or merely perceived, exercised a stabilising influence. In many respects, the post-1918 boom, accompanied by the USA shifting from a debtor to a creditor nation, provided a 'carrot' to the 'stick' of Prohibition, immigration control, and the Palmer Raids.[19] The onset of the Depression greatly reduced the capacity of political institutions to secure consent from those they influenced. Without prosperity, the coercive character of influential political trends and interest groups was laid bare; tensions made dormant by their active suppression between 1919 and 1924 could potentially resurface without economic buoyancy to cushion them. Arguably, the threat from the city and its inhabitants was more imagined than real, a 'presentiment of danger'; given this, the excessive caution and insecurity of the authorities on a number of social questions merits attention. To develop an understanding of legitimation crisis further, we turn to the work of Jürgen Habermas.

Drawing upon key developments over the last forty years, Habermas points to the capacity of the state to 'steer'[20] society through crises - defined here as objective forces denying part of one's normal sovereignty - albeit within the overall limits prescribed by a particular system. Economic crises, susceptible to partial modification through state intervention, are the starting point of this analysis, posing theoretical problems which the author suggests are adequately explained by Marx's theory of value and its important component, the category of commodity fetishism.[21] Having established this, Habermas turns to the effects of the state conduct described. Moving from simple to more complex characteristics of state activity, he suggests that its formal appearance -an ensemble of ostensibly democratic institutions[22] - elicits mass loyalty while by-passing genuine popular participation.[23] Such arrangements have an implicit responsiveness to the state's base of support, coupled with a professed independence from any particular group.[24] This separation of state and civil society facilitates the conceptual relocation of the social relations of production into discrete 'political' and 'economic' spheres. Thus, the various interactions between material conditions and the prevailing political ideas and institutions are conducted more or less indirectly.

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[17] The term racial is used to denote the social, rather than biological basis of discrimination in the 1920s: African-American inequality was institutionalised at this time, especially in the South. However, we would locate the origins of the present phase of problematic 'race relations' in the slump and the 1940s, in contrast to the more ahistorical approach which points to the 'legacy of slavery' as the source of current difficulties (see Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race* [London: Macmillan, 1996]).

[18] Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1989 ed.), p.38.

[19] See Paul Buhle, '"Red Scare"', *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, pp. 646-648.

[20] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p.23.

One problem with Habermas's schema is that, predicated as it is upon the curtailment of the post-war boom during the early 1970s, it is imprecise as to what extent this is a general theory of legitimation crises, as opposed to a model derived solely from historically specific response to the world recession which commenced in 1973.[25] Many of the features of crisis he identifies apply equally to both periods, such as the way the moral certainties which accompany the affairs of state highlight their very contingency and artifice, a trend embodied in their incapacity to erase all memory of previous formations of this nature.[26] Moreover, this shift towards non-economic moral imperatives, from institutional politics to large scale engagement ('culture', according to Habermas), disturbs the integrated character of the relationship between the state and its citizenry, thus drawing attention instead to the necessity for structural change.[27] Provided we do not conflate 'the analysis of the institutional ensemble which constitutes the capitalist state's apparatus with the evaluation of the historically specific regime',[28] this is a useful starting point for thinking about the integration of the mass of Americans into political life, and the role of the state in this process during the inter-war period.

However, it is here that our similarities with Habermas's analysis start to break down; the key trends of the 1920s fail to conform to this theoretical overview in one important respect. Whereas to Habermas economic collapse precipitates legitimation crisis, in Prohibition America, a breakdown of political legitimacy was developing prior to the manifestation of recessionary tendencies in 1927.[29] As a comprehensive, nation-wide influence rather than a mere corpus of public institutions, the U.S. nation state emerged incrementally through a series of traumas, notably the Civil War[30] and the development of a foreign policy appropriate to its imperialist status.[31] Internally, its role as a 'special body of armed men'[32] was more or less explicit, reinforced by private armies where deemed necessary.[33] Thus, despite a widespread disenchantment with the advancement promised by the American dream, there was little of substance to connect the population at large with the nation state. Formally democratic institutions had little difficulty evading genuine mass participation,[34] engendering an *inability* to connect with the populace and generate durable loyalties. Concomitant with this lack of popular authority was an interpretation of 'government' as a problem for the individual, rather than as a representative body or policy instrument. In turn, such perceptions symbolise an unprecedented degree of social atomisation.

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[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-30.

[22] Electoral democracy is not the only form of the state; amid the international backdrop to the New Deal were a variety of social-democratic and fascist political programmes which occurred in Europe. As we see in later chapters, the issue of state forms becomes a central debate in the 1930s, both in relation to arts funding and around the idea of totalitarianism (itself the partial outgrowth of cultural politics). See Stephen J. Whitfield, '"Totalitarianism" in Eclipse: The Recent of Fate an Idea', in Arthur Edelstein (ed.), *Image and Ideas in American Culture: The Functions of Criticism - Essays in Memory of Philip Rahv* (Hanover, NH.: Brandeis University Press, 1979), pp.61-88.

[23] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p.36.

[24] The impact of the autonomous appearance of the state upon the literary left is discussed elsewhere in this study.

[25] This is discussed at length in Tony Allen, 'World in Recession', *Revolutionary Communist Papers 7*, July 1981, pp. 7-13.

[26] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 71-72, 87 -88.

[27] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

[28] Rhonda F. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Capital, Industrial Labor and the State* (Lawrence, KS: Universities Press of Kansas, 1988) pp.10 - 12.

Paradoxically, these trends were also counteracted by the nativist state practices of the 1920s, primarily mass deportations, Prohibition and immigration control. Under this regime federal authority was presented as the first line of defence against an immoral alien 'other'. Suggesting a partnership between government and governed, such measures were well received by those who considered their interests threatened. Likewise, they bolstered elitist thinking, through the *de facto* advocacy of a racial hierarchy with New England at the top, and central and Eastern European immigrants near the bottom. In popular terms this was grasped as an urban-rural split, a feature of which was the invidious 'cultural politics' of the Ku Klux Klan.[35] Although somewhat obscured in post-war economic expansion a taxing problem was developing. If the state was being defined in opposition to 'Rum, Romanism and Rebellion',[36] how could it also integrate those - who such policies undermined - into national life? As we see below, this problem became greatly accentuated with the emergence of full-blown economic crisis in 1929.

The boom years conferred authority on the social order *irrespective* of whether the public at large shared equally in prosperity. Economic expansion, although reinforced by fervent nationalism and puritan morality, also exercised an unsettling influence upon these traditions. One effect of modernisation was that it called into question the conventions of an earlier generation; thus, in transforming the urban metropolis, it undermined the appeal of the family farm. Likewise, as Lizabeth Cohen demonstrates, traditional ethnic affiliations among the families of second generation immigrants were undermined by the rise of mass culture; for instance, when the local grocery store lost ground to the standardised chain store. That such changes were gathering momentum was expressed through the counterposition of country and city in popular culture, and even in the departure of a coterie of writers and artists to café life in Paris. A more widespread, but less well-chronicled outlet for cultural workers was popular publishing, notably Mencken's *American Mercury*.[37] With hindsight we can interpret both European 'exile' and the indigenous tradition of popular narrative as 'finishing schools' for the literature which later engaged with the problem posed by the slump. In order to interpret this transformation in more detail, we will consider its effects on mass constituencies and the hegemonic institutions which sought to elicit their support.

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[29] Tom Kemp,The *Climax of Capitalism: The US Economy in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 1990), pp. 65-67.

[30] Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1992); for a summary of conservative disdain for Lincoln in the 20th century see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic, 1976), pp.38, 211.

[31] Alonso Aguilar, *Pan-Americanism: From Monroe to the Present* (1965) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), pp.23-60; Kemp, *Climax of Capitalism*, pp. 20-23.

[32] V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917: London: Junius, 1994), p.9.

[33] The representation of Pinkertons, deputies and other 'goon squads' in 1930s writing is discussed elsewhere in this study.

[34] See Alexander Keysar, 'The Free Gift of the Ballot?', Paper Presented at the Fifteenth Annual North American Labor History Conference, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; October 1993.

[35] Michael Kazan, 'The Grass-Roots Right: New Histories of US Conservatism in the Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review*, February 1992; p.146.

[36] George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 71-72. This slogan first appeared in 1884.

The onset of the Depression called into question long-standing assumptions about the role of the state within the advanced capitalist countries. Whether labelled Keynsianism or condemned as an expansion of 'big government', the spread of state intervention in the stumbling economies of the 1930s had lasting consequences at a number of levels. Regimes of accumulation were subject to substantial reorganisation; political coalitions were forged. It is against such a backdrop that spaces and resources were opened up for a variety of cultural practitioners. Initially, the activities of such figures were of negligible concern to the engineers of wider social change. A core problem for the Hoover administration was the way that its authority was undermined by recessionary trends. Earlier political difficulties, such as the widespread disrespect for law and order which accompanied Prohibition, caused limited damage, given the ameliorative influence of unprecedented prosperity. Such economic security meant that government intervention in industry was largely unnecessary; it also provided the writers of the day with financial support and subject matter. With post-war class conflicts at a stalemate, the boom years focused America on 'social' (i.e. moral) and 'ethnic' issues. Hence, there was no urgency in consciously foregrounding a discussion of the state. Instead, the rugged individual was seen as a role model, a model rationalised by increasing affluence. Once stripped of its 'rational kernel' this myth was abandoned for decades, paving the way for newer, more appropriate discourses.

Popularised through the Horatio Alger[38] stories, the rugged individual reflected the organising principles of its host society. However, the crash heralded an era when the concept of free market economic liberalism came to seem increasingly unviable, when state intervention became accepted as a necessary evil, and when the Soviet Union was compared favourably to the United States.[39] The notion that upward mobility was personified by the pioneering industrialist was all but discredited. Once, 'in public estimation, business leaders were the acknowledged authority in economic matters, they enjoyed the prestige that comes of association with past achievements'. This contrasted to the comments of journalist Elmer Davies, who expressed sentiments which were widespread in 1931 when he saw 'a great deflation of "the smart man"'. He declared that the leaders of industry and finance were '"about as thoroughly discredited as any set of false prophets in history, and most of them ... know it." "It is easier to believe", another writer commented bitterly "that the earth is flat than to believe that private initiative alone will save us."'[40]

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[37] Prominent figures in the literary radicalism of the 1930s who wrote for Mencken during the previous decade included Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. See Douglass Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p.102.

[38] Horatio Alger (1834-1899) wrote over 100 'non series' books, but was best known for his rags-to-riches creations who embodied the American dream. They included *Ragged Dick* (1867), *Luck and Pluck* (1869) and *Tattered Tom* (1871).

[39] Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age* (London: Pluto, 1992), pp. 172-176.

The Hoover administration was itself caught up in these pressures. It was held responsible for the attrition afflicting industry and agriculture; Hoover's personal adherence to the values of individualism and voluntary association was widely interpreted as irresponsible neglect. Government initiatives were forthcoming such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, itself a factor in legitimising the expansion of federal power. While this compromised Hoover's ideals, it also posed the question of the limits on state subsidy: banks could be subsidised from tax revenues, but not the growing ranks of unemployed workers and ruined farmers,[41] suggesting double standards. The use of the state apparatus to modify the impact of the slump undermined the arguments with which its earlier rationalisation had developed; in failing to rectify the situation, it lagged 'behind the programmatic demands that it had placed on itself'.[42] This shifting balance between state and civil society[43] intensified the problem of political legitimacy through the polarising influence it exerted. Interventionist measures were designed to overcome the crisis and consolidate a consensus of support for the hegemonic institutions.

This process also codified the moral and practical failure of these institutions. The dual character of state intervention, its continual, often simultaneous bolstering and diminishing of its own credibility, had substantial implications for government-sponsored arts, theatre, and writing; a theme we consider at length elsewhere. As the acceptable parameters of such conduct prompted sharp cleavages, a new discourse developed, in which contending interpretations of America's core values jostled for position. This was not a linguistic matter, but an expression of the severity of the crisis afflicting society. Those who disagreed in principle with the *de facto* 'mixed economy' that was concretised under the Hoover administration were further shocked by Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'New Deal'; unalloyed, free market capitalism took over forty years to regain its earlier intellectual ascendancy.

One reaction to this trend is expressed in the palpable isolation felt by Austrian economist F. A. Hayek, codified in his tract, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). Liberals and social engineers were becoming increasingly influential. However, to explain the influence of individuals involved in the administration of government, one should consider the exact nature of that state itself. Hayek's promotion of a specific and limited role for the state was also articulated in the pragmatic tones of American liberalism by Walter Lippmann. He argued that 'when legislatures and electorates are asked to settle not more or less specific issues of justice, but the purposes, plans and management of a social order in the future, they have little or no rational criteria for their opinions'.[44] Lippmann emphasised the particular over the general, not addressing the discussion from a philosophical standpoint by asking 'what is an appropriate role for the state?' but exploring the tensions between individual development and social planning.

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[40] Cited in Romasco, *Poverty of Abundance: Hoover, the Nation, the Depression* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.57; 64-65.

[41] The options open to the dispossessed, where available, consisted of local charities and benevolent associations, often accompanied by degrading means testing. See Frank Freidel, *The New Deal in Historical Perspective* (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association, 1956), p.3.

[42] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p.69.

[43] The historiographical tendency associated with civic republicanism interprets similar tensions between virtue and corruption at the onset of modernity, suggesting that they have a decisive effect upon the character of the society which produces them. The best known exponent of this argument is J.G.A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1975).

He presented the latter as unattractive, impractical and sinister, claiming that 'the blueprint, be it as grandiose a work as Plato's Republic, cannot hope to fit the specific situation ... For in real life men rest content in their station only if their interests have been successfully reconciled: failing that, they do not fit the design until they have been dosed with castor oil, put in concentration camps, or exiled in Siberia'.[45] Pre-dating Cold War sensibilities, he merged Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in a cautionary tale against the rise of the social architect.[46] Given the backdrop of the Depression, such arguments fell flat among all but those who were already convinced, even if translated into the popular idiom of rugged individualism. Lippmann's defensiveness - like his anticipation of the 'totalitarianism' thesis - expresses the *fin de siecle* sentiments associated with the end point of a broader process of intellectual crisis. In effect, he articulates the decomposition of traditional certainties that characterised the inter-war period.

Whether conducted in the abstractions of the intellectual, the shrill tones of newspaper editorials, or in the conversations conducted across the population at large, debates about state policy were a pivotal aspect of the New Deal. It could be a pragmatic means to an end, an infringement of liberty, or a barrier to qualitatively different planning in the form of worker's control, depending upon one's political allegiances. As the first of these perspectives became the dominant one, a few of its opponents responded with the combativity of Hayek,[47] who realised that there was little sense in apologising for his beliefs.[48] Taking refuge in the past was a widespread response among other commentators. For Hoover, this meant repeating the claims he made in 1928, that the ideal system 'was the American system - a national heritage that must be defended and preserved'.[49] Ironically, he persisted with this viewpoint at a time when increasing numbers of WPA cultural workers and Communists were also engaged in the discovery of a 'usable past' (see Chapter Three).

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[44] Walter Lippmann, *An Inquiry into the Principles of a Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937), p.294.

[45] Cited in Edmund Ions (ed.), *Political and Social Thought in America: 1870-1970* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p.297.

[46] On this basis, 'Snake Eyes' Lippmann earned the enmity of the US left. For instance, see E.E. Boyle, 'The Liberty League All-America', *New Masses*, December 14, 1937, pp.16-17; A.B. Magil, 'Walter Lippmann's Logic', *New Masses*, December 22, 1936, p.15. Leading fellow traveller Corliss Lamont called Lippmann 'the intellectual hope of American finance capitalism' (cited in Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown, 1970), p.325.

[47] Friedrich Hayek (W.W. Bartley III, *The Fatal Conceit: Errors of Socialism*, (London: Routledge, 1988), especially 'Our Intellectuals and their tradition of reasonable socialism', pp. 52-54.

[48] James Heartfield, 'Prophet and Loss', *Living Marxism*, May 1992, p.46.

[49] Cited in Romasco, *The Poverty of Abundance*, p.20.

The emerging political framework secured loyalty to Roosevelt within the intelligentsia. Debates over such matters were conducted primarily among professionals and the political classes. At a more popular level, Roosevelt put the case forcefully for a package of measures designed to overcome the slump, at least ameliorating its worst effects. Utilising various techniques of mass communication,[50] he popularised the themes which became characteristic of the New Deal, 'the first American president who could carry his message directly to the people, circumventing the traditional organisations'.[51] Those listening to the famous Fireside Chats 'felt he was there talking to you, not to 50 million others but to you personally'.[52] Roosevelt's legendary capacity to communicate presupposed a constituency to work with, however. The 'Democratic Majority', as it became known, was built upon the votes of a generation of former non-voters, defecting Republican supporters, and the South. The significance of each group in this coalition is hotly debated, but its transformative impact upon the Democratic party is indisputable:

> The New Deal had created a schizophrenic Democratic party; on the one hand, a northern urban wing, backed by organised labour, lower-income visitors and blacks, pushed for liberal reforms; on the other, a Conservative southern wing, entrenched in Congress in alliance with Republicans, was determined to block any advance of the New Deal along urban liberal lines.[53]

On this basis the Democratic party, from the lowest ward to the White House, attempted to integrate the majority into political life through an expansive state programme (in a manner somewhat resembling that of the Progressive Era[54]).

This was a considerable compromise, as the explicit elitism characteristic of the Coolidge and Harding administrations (and of coeval congressional and gubernatorial regimes) produced such monstrosities as the Johnson-Reed National Origins Act of 1924. Although much of the legislation remained intact, as a rhetorical strategy this process of exclusion was modified in favour of consensus politics. Between the 'first' and 'second' New Deals, between business regulation and the open courting of a base of popular support,[55] the Roosevelt administration made connections with the disaffected. The success of the New Deal rested on its combination of recovery measures with a more inclusive relationship between state and citizenry. According to Milton Katz, 'democratic liberalism, coming into power in the Great Depression, was fully alive to the paramount importance of economic growth, productivity, and employment'.[56]

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[50] See Betty H Winfield, *FDR and News Media* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) and Richard Lee Strout, 'The President and the Press' in Katie Loucheim (ed.), *The Making of the New Deal: The Insiders Speak* (Cambridge Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1983).

[51] Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-40* (London Macmillan, 1989), p.7.

[52] Strout, 'The President and the Press', p.13.

[53] Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal*, p. 246.

[54] See Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History 1900-1916* (1963) (New York: Free Press, 1977), *passim*.

[55] Alonzo L. Hamby (ed.), *The New Deal: Analysis and Interpretation* (New York: Longman,1981), p.11.

[56] Cited in Loucheim (ed.), *The Making of the New Deal*, p.2.

To Roosevelt's many opponents, this signified collectivism which was, in their opinion, alien to the American way. Thus, former associate[57] Father Charles Coughlin, who had opposed the Reconstruction Finance Corporation as 'financial socialism' and was also the only man in America more frequently written to than the President,[58] became actively hostile to Roosevelt's more comprehensive package of reforms. A similar criticism came from Herbert Hoover, who alleged socialism and 'profound departures from Liberty'.[59] Such voices became louder, but perhaps less influential, as the New Deal progressed. They were especially opposed to welfare measures and the National Recovery Administration's regulation of industry, all of which were seen as unconstitutional and outside of the remit of the federal government. The campaign against the New Deal gathered momentum throughout the 1930s, outlawing planks of its initial legislative package and, by 1937, establishing a stronghold in Congress from which to undermine Roosevelt. Yet despite the momentum behind this campaign, popular support for FDR's administration remained solid.

Beneath these divergent trends remained the crisis of authority which helped to precipitate the New Deal itself. The measures it pursued were designed to rescue the economy as a whole, despite often conflicting with the interests of individual enterprises. Thus, unemployment relief maintained a degree of vitality and discipline[60] within the workforce, much to the chagrin of the enterprises which funded such payments through higher taxation. Policies of this nature simultaneously restored and undermined the relations of production, modifying the accumulation process while unsettling the notion of the old order as being natural and permanent. This contradiction is central to the opprobrium attached to the 1930s as a decade. The persistence of economic crisis was magnified by the puritan moral order breaking down; the barbarism in Europe that both preceded the 'Roaring Twenties' and brought the 1930s to a close also obstructed any durable restoration of traditional values and certainties.

Despite a growing backlash, itself predicated upon the recognition of this 'moral impasse', the demolition of the New Deal would not be accomplished overnight. One reason is that it was pivotal to rearmament for war. (Moreover, much of its centralised administrative machinery was maintained throughout the Cold War years.) Its lasting influence upon the ensemble of institutions which make up the federal government was also reflected in the persistence of the Democratic majority as an electoral bloc, which did not begin to unravel until the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations. All of these factors intensified the anxieties afflicting the adherents of tradition. Yet the same conditions also prompted new forms of cultural patronage, and provided new opportunities for the intelligentsia. Moreover, such developments magnified the traditionalists' crisis of authority, while offering them themes around which to cohere themselves. We now concern ourselves with the place of cultural patronage in this crisis.

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[57] Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1965), pp. 30, 42.

[58] *Ibid.*, p.12. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 102-103.

[59] Herbert Hoover, 'The Challenge to Liberty' (1934); reprinted in Edwin C. Rozwenc (ed.), *The New Deal: Revolution or Evolution* (Boston, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1959), pp. 66-67.

[60] 'The relief projects were, of course, in an important sense in direct contradiction to the free citizen. Workers were dependent upon the political structure for employment'. Philip Abbott, *The Exemplary Presidency: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.80.

Introduction to Section One - The Parameters of Federal Patronage

As was established previously, the central concerns of this study are patronage, the state and the intelligentsia. We attempted to establish the mediations between such general concepts and their specific, concrete forms in a particular historical period. None of the categories are uncontroversial, and care has been taken to frame each as precisely as possible. Thus patronage was defined as a combination of protection, material support and subservience. Although borrowed from an essentially feudal model linking cultural production and social power, the term is used as an approximation of the relationships between culture and organisational frameworks (e.g. public authorities).[1] In introducing the first section of this study, we attempt to address the relationship between the general features of the New Deal state and its specific relationship to cultural patronage.

Given the place accorded to the state in this analysis, the reasons for using the term patronage to decribe the processes behind New Deal art should be self-evident. Under the New Deal, the government established national institutions that procured the labour of a variety of cultural practitioners, while ensuring that their work conformed to the stipulations of the procurers rather than the producers. Although in practice this process was rather more complex - partly on account of the degree of autonomy given to artists and writers - patronage remains an apt description of the relationship that developed between art and the state during the decade after 1933.

Recognising this cannot replace the task of explaining it, however. Patronage is a useful descriptive formulation, but it does little to unearth the dynamics that brought the state into the cultural arena in the first place. In considering the concrete, historically specific factors propelling state intervention in all its forms and contradictory manifestations, we are confronted by the underlying imperative of crisis. The extent of social breakdown - notably at the level of legitimation, as we saw in Chapter One - was a decisive influence, but this requires demonstration, as opposed to mere assertion. One reason for this is best expressed in a parallel concern of this study, that of 'the Thirties'[2], because this received image of the 1930s can often inform secondary sources on arts policy. Both the ubiquitous sense of crisis, and the interpretative framework that sought to explain it away, require thorough interrogation in order to prevent them from misleading a discussion of the patterns of arts patronage that they intersect. In short, federal arts policy mediated the very tensions that it was primarily a product of, suggesting relationships of continuity and change that stemmed from a wider, social totality and were inflected through the specifics of cultural production.

The ravages of the slump led to unemployment for one fifth of the labour force. Its impact was also mediated by the type of work that its victims were engaged in; sharecropper farmers were affected more severely than public employees, and so forth. For many of those in work, living standards even rose slightly. The onset of mass unemployment dramatised a wide range of problems, most vividly those of poverty and potential for political instability. It seems to many, including those - like WPA director Harry Hopkins - engaged in relief administration or social work, that more unalloyed individualism offered nothing in the way of a solution to the slump. In some respects, the slump also compounded a number of specific problems facing cultural workers.[3] While considerations of what differentiated cultural production from other forms of economic activity are important, these material factors should not distract us from some of the broader cultural and interventionist sentiments which meant that there was also a common emphasis among WPA administrators. They saw their projects and employees as indicators of the moral worth of American society, expressed in its mechanisms for dealing with economic depression. On balance, at an institutional level, federal arts funding was part of a package of counter-crisis measures.

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[1] This formulation will be used more cautiously in the next section of the present study, as the interaction between cultural practice and left-of-centre groupings diverges considerably from the arrangements that characterised the lives of court playwrights and others in similar positions.

[2] In introducing this study we used the term 'the Thirties' as shorthand for those *ad hoc* mythologies which evade a serious discussion of the slump, fascism and war, also disassociating them from any tendencies present in contemporary society.

In analysing the implementation of such measures we can derive the form of the state from the needs and movements of capital. The process of allocating society's labour, and the products of that labour, occur spontaneously through the market and independent of public authority. Indeed, the functioning of the market requires that public authority be exercised independent of any one competitor, hence the formal separation of the state and the market. If the institutions that comprise the state were to take sides with any single enterprise it would endow the latter with an unfair advantage. However, this does not prohibit the state from pursuing projects that facilitate the collective goals of the different business interests in society. (This was often done through state support for large scale industry[4], creating the impression that the state sided with big business.[5]) Public institutions are thus better-placed to finance the supply of infrastructure, or offset the immiseration of an entire workforce, projects beyond the scope of a single enterprise. In the process, an intellectual consequence of such measures is some recognition of the market system's inability to operate unsupported, a failure demonstrated through the necessity of large-scale government assistance.

At this level of abstraction, there is little in a general theory of the state to suggest why such economic counter-crisis measures would necessitate the use of cultural production as an appendage of public authority. This problem requires the consideration of such key mediations as the forms in which state activity was to present itself. On one hand there is the official explanation of relief work, namely that it preserved extant skills and talents. On the other, there were official techniques for navigating a political culture inhospitable to 'big government'. New Deal work relief for white collar workers attempted to avoid a number of pitfalls, notably the deskilling and demoralisation accompanying the ditch-digging and snow clearance that too often characterised WPA schemes. Its bureaucratic procedures meant that WPA Federal One frequently refused to conform to conventional theatrical expectations, and similar patterns appeared on other government relief programmes. In turn, this brought a number of other controversies to the fore. In Federal One's final years, it became the target of a number of attacks, made by those who alleged tax-funded largesse in Washington, often supplemented by outright anticommunism. Little wonder that Hopkins anticipated Federal Theater's Hallie Flanagan handling government money while hearing 'the cries of the those who believed it should never have been spent'.[6]

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[3] For instance, the theatrical profession was suffering before the onset of slump in the late 1920s due in part to competition from the movie industry. Likewise, older forms of popular entertainment, such as circus and vaudeville, were also finding themselves superseded by cinema. The impact of recessionary trends on the theatre industry were particularly salient on Broadway (considered to be the pinnacle of national theatre), but their impact was devastating in the provincial towns of the Midwest (which were starved of drama apart from the occasional visit from a touring troupe). The specificities of show business as an industry - outside of Hollywood - intensified the effects of the slump for the cultural practitioners employed therein.

[4] Paul Mattick, *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (London: Merlin, 1969), p.117. In part, this perception informed the studies written in the late 1960s that emphasised the conservative character of the New Deal. E.g. see 'The Conservative Achivements of Liberal Reform', in Barton J. Bernstein (ed.) *Towards a New Past* (New York: Vintage, 1969).

[5] For instance, in so far as the CPUSA had a theory of the state, it vacillated between predicting incipient fascism and presenting the state as the 'tool of big business'. See Anders Stephenson, 'The CPUSA Conception of the Rooseveltian State, 1933-1939', *Radical History Review* 24, Fall 1980, pp. 161-176.

Thus, federal patronage was controversial with the opponents of 'excessive' government expenditure, but others considered it a necessary and humane response to the Depression. In the process it exposed important faultlines in the emerging situation. For instance, the fact that few anticipated that Federal Theater would prove so controversial is visible in the discussion surrounding its inception. As with all of the WPA art projects, the slump provided the main impetus behind the FTP. April 8, 1935, saw a joint resolution in Congress to commit $4 billion for relief, including $300,000,000 for clerical and professional occupations. Numerous commentators shared journalist Martha Gellhorn's sentiments that it was 'one of the administration's most successful experiments'. It was considered to be 'very likely the largest theatrical enterprise in the world', if not 'the largest'.[7]

In keeping with the government-directed expenditure that characterised the New Deal, the emphasis of this particular branch of the WPA was on preserving skills through relief work, as opposed to the 'pump-priming' economics that characterised Keynesian experiments in other countries. It was not direct relief or 'dole' but a means of organising those professionals already in receipt of relief.[8] On this basis, the dynamics of Federal One overlapped with the uncertainties of the 1920s, which bequeathed upon sections of the establishment an acute sensitivity to crisis. This sensitivity was heightened and superseded by economic collapse itself, leading in turn led to a raft of measures designed to put the unemployed back to work. New Deal economic policies made receipt of relief dependent upon enlisting with a government agency. It could be argued that this was to the benefit of the economy as a whole, as it sustained sections of the workforce and imposed a degree of discipline in a fashion beyond the means of any individual enterprise. Workers' activities in such institutions assumed concrete forms; they were largely involved in work which would not compete with the private sector. However, while the slump necessitated a degree of state intervention, the structural basis of which was established by the supposedly *laissez faire* Hoover administration, it did not necessarily follow that this would entail state cultural patronage.

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[6] Hallie Flanagan, *Arena: The History of the Federal Theater* (1940) (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1965 ed.), p.24.

[7] Irving Kolodin, 'Footlights, Federal Style: The Astonishing Story of Federal Theater', *Harpers*, November 1936, p.621.

[8] For instance, approximately 90% of FTP expenditure went on such 'wages'. Its successes against unemployment are visible in Federal Theater's returning some 10,700 otherwise ruined performers to their professions during its first six months. Between February 1936 and June 1937, it appeared before an estimated audience of 25 million, 87% of who paid no admission charges. While not the first experiment of its kind - Hopkins' Civil Works Administration in New York had previously employed a number of circus and vaudeville performers - it was unique in both its scale and diversity. In Hopkins's famous phrase, it was to be a 'free, adult, uncensored theatre' (Flanagan, *Arena*, p.28).

Cultural practitioners occupied an unusual place in relief expenditure since, compared to those involved in ditch-digging, forestry and other primitive infrastructural concerns, they were relatively specialised. Like other professionals they experienced the contraction of the fields they worked in; publishing was hard hit, and arts patronage was in a state of collapse. However, the WPA and other federal agencies were able to devote resources to such concerns without undermining what remained of the parallel private sector. Although the New Deal state was ultimately accountable to market forces, the rhythms of the latter were temporarily violated by the regulatory mechanisms which the Democrats expanded upon, inheriting them from the Hoover administration. In turn, this allowed for policy and types of employment to be discussed in language far removed from profit and loss. Instead of judging success in terms of efficiency and a balance budget, as favoured by Hoover, 'socially useful' activities were put at a premium. In form, unemployment policy was being guided by non-economic imperatives. At the level of arts patronage, the standards of an earlier generation were called into question.

Critical acclaim was no longer a function of the gallery and museum, underpinned by the arts market; with the collapse of the latter, state intervention displaced many of the accompanying institutional power centres. In comparison, the publishing industry had suffered only a relative decline. Nevertheless, despite the differential impact of the slump upon art, writing, literature and music, the standard of social utility was universally applicable. Within limits, it allowed state activity to sidestep the charge of competing with private industry. Thus the foundation was laid for Federal One to orient its production towards educational goals. Such objectives suggested the scope for an official cultural practice to play a role in the socialisation of US citizens. We explore the different aspects of this theme throughout section one even though, at the level of institutional continuity, it proved one of the more emphemeral aspects of federal cultural policy. In sum, the opening section of this study concerns the role of culture in mobilising and reproducing the state formation.

Discourses concerning state funding of the arts were linked inextricably to the question of state power. The theoretical approach for discussing the state that is adopted in this study takes it as given that state form is derived from the needs of capital in general, making the state into the executive instrument of the dominant minority. On this basis, the New Deal can be seen as a package of counter-crisis measures thrown up in response to the Depression. Prior to the Popular Front, this was a common perception across the left, albeit one asserted rather than explained. This formulation is potentially problematic on two counts: firstly, it could suggest that the state is a mere 'epiphenomenon', a surface reflection of underlying economic trends. We took issue with this conception earlier, by rejecting a crudely reductionist base/superstructure model of the relationship between the state and civil society. The problem with such a model lay not necessarily in its conclusions, but in its means of arriving at them, which left it open to confusion if the coercive orientation of the state was modified.

Secondly, New Deal measures often entailed the violation of the 'free market', disrupting the operations of individual enterprises, which would seem to contradict the notion that the state somehow served the interests of 'capital in general'. Such intervention generated a variety of hostile responses from employers, frequently organised in the National Association of Manufacturers, who lobbied Congress to prevent the further encroachment of government on business. Rhetorically, Roosevelt responded to these pressures by championing the 'forgotten man' against these 'economic royalists' who, it was alleged, sought to further their sectional interests by hampering the administration's programme. While this approach was a component part of a strategy of building up a base of support for the New Deal, it was also indicative of another state function: the ability to generate social cohesion.

Our study has already alluded to the contradictory character of this capacity. Historically, states seldom relinquish their capacity to enforce stability through coercive means. This description applies as much to the New Deal state as to any other, under which both the FBI and, slightly later, military expenditure, grew exponentially. However, coercion alone provides a limited basis on which to manage a modern society; even fascism - which itself was touted as an alternative to economic crisis - drew upon a base of support from the disenchanted lower middle classes. As our own engagement with Habermas attempted to demonstrate, securing hegemony was a contradictory process. By welding together a coalition in support of government objectives, the New Deal more or less successfully integrated the majority into political life.[9] In later chapters we suggest that, at the level of elite confidence and self-esteem, this process caused almost as many problems as it solved.

Here our concern is with the way that New Deal arts patronage was used to offset the acute sense of crisis that pervaded the 1930s. To do so, we return to the work of Antonio Gramsci, whose concept of the 'national-popular' is useful in this respect. In terms of our study's overall trajectory, this represents a move away from looking at federal arts patronage as unemployment relief (i.e. as providing a rather dubious service to 'capital in general', within the context of the wholly necessary provision of some form of 'dole'). Instead, we assess the 'national-popular' character of the federal art, in an attempt to theorise its place in a broader legitimation crisis. This theme is developed at length in Chapter Three, but we outline below the concept of the national-popular.

Although both the Public Works of Art Project and WPA Federal One were primarily concerned with with unemployment relief, they also performed particular functions for the Roosevelt administration. As later chapters explain, this involved an attempt to construct 'American culture' from scratch, in the process both crystallising the administration's approach *and* forcing it to confront existing traditions and values. Gramsci's national-popular provides a useful framework with which to conceptualise this core function of federal arts patronage. In particular, it allows us to identify the connections between social processes and different sections of society. In language designed to evade the prison censor, Gramsci presented the national-popular as a cultural concept relating to the position of the masses within national culture. On this basis, the national-popular represented an 'historic bloc' of national and popular aspirations. In part, the need to theorise such a bloc was grounded in the weaknesses of the Italian state, where the incomplete character of bourgeois rule - an incoherent national economy, underdeveloped democracy, the domination of the church - also retarded the development of 'the national-popular collective will toward the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation' (Gramsci's euphemism for communism). The role of intellectuals, especially the Modern Prince (revolutionary party), was to mediate and direct the formation of such a bloc.[10]

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[9] By an irony of history, this followed the nativism of the 1920s with which successive administrations cohered 'Old Stock' Americans against ... the majority. See S.J. Mennell, 'Prohibition: A Sociological View', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 39, 1969.

Although the theory originated in the specificities of Italian historical development, Gramsci also deployed it in discussions of France and Russia. This would suggest a more general applicability, although the different conditions prevalent in the United States should caution us against the imprecise use of the category. Gramsci himself began to explore some of these considerations, notably in the essay 'Americanism and Fordism'. The present study attempts to navigate the tensions between these two elements; on the one hand, we assess the extent to which the New Deal was an attempt to construct a 'national-popular' bloc, albeit one very different from that envisaged by Gramsci. On the other, we engage with the specificities of American culture, especially its interaction with the worldwide experience of crisis in the 1930s.

In form, the New Deal appeared to combine 'national' and 'popular' aspirations. It consisted largely of measures to facilitate national economic recovery, and it championed 'the people' and the 'forgotten man' in its attendant political discourses. However, neither of these activities should be included in a Gramscian framework without first introducing several important qualifying factors to our argument. In terms of national aspirations, patterns of development in Italy and the United States diverged substantially. In effect, the question of national integrity in the latter was resolved by the Civil War, which shifted the idea of the United States from a plural to a singular concept. This process was further consolidated by the closing of the Frontier and the state intervention of the Progressive Era. At the level of ideology, each such shift was important in codifying what it meant to be an American. (In contrast to Italy, America's 'national question' was largely resolved, at least in terms of the state and national economy.) However, uncertainties persisted: American culture was seen as inferior to that of Europe, even by self-styled US 'organic intellectuals'; likewise, the hegemonic elite was acutely sensitive to perceived threats to social stability.

This process also exercised a constituitive influence on 'popular' aspirations. While space does not permit a more detailed discussion of 'American Exceptionalism', several explanatory points are appropriate. Thus, the effects of the absence of a feudal order in American history were not confined to the lack of 'traditional intellectuals' discussed above. It also meant that the popular mobilisations based on democratic demands that overshadowed Europe between 1789 and 1848 were not reproduced in America, where workers were said to have received the 'free gift of the ballot'.[11] Numerous historians have argued that this undermined the emergence of class politics of the sort that prevailed in Europe. Likewise, the abundance of land and other resources also blunted the collectivising impact of industrialisation. Whereas much of the European working class was concetrated in the same factories and neighbourhoods, American artisans and labourers would often disperse to new settlements and other forms of employment, in turn replaced by successive waves of immigration. Given that the complex inter-play of economics, ideology and class formation would merit a separate study in its own right, this excursus has hopefully served to remind us that interpellating the 'national-popular' in the United States addresses a constituency far removed from that conceptualised by Gramsci on the basis of Italian history. Even this brief synopsis suggests that both the 'national' and 'popular' components of Gramsci's formulation would express a radically different content in Europe and America.

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[10] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowel Smith, eds.) (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp.421*n*, 133-33, 421. This anthology also includes 'Americanism and Fordism', cited below.

[11] Michael Kazan, 'The Agony and Romance of the American Left', *American Historical Review* Vol. 100: 5, December 1995, pp.1488-1512. See Alexander Keysar, 'The Free Gift of the Ballot?', Paper Presented at the Fifteenth Annual North American Labor History Conference, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; October 1993. Keysar posited a conflict between *formal* democracy in the US and a wide range of political realities that discouraged or actively prevented electoral participation.

However, we would maintain that it remains an appropriate means with which to interrogate New Deal cultural patronage. First, although Gramsci's observations were based largely on the strategic problems facing Italian revolutionaries, he considered it appropriate to extend them to discussions of France and Russia. This would suggest their broader applicability from within his totalising 'philosophy of praxis'; moreover, Gramsci's methodology permits a move from the specific to the general, in a manner consistent with classical Marxism. Secondly, if we reconsider the emphasis placed upon the intellectuals acting as mediators in the formation of the national-popular as a distinctive historic bloc, it appears that this process is not necessarily confined to the organic intellectuals of subaltern classes (i.e. the Modern Prince). Our point of departure here is the concept of the organic intellectual. As readers will recall, whereas traditional intellectuals were nurtured in the feudal order and subsequently integrated into modern society, organic intellectuals developed under capitalism and performed the role of connecting the manifold aspects of that society together.[12] If working class organic intellectuals can play a mediating role in constructing the national-popular, as Gramsci argues, what is to prevent *state functionaries* from performing a similar task? Hence the main argument of Chapter Three: working with the raw materials at hand, federal arts administrators projected a new conception of the relationship between the people and the nation state.

In Chapter One we present the New Deal as a broad strategy on the part of the state to steer society through a period of intense crisis. At this level, it can be seen as a hegemonic project, involving the interpellation and organisation of different 'class relevant' forces under the leadership of one class or class fraction. As state theorist Bob Jessop reminds us, discussions of this nature point to 'the development of a *hegemonic project* which successfully links the realisation of certain particular interests of subordinate social forces to the pursuit of a "national-popular" programme which favours the long term interests of the hegemonic force'.[13] This observation reflects a problem general to capitalist states in the inter-war period, namely maintaining the domination of capital and legitimating the state itself. (Fascism and social democracy also represented distinct attempts to deal with this problem.) In part, the nativist legacy of the 1920s shaped the expansive form of the New Deal state: while contributing to the long-term survival of capital, the state also cohered a base of support for itself far larger than any particular sectional interest. Those excluded during the first two decades of this century went on to form a substantial part of the Roosevelt administration's electoral base, while a handful of their leading representatives were temporarily integrated into the state, mainly under the National Labor Relations Act (1935).[14] As we see later, the development of New Deal arts patronage proved inseparable from these processes, albeit in a form also predicated upon the logic of cultural production as a concrete human activity (as distinct from politics).

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[12] For Gramsci, the key to social transformation was the creation of organic intellectuals of the working class. See *Prison Notebooks*, p.9.

[13] Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp.207-209.

It may appear that this study presents a cultural variant on the 'conservative strategies' argument concerning the New Deal. Whereas the early New Deal historiography pioneered by William E. Leuchtenberg and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. lauded Roosevelt as an innovative leader,[15] later critics stressed the ability of 'liberal' policies to produce 'conservative' results. Barton J. Bernstein, for instance, expressed the sense of disappointment - widespread among intellectuals - that racial and social inequality had remained largely intact *despite* the Roosevelt administration's reforms.[16] Others, further to the left, saw the New Deal as essentially an exercise in containment, 'saving capitalism from itself' while undermining a militant working working class.[17] While all of these explanations are credible, they share a tendency to over-emphasise one or other aspect of overall process. Thus, it was both innovative *and* conservative to embroil the state in the affairs of individual enterprises, in that such intervention both violated the autonomy of the firm while initiating a degree of rationalisation conducive to a future round of accumulation. (This helps to explain the paradox of a 'mixed economy' consensus emerging amid widespread disputes over the growth of state power.) It was also innovative *and* conservative to foreground a discussion of national culture that was predicated on state expenditure.

At this point a brief outline of the institutions involved in federal cultural patronage is necessary, in order to establish a chronology and differentiate the various projects. Federal patronage dates back to 1846, when Congress created the Smithsonian Institution. In this period the predominant sources of patronage were private foundations, commercial institutions and the activities of the millionaire philanthropists who came to the fore with the exponential development of US industry after the Civil War. While a handful of local initiatives appeared, such as the Utah Art Institute (1899), there was little cultural activity on the part of government institutions until Theodore Roosevelt appointed a thirty-member Council of Fine Arts in 1909. The following year, President Taft signed an executive order establishing the National Commission on Fine Arts; we examine the relationship of this institution to the New Deal in Chapter Two. The tangled web of connections that constituted US government support for arts is described can be schematised as follows:

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[14] Rhonda K. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital and the State* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), pp. 135-136; 148.

[15] Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Schlesinger Jr. *The Age of Roosevelt Volume 2: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

[16] Bernstein, 'Conservative Achivements of Liberal Reform', *passim.*

[17] E.g. Ronald Radosh, 'The Myth of the New Deal', in Radosh and Murray N. Rothbard (eds.), *A New History of Leviathan* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972).

1933 - The Civil Works Administration grants Treasury funds to the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Over $1 million in funds was allocated to 3600 artists; the programme ended in March 1934. CWA assistance was also made available to theatre and music projects.
1934 - Artists are assigned to decorate federal buildings under the Treasury Department's Relief Art Project (TRAP).
1935 - The Works Progress Administration establishes Federal Project Number One, (a.k.a. Federal One) which consisted of five programmes: arts, writing, theatre, music and historical records.
1937 - The US government accepts the Mellon Collection as a gift, forming the the basis of the National Gallery of Art collection.
1939 - The 1939 Emergency Relief Act abolished the Federal Theater Project and transferred other Federal One programmes to the states.[18]

Our study focuses primarily on Federal One, as the government department most directly linked to the official counter-crisis strategy, especially its art, writing, and theatre programmes. We also acknowledge that the Public Works of Art Project is significant here, in that attempts to use this institution to provide unemployment relief for artists substantially foreshadowed the experience of Federal One. Taken together, as we see in the following three chapters, three themes that are pivotal to a discussion of culture and crisis arise. First there is the question of cultural tradition, embodied in the Commission of Fine Arts, with which Roosevelt collided on a number of occasions. We argue that this conflict served sharply to demarcate New Deal arts patronage from what had gone before. In short, the Commission's 'traditional' intellectuals represented a barrier to innovative cultural production. Secondly, we consider the way that the President's attempts to define what he stood *for* in the aesthetic sphere led him in the direction of attempting to construct something akin to Gramsci's formulation the 'national-popular', albeit built from the top down. In the final chapter of this section, we assess the extent to which Federal One can be located in the context of the broader 'documentary impulse' said to characterise the 1930s.

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[18] Adapted from Dick Netzer, *The Subsidised Muse: Public Support for the Arts in the United States* (1978) (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993 edition), pp. 205-206.

Chapter 2 - State Arts Patronage and the Quest for Tradition

In introducing this study, we recalled Antonio Gramsci's distinction between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. Whereas the former developed within pre-capitalist societies as a relatively homogenous group, defined above all by their dependence upon an established ruling elite, 'organic' intellectuals developed within modern society, performing the functions connecting aspects of capitalism as a social totality. Gramsci's concept cannot transfer to an American context in an entirely unproblematic fashion since, whereas feudal Europe's theologians and court poets could be said to embody the traits associated with traditional intellectuals, no directly analogous figures appeared on the American scene. Instead, organic intellectuals performed a number of diverse social functions, from mayors to high school teachers; such roles were necessary for running a country in part characterised by the decentralised form of its public institutions. The New England 'Brahmins' occupying the centre of the charmed circle formed by WASP domination tended to pass themselves of as traditional intellectuals, emphasising - or feigning - continuity between themselves and European high culture. (Even today, one can point to US intellectuals who appear more 'traditional' than their European counterparts, as demonstrated by their vexed interventions in the debate over the Canon, and the related issue of 'Western Civilisation'.) In short, we argue that US 'traditional intellectuals' should be seen as new wine in old bottles, a historically specific social group preoccupied with appearing timeless.

Such themes pertain to this chapter as an important influence in our unfolding narrative. As was suggested previously, the state was an important resource to those seeking to compensate for a nationwide decline in political cohesion. It provided a basis from which to attempt to reintegrate the majority into a political system that had previously neglected them. It also strengthened the capacity of various administrations to 'steer' society after the onset of recessionary trends after 1927, intensified by the slump in 1929. As we argue in later chapters, federal arts patronage was aligned to these goals, although in ways more complex than the unmediated deployment of propaganda. However, in order to arrive at this perspective, arts administrators ('organic intellectuals') had to contend with the influence of self-styled 'traditional intellectuals', albeit ones paradoxically developed within the capitalist state itself. Hence the focus of this chapter, which considers the struggles between the Roosevelt administration and the Commission of Fine Arts. The significance of this particular controversy, as conducted over questions of policy *and* aesthetics, is that it provided a focus against which federal cultural patronage came to define itself.

As our previous chapter suggests, the dislocation caused by the pressures of the inter-war years generated an acute sensitivity to social breakdown. We argue below that this resulted in the demand for tradition. If the crisis-ridden character of the 1919-1941 period is self-evident today, we can also acknowledge the impact of similar historical forces upon the forms of cultural patronage generated by the New Deal. Indeed, the patterns of arts funding catalysed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to the Depression illuminate the broader relationships between cultural institutions and their age. At the same time, the web of connections between such bodies and particular historical moments can often obscure their specific character. One expression of these trends, for instance, was a number of attempts to ensure that government-funded arts suggested the health and longevity, or the traditional status, of US public institutions.

The wide-ranging character of such discourses begins to explain our focus on the Commission of Fine Arts, which suffered a decline in stature under the New Deal. Its diminishing influence threw into sharp relief some of the tensions which resulted from a major shift in state intervention in the arts. Moreover, such discourses are themselves pregnant with the question of political legitimacy. Hence, a common assumption of the Commission *and* its modernising New Deal antagonists: both thought that they could derive authority from claiming the mantle of tradition. Writing about the Federal Art Project, Holger Cahill declared that the prerequisite for art was 'the stored up environment of the past'.[1] As we see below, this was a sentiment shared by the Commission.

The category *tradition* refers to a 'semi-conscious process of selective remembering and forgetting' which 'means in practice a demand to alter the conduct of contemporary society'.[2] However, this immediately begs the question as to why a demand for such tradition exists. Whilst the contestants in this debate differed as to when precisely 'modernity' nullifies artistic value, they agreed on the importance of heritage - in whatever form - as an indicator of the worth of cultural production in its particular forms. We can locate this demand in the broader crisis of cultural authority which prevailed during the inter-war period. Trends associated with crisis impacted upon the changing strategies of federal arts patronage. As we discuss below, institutions such as PWAP and Federal One consciously promoted discussion about national artistic traditions, within which the nation as a whole could participate, both as consumers and as subject matter. However, it is perhaps in relation to an older, pre-crisis state-cultural formation that the public, Presidentially-endorsed criteria for good art becomes clear.

In dealing with President Roosevelt's directives to the art world, both formal and informal, it is important to consider the politics of art. Logically, this implies an investigation of the relationship between artistic production and external political life. However, this does not preclude any assessment of the *internal* politics of art, i.e. 'the specific historical conditions of the production of art; the social relations within which that production is carried out; the functions of art critics, audiences, the institutional structures (museums, galleries), and the patrons and purchasers of art'.[3] As we shall see, the interaction of New Deal agencies with the then-threatened art world was informed by such aesthetic considerations, in addition to the interventionist policies and pump-priming economic objectives discussed above.

The Commission of Fine Arts was established by Congress in 1910. This initiative followed the failure of the 'Council of Fine Arts', appointed the previous year by Theodore Roosevelt. It consisted of some thirty artists and ceased to exist after one meeting. During this short period it proved a source of tension between the executive and legislative branches of government.[4] The Council's successor had a far closer relationship with Congress than with the White House, which in part explains its objections to the innovative sources of arts patronage which accompanied the New Deal. Franklin D. Roosevelt's conciliatory gestures towards this body, coupled with a number of attempts to moderate its influence, allow the historian an inkling of the official aesthetic visions deemed appropriate for the Democratic Majority.

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[1] Holger Cahill, 'Foreword: American Resources in the Arts', in Francis V. O'Connor (ed.) *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Arts Project* (Greenwich, CN.:New York Grahic Society, 1973), p.34.

[2] Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age* (London: Pluto, 1992), p.61.

[3] Marx W. Wartofsky, 'The Politics of Art: The Domination of Style and the Crisis in Contemporary Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:2, Spring 1993, p.221.

The Commission's advisory status brought it into close proximity to the nation state. It was chaired by Charles Moore, a doctor of the arts awarded an honorary degree at Harvard University. Moore himself was praised as 'a citizen who laboured unremittingly for the orderly development of our national capital'.[5] This assessment reflected the Commission's responsibilities, allowing it to decide whether coins, public buildings, monuments, and official emblems were of sufficient artistic quality. Presidents Taft, Wilson and Harding all used executive orders to call in Commission advice on a wide range of artefacts produced under government auspices, most notably in relation to the architecture of the District of Columbia. Committee members themselves were drawn from a number of creative disciplines, significantly architecture and the fine arts. They were presidential appointees for a four year term, with a realistic possibility of renewing each appointment. Upon retirement, a member joined the Commission Alumni, 'whose counsel is available when decisions of high importance are to be made and policies to be decided upon'.[6]

Administrators Interpret the President's Aesthetics

Friction between the President and the Commission developed almost immediately. Moore wrote to Roosevelt in April 1933 stressing the need for the Commission to 'retain its status as an independent advisory body'.[7] The growing perception that the New Deal meant an unparalleled extension of federal power prompted Committee members to seek assurance that their position of influence was secure. They became increasingly aware that figures in the Roosevelt administration had begun to consider the demands of Edward Bruce and George Biddle for new forms of arts policy. In part, such demands were encouraged by the hidebound outlook of the Committee, which according to Richard McKinzie 'saw art as noble and scholarly, and, if it were good, slightly mystical', opposing 'all that smacked of the twentieth century, and a good part of that which belonged to the nineteenth'.[8]

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[4] See 'Thirtieth Anniversary Meeting of the National Commission of Fine Arts', Report of 17 May 1940 Meeting, p.4; Commission of Fine Arts Box, Official Files 187; Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Future references to this and other collections appear by collection type, number and file name, followed by location e.g. OF 187, FDRL.

[5] See press cutting attached, M.H. McIntyre to Mrs. F.E. Farrington, 2 July 1937; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38, FDRL.

[6] Franklin D. Roosevelt to John Mead Howells, 22 January 1937; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

[7] Charles Moore to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 3 April 1933; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38, FDRL.

[8] Richard D. McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 6-7.

This assessment of the Commission underlines its opposition to 'modernism' on principle. Given its close links with the authorities, its advisory status did not bode well for artistic innovation. Indeed when in July 1933 Roosevelt sent Biddle a copy of the latest Commission report, he opined that it 'did not sound very promising for mural paintings'.[9] Within three days Moore had contacted the President, quoting Eugene Savage's interpretation of these remarks and requesting that the President clarify his views on such matters.[10] Moore's sensitivities reflected his traditionalist and romantic view of cultural production, perhaps best expressed in his description of a piece of work by an architect which was evolved 'from his inner consciousness to fit the space in the drawing'.[11]

Given such conditions, Bruce was quick to explore alternatives to art's conventional relations with officialdom, as mediated through the Commission. After an intensive period of lobbying, most notably within the Department of Justice, he staged one of a number of 'working dinners' in October 1933. From here he expounded his vision of a new arts policy for America to the assembled dignitaries. Among those present was the Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, Lawrence Robert, who recommended that Bruce 'ignore the Commission of Fine Arts and place mural decorations in public buildings if he had a sponsoring committee representing "a sufficient variety of art interests so that he would be protected in acting on their advice"'.[12] Finding new sources of patronage allowed Bruce and his fellow administrators to bypass the Commission as a source of legitimation. This process also established new channels of communication between artists and Roosevelt, while undermining the Commission's cultural authority.

A factor further diminishing the Commission's significance was the combination of Bruce with George Biddle in overseeing relations between Washington and arts funding bodies. In an astute tactical move, Commission chair Charles Moore was incorporated into the advisory committee appointed to oversee the Public Works of Art Project. An appendage of the Treasury Department, funded by the Public Works Administration and administered by the Civil Works Administration, executive power in PWAP was invested in Bruce. *De facto*, the Commission lost its monopoly on setting aesthetic standards. The Commission-appointed PWAP advisors were rendered toothless by Bruce's position of strength.

With the preliminary signs of the Commission's declining influence, a number of its critics began raising their complaints with Roosevelt directly. Primarily such criticisms concerned personnel and aesthetic matters. Both types of complaint expressed discomfort with the Commission's conservative anti-modernism. For instance, the architect Rossell Edward Mitchell felt Moore, a former art gallery director, was an inappropriate chair, given that 'about 95% of the time of the Commission is taken up with buildings'. He went on to claim that 'many deplorable things, architecturally, would not have passed, especially if a trained and learned man had been on the job all the time'.[13]

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[9] *Ibid.*, p.6.

[10] Moore to Roosevelt, July 31, 1937; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

[11] Moore to Roosevelt, June 10, 1941; PPF 6416, FDRL.

[12] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.8.

[13] Mitchell to Roosevelt, 21 December 1933; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

Mitchell's letter expresses the breakdown of the Commission's professional division of labour. Its perceived administrative failures could also fuel allegations of aesthetic incoherence. Thus, while Mitchell claimed that 'there can be little objection ... to designing these great structures in the very ancient styles of Greece and Rome' he also complained of 'such monstrosities as the Washington auditorium'. Corrective action was needed so that 'the "Approval of the Fine Arts Commission" would not continue to bring forth regretful smiles from those who know what is going on'.[14] Mitchell's grievances show in microcosm that which an increasingly significant section of the art world felt to be a problem with the Commission.

Other complainants attempted to draw the President's attention to its irrelevance to contemporary life. Count Rudolphe de Zapp of the White House Press Room suggested a drive to Americanise public buildings, 'and to eliminate those Greek and Roman decorative schemes which have absolutely no connection with the American mentality'.[15] This growing emphasis on innovation was a source of growing discomfiture to the traditionalists.

For two years the Commission attempted to play an obstructive role in relation to modernist initiatives. This led to constant friction with the Section of Fine Arts, which was regarded as more credible artistically than any of the arts projects concerned primarily with unemployment relief. Thus, in addition to Bruce's difficulties with the Treasury bureaucracy, the Commission 'seemed determined to thwart any but the most formal and traditional art in Washington'.[16] However, by this time Bruce was securely ensconced amid 'first rank New-Dealers', having far greater influence in the government than his conservative antagonists, which he further extended through frantic lobbying.

Roosevelt's contribution to this debate was as a conciliator, treating the art institutions on their own merits and standing aloof from controversies over aesthetic issues. Hence, in congratulating Commission retiree John Mead Howells, the President paid tribute to his 'ability and wide experience as an architect, and [his] knowledge of the history and traditions of American architecture...the great tradition established by Washington and Jefferson for the National Capital'.[17] Sculptor and Commission member Lee Laurie was also acknowledged, for providing advice that was 'helpful and inspiring to the artists, stimulating them to do their very best work for the Government. In this way you have served your country and at the same time have advanced the cause of the fine arts'.[18]

Moreover, presidential relations with the Commission appeared smooth in public, and its counsel was sought on a number of occasions. For instance, when New York artists Louise H. Orchard contacted Eleanor Roosevelt for comments as to whether caricatures of the latter and her spouse could be included in a mural, the matter was referred to the Commission by Stephen Early, the White House press secretary.[19] The previous year saw Early making such decisions himself, over a request to produce a cartoon biography of FDR.[20] Taken together, this style of devolving responsibilities was symptomatic of the Commission's changing status; while Roosevelt remained cordial towards it, many of its traditional tasks were passing into other hands.

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[14] *Ibid.*

[15] de Zapp to Roosevelt, 8 September 1934; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

[16] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.38.

[17] Roosevelt to Howells, 22 January 1937, *op cit.*

[18] Roosevelt to Lawrie, 22 January 1937; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

[19] See Louise Orchard to Eleanor Roosevelt, 17 October 1938; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, and Reference 116-O, FDRL. The Commission ruled against the caricature.

Indeed, the Commission's obsessive hostility towards modernism encouraged the federal authorities to build up alternative institutions through which to seek counsel, most notably within the Section and in the Treasury Relief Art Project, which was dubbed the 'Ritz' of the art projects by *Time* magazine. In May 1938 $40,000 was set aside for a Section-sponsored competition to design a Smithsonian gallery of art. The Commission supported a number of conservative architects opposed to Eliel and Eero Saarinen's entry, 'gratuitously announcing that when the design was submitted to them that they would reject it and any other which exhibited a "similar flavour of modernism"'.[21]

Such judgements were consistent with an outlook that was self-consciously derived from classical antiquity. However, this traditionalism was not the sole anti-modernist and implicitly anti-European approach to American art. The development of Urban and Rural regionalism since the 1920s had engendered diverse styles and practices 'only unified by [a] philosophy that all European modernistic art and all elitist art should be rejected in favour of representational art which was easily accessible to the ordinary American and which reflected the life style in the United States'.[22] The inception of Public Works of Art Project, most significantly in its support for mural painting, led to the official embrace of these schools, helping to validate their claims to be authentically American. Moreover, the institutional realignment behind this shift undermined and marginalised a number of Commission preoccupations. The growth of state-subsidised realist art in the 1930s curtailed much of the normative influence of pre-industrial cultural styles.

Little of this was to occur without conferring political advantages on the Roosevelt administration. Following five years of haggling and controversy, the President confided in Frederic Delano that 'just for once I would like to put on the Commission a 100% New Deal Democrat ... I do not care whether the individual is a resident of the District of Columbia or not - but I do want someone who will not "lie down" or oppose if we seek, in the future, to honour Monroe or Madison or Cleveland or Wilson'.[23] Departmental reorganisation handed Roosevelt the opportunities he sought.

The Commission of Fine Arts had been subject to reorganisation before. In June 1933, under Executive Order No. 6166, the administration of Commission expenditure was delegated to the Department of the Interior. A number of administrative functions was also consolidated in this department, including the bodies responsible for administering the Capital, significantly the Public Buildings Commission. The responsibility for disbursing was placed under Treasury control, as opposed to the 2200 commissions previously responsible.[24] Such centralisation increased Presidential leverage in matters of cultural patronage.

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[20] T. Scott to Stephen Early, 10 November 1936; Presidential Personal File 1 (PPF): 487 (Art and Artists), FDRL. Initially the venture was acceptable to Early, within the boundaries of taste, decency and partisanship.
[21] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.45.
[22] Maria Caudill, 'Introduction', in *The American Scene: Urban and Rural Regionalists of the '30s and '40s*, Exhibition Programme, 1 April to 13 May 1976, University Gallery, University of Minnesota, p.6.
[23] Roosevelt to Frederic A. Delano, 17 April 1939; OF 187, Commission of Fine Arts 1933-38 file, FDRL.

Further reorganisations of the executive branch occurred in the closing years of the 1930s. The Public Buildings Administration and the Section were both transplanted to the new Federal Works Agency. Bruce's fears that this would render his own agency obsolete seemed well-founded; it was now forced into cohabitation with another - the WPA Federal Arts Project.[25] In the same process the Section lost a number of its influential friends and guardians, and wartime procurement threatened further its role as an embellisher of government offices.

Temporarily, Roosevelt offset the Section's predicament, by making it part of the Public Building Administration and guaranteeing that 1% of each building's cost be set aside for decoration. Moreover, despite widespread concern about Bruce's health,[26] he was appointed to replace Charles Moore as head of the Commission when the latter retired. Moore was praised for 28 years of service.[27] This also represented Bruce's final triumph over the Commission's inflexibility.

Substantial changes were in motion. Bruce had secured the appointment in spite of 'his opinion of several of the Fine Arts Commission [which meant that] undoubtedly there would be an A-1 row if he were put on it'.[28] Accompanying Bruce's temporary ascendancy in the Commission was an increased acceptance of his criteria for aesthetic quality. Thus, in 1942 we find its members in a position of sympathy with Bruce, attacking Archibald MacLeish's Office of Facts and Figures for producing graphic propaganda based on 'cold mechanical airbrush competence'.[29] Bruce's triumph was to prove brief, with his death in 1943 and the closure of the Section of Fine Arts virtually coinciding. Moore maintained private contact with Roosevelt, but was regarded by the President as a rather tiresome eccentric. This became apparent when one of Moore's garbled letters was forwarded to one of Roosevelt's assistants, with the instruction 'find out what the old boy is talking about - I don't know'.[30]

Roosevelt's interventions in debates over aesthetics appear even-handed and non-partisan. However, it is clear that he was quite prepared to work towards undermining the orthodoxy of the Commission of Fine Arts through administrative means. Roosevelt seldom intervened in artistic disputes himself; instead he experimented with appointees and advisory bodies in a manner which ensured a shift away from the hidebound traditions of the Commission and towards the latent national realist movements in American art. Upon Moore's death, Roosevelt commiserated with the former's son MacAllester by praising his Commission work as a 'permanent memorial'.[31]

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[24] See *The Presidential Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Volume 2: The Year of Crisis 1933* (New York: Random House, 1938), pp.223-228.

[25] See Graham Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement: Federal Arts Patronage and National Identity Under the New Deal* (Sheffield: CMCRC Occasional Papers, 1993), p.20*n*.

[26] See Delano to Roosevelt, 15 January 1940, OF 187; Memorandum, James Rowe Jr. to Roosevelt, January 15, 1940, OF 187A; McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.50.

[27] Memorandum, Roosevelt to Moore, December 7, 1938; PPF 6416.

[28] James Rowe Jr. to Roosevelt, January 15, 1940; op. cit.

[29] McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.50.

[30] Memo, Roosevelt to Rudolph Forster, June 6, 1941; PPF 6416.

[31] Letter, Roosevelt to MacAllester Moore, October 10, 1938; PPF 6416.

Nevertheless, the populist orientation of New Deal cultural patronage had done much to undercut Moore's vision for the arts.

The President's sympathy with such trends can be deduced from his public forays into 'art criticism'. Here we move from the internal politics of art, based on its production and its institutional relations, to an external expression, namely the position of art within the emerging Democratic majority. In the public promotion of a government-funded national art we see how such 'external' politics operate, projecting a desire for both national unity and a particular relationship between government and cultural practitioner. Without ignoring the significance of these themes, the extent to which such initiatives were a product of the Oval Office merits some investigation. If art, as Alain Jouffroy said some three decades later, 'is the armchair in which the State sits for its own pleasure',[32] we should examine why the head of State should choose to identify armchair and occupant so closely. To this issue we now turn.

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[32] Cited in Richard Gilman, 'The Idea of the Avant-Garde', in Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips (eds.) *Writers and Politics: A Partisan Review Reader* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p.78.

Chapter 3 - From Moral Impasse to Moral Imperatives: Federal Art and National Identity

New Deal cultural patronage can be located in the interstices between crisis and culture. It was a product of specific circumstances, primarily the crisis of legitimation that accompanied the Depression and demanded a reorganisation of society. So far, the present study has argued that this precipitated a novel response on the part of the state, namely an accumulation strategy to ensure the overall survival of the United States' national capital. At the level of politics, the New Deal was a hegemonic strategy predicated upon an expansive state, in which the populace were integrated into political life. Arguably, the 1939-1945 war provided the basis for curtailing this crisis; the New Deal, however, represented a co-ordinated attempt to resolve what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. characterised as 'the crisis of the old order'. In the following chapter, we consider the role and place of culture - as conceptualised by federal administrators - in this process.

As we saw previously, the cultural apparatus that the Roosevelt administration inherited from its predecessors was wholly inadequate for the tasks it faced. A coercive framework existed, concerned with censorship and regulation.[1] Many of these responsibilities were devolved to individual states and other local units, such as individual police departments; others, such as radio regulation and the F.B.I.'s so-called 'book reviews',[2] were implemented under central control. A more obvious and conventional form of arts patronage was conducted through the Commission of Fine Arts, which vetted government-funded architecture and design. Its aesthetic outlook was antiquarian, to say the least. Taken together, neither coercive 'cultural policy' nor the Commission's archaic traditionalism provided an appropriate basis on which to extend the New Deal's hegemonic strategy into the cultural sphere. Given these conditions, the forms of patronage that would occur under Roosevelt's auspices would need to be both innovative and commensurate with the New Deal as a political project.

The following chapter attempts to chart this process. It considers the way that the provision of unemployment relief for cultural practitioners was expanded to construct a 'national-popular' discourse compatible with New Deal politics. As was argued in the introduction to Section One of this study, the New Deal's orientation embraced both national and popular aspirations. Thus, in 'national' terms, it promised to assist the 'forgotten man' by feeding the 'one third of the nation' that went hungry. In practice, this meant rehabilitating members of the urban electoral bloc that helped to put Roosevelt in the White House; this was also reflected in the rhetorical inclusion of the poor within the 'nation' itself, unlike the President's nativist predecessors. At the level of the 'popular', New Deal politics were presented as a radical departure from the recent past, mobilising the majority in defence of their interests. These elements were combined at the level of cultural policy, which was oriented toward 'discovering America'. Anticipating the work of the embryonic American studies movement, such discovery was political, in so far as it represented an attempt to present 'national culture' as possessing a maturity and sophistication equivalent to its European counterpart.

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[1] Louise M. Benjamin, 'Defining the Public Interest and Protecting the Public Welfare in the 1920s: parallels between radio and movie regulation', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1992); Robert McChesney, 'Press-radio Relations and the Emergence of Network, Commercial Broadcasting in the United States, 1930-1935', in *ibid.*, Vol. 11 No.1 (1991).

[2] See Franklin Folsom, 'Notes on Writergate', *Monthly Review* May 1995, *passim*.

In stark contrast to the national-popular as theorised by Antonio Gramsci, Roosevelt's 'historic bloc' was orchestrated from the top down, by the state. It was hegemonic rather than counter-hegemonic, and the existing order remained more or less intact throughout the 1930s. The key shift was a quantitative move toward some form of 'mixed economy'. Despite this, it was also a site of contradictions and contested meanings, especially in the sphere of cultural policy. Combining an emphasis on crisis and counter-crisis measures, this chapter attempts to interrogate the key themes of federal cultural patronage. Such patronage is irreducible to a mere symptom of crisis, because it intersects with the 'logic' inherent in cultural production itself. In short, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the *mediations* between cultural policy and cultural production, as expressed in the predominant *themes* of cultural patronage. To this we now turn, (while indicating that Chapter Four complements this analysis by considering documentary, a predominant *form* - among other things - with which such themes were addressed).

Despite rejecting much of the advice of the Commission of Fine Arts, Franklin D. Roosevelt made few explicit endeavours to establish the aesthetic criteria with which the value of the new government-sponsored art could be assessed. He was reluctant to become embroiled in many of the broader controversies associated with the projects, with the exception of defending project administrators such as Hallie Flanagan against their detractors. On the issue of communists working on Federal One, Roosevelt emphasised the universal eligibility of unemployed artists, while in private he echoed Edward Bruce who, in response to San Francisco's Coit Tower mural affair (in which allegedly subversive panels appeared) hoped that artists 'don't fool around with this Socialistic thing any longer'.[3] Other leading members of FDR's 'inner cabinet' approached the arts from an equally ambivalent point of view. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes recalled viewing 'terrible' CWA paintings at the Corcoran Galleries, and 'wondering why men who turned out that kind of stuff should be supported as artists'.[4] Amid such uncertainty, Roosevelt's emphasis on the political was primarily a pragmatic response to the New Deal's opponents, to whom the arts projects presented an easy target (hence the substantial controversies over communism which frequently overshadowed the various federal projects during their final years). Overall, the President's political trajectory in matters of cultural patronage could be summarised as an emphasis on the synonymous nature of New Deal art, the Democratic Majority, and the nation state. His specific aesthetic commentary was subordinate to this.

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[3] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.25; based on telegram, Rowan to Heil, 21 July 1934. (The original document was housed at Record Group 121, Preliminary Inventory Entry 105, National Archives, Washington DC.)

[4] *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p.162.

Ickes, Bruce and hundreds of lesser-known figures were a key feature of the New Deal: 'New Dealers', the state administrators central to the implementation of Roosevelt's programme. Symbolised by the 'Brains Trust' (a consultative body of specialist advisors), this distinctive type of 'organic intellectual' personified the shifting forms of state intervention thrown up in response to the slump. Although such figures fell into disrepute in the Cold War years - becoming scapegoats in the process this study has described as constructing 'the Thirties' - they played a key role in the reorientation of the state around a package of counter-crisis measures. Subject to numerous, historically-conditioned constraints, New Deal administrators nevertheless managed to exercise the dynamic leadership in pursuit of specific ends that constitutes hegemony.[5] Part of this process involved a struggle to construct and address 'the people' on national-popular terms, attempting to legitimate the New Deal by demonstrating its correspondence with both national and popular aspirations. Without wishing to underestimate the importance of unemployment relief, we would also maintain that this was a central point of departure for federal arts patronage.

This is reflected in official and personal correspondence from the period, which suggests that cultural administrators lobbied Roosevelt through a strategy of alerting him to the political potential of government art projects. Initially, this took the form of proposing that they go beyond the basic provision of unemployment relief for artists, subject to obvious financial constraints. It keyed into FDR's frustration with some of the schemes, most poignantly expressed when he wrote to Bruce, claiming 'I should like to find some way of employing a better type of artist at more than relief compensation, but I do not see how we could do it out of present relief funds'.[6] The inadequacies of organising art through unemployment assistance were becoming increasingly apparent, most notably due to a shortage of suitably talented artists eligible for relief.[7] Advocates of federally-funded arts programmes seeking to address these frustrations began by offering their services, and implicitly the services of an artistic community, to the nation state itself.

The initiatives of George Biddle, a school acquaintance of Roosevelt's, are instructive to the study of such a strategy. Biddle is seen today as the 'father of Federal Arts', thanks to his widely publicised 'conviction that American art could blossom by finding expression in the great social adjustments of the depression and the New Deal'.[8] Whereas several of his contemporaries justified arts patronage with vague reference to European arrangements, Biddle lobbied FDR from the more concrete vantage point of the experience of the Mexican muralists. The general problem was posed thus:

> The younger artists of America are conscious as they never have been of the social revolution that our country and civilisation is going through and they would be very eager to express their ideals in a permanent mural art if they were given the government's co-operation.[9]

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[5] See Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p.217.
[6] Roosevelt to Bruce, December 13, 1934; PPF 2577, FDRL.
[7] McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.39.
[8] *Ibid.* p.5.
[9] Biddle to Roosevelt, May 9, 1933; PPF 458, FDRL.

Biddle conveyed an awareness of the extent to which there was an overlap between the crisis and its accompanying government responses, and the cultural practitioner's growing social awareness. Moreover, he presented a rudimentary policy option for institutionalising this situation, by emulating Mexico, 'home of the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian renascence' [sic]. As if to confirm his hypothesis, he echoed Diego Rivera's suggestion that this renaissance 'was only possible because [President Alvaro] Obregon allowed Mexican artists to work at plumbers' wages in order to express on the walls of government buildings the social ideals of the Mexican revolution'.[10] In effect, Biddle was arguing that the state could establish a political conduit by treating cultural practitioners as they would any other productive employee.

This example also indicates the extent of the compromise implicit in New Deal public art. Previously, the relationship between the United States and its immediate southern neighbour had assumed US superiority. At the level of foreign policy, this imbalance was formalised in the Monroe Doctrine and ratified on the battlefield. In popular culture, the Border represented a threat of miscegenation and the endangerment of white prestige.[11] In treating Mexico as having led by example, arts administrators revealed some of the insecurities that concerned them, both as a specific strata of the intelligentsia and as part of a broader collectivity responsible for society's overall trajectory. Biddle's comments regarding the *national* character of Mexican muralism suggested that, in his view, an analogous national school would be desirable. While this discussion was largely confined to artists and policy-makers, it was nevertheless indicative of the broader changes under way. By an irony of history, just as the Institutional Revolution's patterns of patronage were being accepted in the USA, they were proving controversial in Mexico, where Rivera faced allegations that he had degenerated into a 'court painter' for the regime there.[12]

The aesthetic influence of Mexican artists north of the border was considerable; Philip Evergood went so far as to argue that

> It is safe to say that no monumental mural painting had been executed in the western world before the recent great and sweeping movement in this field took place in Mexico twenty years ago under the leadership of men like Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros.[13]

This influence also provided a vehicle both for supporters and opponents of the New Deal, reminding us of the element of control involved in arts patronage. Oblivious to the backdrop of deradicalisation that accompanied the Institutional Revolution in Mexico, conservative critics of New Deal art took its sometimes insurrectionist appearance at face value. While this clearly overlapped with anti-communism, opposition to radical murals could also conjure up the language of America's past involvement in the Mexican wars; even the relatively liberal Bruce promised the Treasury that the formation of the Section of Fine Arts in 1934 would 'deal with social protest by stopping the "Mexican Invasion" on the border'.[14]

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[10] *Ibid.* p.2.

[11] We consider the position of Mexico in Depression-era fiction in later chapters.

[12] Alicia Azuela, 'Public Art, Meyer Schapiro and Mexican Muralism', *Oxford Art Journal,* 17: 1, 1994, p.55.

[13] Francis O' Connor (ed.), *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich.: New York, 1973), p.47.

More significantly, administrators like Cahill responded to their critics with a defence of pluralism - 'American art is anything that an American artist does' - despite imposing much of the regulation which accompanied the projects.[15] Presenting the case for the emerging national art allowed such commentators to formulate its components in a manner that was tolerant of otherwise suspect influences:

> In sum [its] cultural origins - the Depression scene, the American scene, and Mexicanism - were reflected in the art of the New Deal programmes. The American artist, imbued with the mood of social consciousness engendered by the Depression, painted themes that expressed a commonplace sensibility, such as society on welfare, society at play, society working, and society sustained by the new idealism of the Roosevelt administration.[16]

Thus, in so far as a coherent mode of argumentation existed, the arts administrators suggested that it was possible to bring forth artistic greatness from national adversity, conditional upon the pragmatic emphasis on relief being matched by aesthetic dedication (usually to the mural form). In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Biddle spelt this out more explicitly, claiming that 'mural art can never be important unless it is interpreting a great social and collective idea'.[17] Such assertions, coupled with his enthusiasm for the Mexican muralists, appear ironic in the light of subsequent anti-collectivist controversies.[18]

Moreover, the characterisations of Federal One as a 'Red Nest' bore little resemblance to its administrators' Democratic Party loyalties. Running through the personal correspondence of both Biddle and Bruce is a strand of personal respect for the President and loyalty to the vision of the New Deal. The former was expressed in a stream of greetings cards, Christmas presents and other gifts.[19] As arts lobbyists and administrators, Bruce and Biddle combined flattery and gratitude in order to remind the President of their innovation's potential rewards. Thus Bruce wrote to Roosevelt:

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[14] McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.56. This was facilitated by Bruce's control of the Section of Fine Arts: 'only the Section, unencumbered by relief criteria, could fulfil Bruce's quality standards'. See Belisario Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (New Jersey: Associated Universities Press, 1983), p.57.

[15] McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.110.

[16] Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation*, p.25.

[17] Biddle to Eleanor Roosevelt, June 28, 1933, PPF 458, FDRL.

[18] Influential commentary in this genre appears in Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Communist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), esp. p.174.

[19] For example, see MA Lehand to Mr. & Mrs. Edward Bruce, January 9, 1939; Roosevelt to Edward Bruce, January 2, 1941, PPF 2577, FDRL.

> I hope that in my small way, I have been able to convince you of my devotion to you and the things you stand for and that you will allow me to make a suggestion, which I feel is needed in this country ... I genuinely believe that an appeal on your part to the best side of human nature would bring an instant response and would ring around the world.[20]

Bruce's gushing prose suggests his belief in the President's capacity to transform popular support, derived from political loyalty, into a pattern of widespread and participatory arts appreciation. Moreover, such correspondence is indicative of the extent to which federal arts administrators saw their successes and future prospects as bound up with the development of the New Deal. This would suggest the accuracy of describing 'Brains Trust' members and their contemporaries in cultural patronage as Roosevelt's political cadre, actively attempting to construct a national-popular hegemonic bloc.

Such sentiments were echoed by George Biddle. Although acting in a professional capacity, the fierce personal loyalty to FDR was clearly visible when he stated that, 'as President of the Mural Painters of America, I should like to tell him personally on behalf of American artists how grateful they are to his administration'.[21] Correspondence between Roosevelt and his arts lieutenants illustrates pertinently the range of relationships connecting artists to the administration. With characteristic flattery, Bruce presented his own successes in such terms, in that 'obviously, the award of the [Columbia] University Medal of Excellence, although described as a personal award for my work as an artist, has been given to me as a tribute to your art programme'.[22]

A combination of friendship and politicking continued throughout the decade. As the years passed, the clamour for personal attention remained, albeit mediated by an awareness of external events. Hence the comments Biddle enclosed with a copy of his autobiography sent to the White House: 'I had hesitated at this moment in our country and the world's history to bring to your attention the record of so slight an achievement'.[23] Such attention was all the more important given the threat which wartime reorganisation posed to existing government art projects.

As early as the end of the First Hundred Days, many of the prerequisites for an attempt at a New Deal national-popular mobilisation were in place. Roosevelt began to establish a cadre of loyal administrators within the state, a substantial electoral base and a consensus as to the nature of the problems facing society. From this vantage point, his administration began to articulate the aspirations of a depression-stricken populace. Thus, a central theme in our study is the ways in which this process was inflected through arts patronage. The purpose of this observation is not to reduce federal art to a simple expression of New Deal politics, but rather to assess the consequences of a dynamic being established between the two. On this basis, we suggest that this can help to clarify the relationship between the 'external' and 'internal' politics of art (e.g. the connections between institutions like the state and the gallery). In terms of the arguments outlined above, these linkages can be seen in the adoption of the model of Mexican muralism: 'externally', the work of Rivera *et al* suggested the possibility of constructing the national-popular; 'internally', the mural provided a means of establishing such a mode of address on the basis of craft-produced mass communications. In short, this connection logically obliged the administration to develop an aesthetic strategy to accompany its broader political approach.

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[20] Bruce to Roosevelt, August 28, 1935, PPF 2577, FDRL.

[21] Biddle to Roosevelt, January 20, 1936, PPF 458, FDRL.

[22] Bruce to Roosevelt, March 6, 1937, PPF 2577, FDRL.

[23] Biddle to Roosevelt, October 3, 1939, PPF 458, FDRL.

Roosevelt himself attempted to stand above the various aesthetic controversies, paying close attention instead to matters of personnel. On one occasion he expressed doubts over the historical accuracy of a Poughkeepsie post office mural depicting 18th Century white settlers with horses,[24] but such interventions proved exceptional rather than frequent. Indeed, much of his official correspondence seems preoccupied with staffing issues, and deflecting criticisms both made by Congress and other complainants. In public, however, he attempted to explain both the necessity of relief and the importance of developing a distinctly national culture, but even with Roosevelt's legendary capacity for communication, his attempts to motivate public arts to a wider populace were uneven. In terms of public appeal, his promises of recovery - conveyed on radio via the famous Fireside Chats - acquired far greater purchase than speeches concerning cultural patronage; the same can be said of his numerous memorable wartime broadcasts.

This pattern was also evident in his attempts to defend such expenditure against the austerity drives of Congress, which ultimately saw it as an eccentric luxury and voted accordingly. At best the general position was one of indifference, and 'Congress did not, as some enthusiasts desperately tried to believe, view the cultural projects as the first steps resulting from a commitment to subsidise American culture. While those who served on the Writers' Programme thought that cultural improvement was as important as relief, members of Congress were not concerned with this extension of the Programme's benefits.'[25] This highlights a key limit of the extent to which a durable coalition in support of cultural patronage could be pursued under Roosevelt's hegemony: it won backing from cultural practitioners, the rest of the intelligentsia and, albeit more passively, from the vast audiences attending Federal Theatre productions. However, it proved more difficult to persuade Congress to renew funding in consecutive rounds of budget appropriation voting.

In summary, the case for federal arts funding in general - and Federal One in particular - was advanced on two planes. It was initially promoted as a humanitarian form of unemployment relief for cultural practitioners, a trend personified in the image of the flautist whose highly-trained lips were being destroyed whilst performing construction work in freezing conditions. Secondly, patronage was also presented as offering a sound basis for the future development of a mature national culture, itself almost synonymous with the administration. Dialogues between individuals who were sympathetic to patronage and also bound up with the implementation of the New Deal tended to oscillate between these two poles. Thus, although state patronage became part of a national-popular orientated hegemonic strategy in an *ad hoc*, semi-conscious fashion, it can nevertheless be located within the broader goals of the New Deal as a distinctive counter-crisis strategy. This does not explain the *forms* that such cultural production would assume, however: to this we now turn.

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[24] Roosevelt to Bruce, December 8, 1938, PPF 457; see also OF 400: New York 'P', FDRL.

[25] Kathleen O'Connor McKinzie, cited in Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, p.327.

Constructing the National Popular

As we have discussed elsewhere, the election of Roosevelt in 1933 signalled a sea-change in American politics.[26] It was no longer appropriate for society to be organised around a platform of nativism; thus, even prior to the First Hundred Days Prohibition was becoming treated with increasing contempt, viewed as a failure, if not a disaster. The reasons for this were twofold; firstly, demographic changes had substantially shifted the balance between contending social forces. Initially the targets of nativist politics, there were now 'twenty-five million of these second-generation Americans; together with their parents they constituted a third (forty million) of the white population and a majority of the working class'.[27] On this basis, a return to the nativism of the twenties was highly impractical, in that it would privilege exclusion and coercion over a consensus-building hegemonic strategy.[28] Secondly, the depression itself forced a reordering of political priorities. Although police departments and sections of the press maintained a seemingly obsessive interest in regulating strong drink, gambling and personal conduct,[29] others saw the slump as a far more pressing problem. Most importantly, this was reflected in Roosevelt's historic electoral gains, which lead to a substantial decline in the Republican vote. Much has been written concerning the political, psephological and demographic dimensions of this shift, but less concerning the ways that New Deal Art codified it. This is a theme that we explore in the remainder of this chapter.

To summarise our argument: New Deal patronage developed as a novel form of unemployment relief but, through a semi-conscious process of innovation and pragmatism, it led to the establishment of a *de facto* mass communications agency under government auspices. The experimental character of such activity is demonstrated by the adoption of Mexico as a model, suggesting a partial departure from earlier notions of cultural supremacy. However, it was one thing to mandate the production of 'socially useful' murals on post office walls; it was quite another to reach a consensus as to what the content of such murals should be. Taken together, these contradictory influences meant that the promotion of federal art as national art was a discursive strategy that developed on more of an *ad hoc* basis than from planning and foresight. Differences of emphasis and tactics meant that a clear strategic orientation was seldom apparent in the work of Federal One. In turn, this suggests that New Left historiography's interpretation of the New Deal as an exercise in 'bailing out capitalism' underestimates its crisis-ridden and contradictory features. Without wishing to exaggerate the strength of labour relative to capital in the 1930s, we maintain that the Roosevelt administration was, at the level of society's hegemonic strata, experienced as a compromise. As we see below, this process found expression in, and was mediated through, New Deal cultural production.

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[26] Graham Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement: Federal Arts Patronage and National Identity Under the New Deal* (Sheffield: CMCRC Occasional Papers, 1993), pp. 9-13.

[27] Mike Davis, 'The Barren Marriage of American Labor and the Democratic Party', *New Left Review* 124, November/December 1980, p.46.

[28] However, we should note in passing that 1930s political life was littered with conservative authoritarian movements seeking to revive this programme, such as the Silver Shirts and followers of Father Coughlin. See Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982).

[29] Likewise, 'as late as 1933 high-school students in the most devastated state in the nation, Mississippi, could list pressing national issues in order of importance as strong drink, illicit sex, idleness, gambling, narcotics, pornography, and, last of all, poverty' (Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* [London: Macmillan, 1989], p.57).

In many respects, FDR took his cue in such matters from Edward Bruce. In opening the First Municipal Art Exhibition, Bruce summarised cogently federal art's congruence with mass appeal: 'the Public Works of Art Project is, I believe the first genuinely democratic movement which has ever been started for the employment of the artist and the support of the arts'.[30] This opening speech is instructive, in that it allows us to identify the different elements which meant that such art could be presented as democratic:

> A great Democracy has accepted the artist as a useful member of the body politic, and his art as a service to the state. It has taken the snobbery out of Art, and made it part of the daily food of the average citizen. It is, I believe, a distinct setting up of our civilisation, a new conception and definition of public works - a recognition that things of culture and of the spirit contribute to the well-being of the nation.
>
> It has elevated the artist to the rank of artisan - has recognised him as a labourer worthy of his hire.
>
> It has been made possible by our well beloved President. It is part and parcel of the New Deal. It is a significant example of the motivating force behind the President's whole policy - to give all the people of our country "a more abundant life".

As a record of shared aspirations, the components of such democracy are clear to all. Aesthetically, it projected a number of challenges to the conventional status of the artist within American society. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to link comprehensively this shift in public perceptions to US traditions of large-scale cultural production, or 'mass culture', but more immediately, we should be alert to the attempts of both Bruce and Roosevelt to demystify *and* defend the artist, now elevated 'to the rank of artisan'. PWAP stipulations also exercised a contradictory influence, in that means-testing artists as the precondition to their employment[31] usually meant that those potentially most competent at furnishing public spaces were often ineligible to work on the project. Cultural workers able to secure PWAP relief then had to negotiate a second hazard, that of *how* to produce.

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[30] Edward Bruce, 'Address at the First Municipal Art Exhibition of City of New York', February 27, 1934, PPF 2577, FDRL.

[31] See McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.18.

Art became available to all as the output of a state industry, albeit one supported by popular mandate. The arts were - more or less - explicitly treated as a resource with which to offset the ravages of the slump. Bruce's lavish praise of his presidential mentor should not blind us to the emerging consensus in Washington, namely that the connection between the New Deal Coalition and the embellishments of public buildings conferred aesthetic worth upon the latter. What developed was the peculiar moralisation of art according to a political agenda. There were three components that underpinned this process. Initially, a consensus emerged that federal arts be 'socially useful', which formed part of the backdrop to the Commission of Fine Arts' antiquarian vision. In turn, this facilitated an emphasis on folk themes, ultimately embodied in the notion of a 'usable past'. Implicitly and explicitly, this suggested that both mass culture and European high culture could not be considered part of New Deal-sponsored cultural production. A third factor was that such art became closely identified with the Roosevelt administration, a perception that strengthened its position as an 'authentic' national force whilst ultimately contributing to its downfall. Each of these themes is considered below.

How could art be 'socially useful'? As the repudiation of perspectives associated with the Commission of Fine Arts demonstrated, the cultural advisors appointed - rather than inherited - by Roosevelt had a clear idea of what constituted anti-social art. This was expressed in the numerous controls that they placed on form and content, often on quite arbitrary grounds but nevertheless sanctioned, at whatever level, by the state itself. The PWAP, for example, insisted that the residents of a Westport artists' colony 'were expressly forbidden to experiment with "cubism, futurism and all forms of modernism"'.[32] Even the Commission on Fine Arts contributed to this consensus; as one of eight bodies that vetted Post Office and Justice Department murals, it guarded against panels which contained 'quickly outmoded themes, ignored the beautiful, and promoted social theories "at variance with the established ideas of the fundamental rights and duties of citizenship"'.[33] This concern was not due to the strength of abstract artists within government projects, and at this time neither Willem de Kooning nor Arshile Gorky had broken completely with realist painting[34] (nor did they become members of the main abstract artists' organisation).[35] Instead it reflected the Commission's rather staid cultural horizons.

The styles available to PWAP artists were formally unrestricted, with the official report claiming that 'the art of our period had become a highly individualised expression. Therefore, very elastic and sympathetic rules had to be originated in order to deal justly with 2500 individuals, each working in his own highly personal manner'. The document also links the inception of the PWAP to 'exactly the right psychological moment [when t]he American artist had just gone through a period of eclecticism, but a few years before the beginning of the project he turned his mind a way from theorising for its own sake and toward the life and people of his country'.[36] This formulation tells only half the story, in that it describes a process that PWAP actively encouraged as occurring entirely independently. One reason for the minimal profile of art influenced by European modernism appearing under government auspices is that such experiments were ruled out by federal administrators, privileging instead 'American scene' painting. To many federal administrators, foreign 'isms' signified a potentially dangerous detachment from the concerns of the broader populace.[37]

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[32] *Ibid.* p.24.

[33] *Ibid.*, p.60.

[34] See 'Introduction: A Brief History' in David and Cecile Shapiro (eds.), *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.14-15.

[35] Clement Greenberg, 'The Late Thirties in New York' in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (1961) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p.230.

Those attempting to define 'socially useful' cultural production were forced to specify an appropriate relationship between the artist and society. This became an issue primarily because of the appropriation of federal funds to support unemployed artists; the government had to be seen to be getting its money's worth. From the beginning, concern as to the artist's economic future fused with apprehension over the future of the nation's creative talent. New Deal cultural projects were understood as preventing excessive hardship while providing a stimulus to the economy. This posed new questions: why not simply enrol the artist in the Civilian Conservation Corps? Was it really necessary that they continued to work in the professions they had worked in the period prior to 1929? The key to fending off such criticisms was the construction of a makeshift aesthetic of art with a social purpose.

The new role of the state, as the central consumer of artistic craft production, fed directly into a transformation of the criteria by which art's worth was judged. Sensitivity to criticisms over funding led the administrators of Federal One to hit back, by attributing to the public output of their projects the quality of being 'socially useful'. In addition, they asserted a dedication to overcoming the separation of society and the artist, the latter being widely perceived as inhabiting a proverbial ivory tower. Cahill hoped to overcome this 'through contemporary painting, with its emphasis on social and collective expressions, [which] gave a fresh and vital interpretation to the American way of life'.[38]

The ideology which accompanied a 'socially useful' project assumed numerous forms. It became one of the major non-economic imperatives which complemented the economic aims of Federal One. At the most basic level, it was assumed that an artefact's utility could be demonstrated empirically. On this basis, federal art decorated public buildings, on a scale which would fall outside the remit of the commercial sector. Likewise, given the absence of a viable 'heritage industry' during the Great Depression, the various attempts at recording and preserving the cultural life of an earlier generation could be projected as a service to the nation as a whole. Among the arts and crafts that were painstakingly reproduced were those of the Shaker communities and the Old West. Such explorations served to reopen the debate about a 'usable past' which had been dormant since the early 1920s.[39]

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[36] Public Works of Art Project, *Report of the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury to the Federal Emergency Relief Administrator: December 8, 1933 - June 30, 1934* (Washington, DC.: Government Printers, 1934) (FDRL copy), pp. 1-2. Another factor that reflected the changing fortunes of modernism was the return of US 'exiles' living in Europe (see Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel* [London: Secker and Warburg, 1995], pp.357-358).

[37] This theme returned to haunt the arts world in 1949, when Representative George A. Dondero claimed that 'modern art is Communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, and our material progress. Art which does not glorify our beautiful country in plain, simple terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. It is therefore opposed to our government, and those who create and promote it are our enemies'. Cited in Helen Cantor, 'Forbidden Art: Class, Culture and Censorship', *Women and Revolution*, Winter 1990-1991, p.16.

[38] Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation*, p.23.

The point is not that there was a sudden upsurge in interest in American history. Rather, current crises created a demand for it, for use as a political resource in the present. In appearance, the 'turn to the past' in the 1930s stemmed from needing the tried and tested to resolve pressing problems; in content, it was an attempt to situate the New Deal, with its experimentation and outcast constituencies, in a legitimate American tradition. Alfred Kazin summarised this process as the 'drive towards national inventory [which] began by reporting the ravages of the depression and ended by reporting on the national inheritance'.[40]

This search for national symbols reflected the effective closing of earlier controversies, and the desire for unity in the present. According to Alfred H. Jones

> Interpreters of the past responded to the mood of national unity, promoted by Franklin D. Roosevelt, which contrasted with the divisive temper of the preceding decade. Rarely speaking now in the solitary accents of a cultural elite, they sought instead to capture a wide and popular hearing ... in general, the gap between the writer and his society narrowed during the Thirties'.[41]

While this is undoubtedly so, interpreting the past was also a means for constructing a 'mood of national unity', eroding the bitter legacy of the 1920s and reintegrating those sections of society most estranged. Belisario Contreras makes an astute observation when he notes that 'Cahill's quest for unity had its roots in the ante-bellum era - a time when artist and society were not mutually excluded. To create a living present, his search meant going back into the past to restore the values of an agrarian society - shattered by the impact of the Civil War. The mechanisation of America in post-Civil War times challenged his goal; the ruthless newly rich looked to the stored up treasures of Europe for their art, and the American artist became alienated in his or her own land'.[42] Although it is doubtful whether an organic relationship between the cultural practitioner and agrarian America ever existed, this remains a useful formulation. Rather than simply reflecting popular sentiments, initiatives from state-cultural formations fostered actively a usable past, a viable national identity, and a consensus-oriented relationship between the state and wider society.

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[39] Alfred H. Jones, 'The Search for a Usable American Past in the New Deal Era', *American Quarterly* December 1971, pp. 711-714.

[40] Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p.487.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation*, p.160.

This is also apparent in the widespread insistence on craft production as the cornerstone of the national tradition. In the visual arts, especially the Index of American Design, artistic production was itself shielded from technical innovation and the methods of mass production. While FAP photographic units were established to record new creations like murals, the Index was keen to exclude photography as an accepted reproductive technique. From 1935 graphic artists were instructed to record American design in accordance with 'principles of "strict objectivity, clarity of construction, exact proportions, and faithful rendering of material, colour, and textures so that each index drawing might stand as surrogate for the objects"'.[43] Such assignments were frequently given to relief recipients who had been rejected by the creative projects, on the grounds of insufficient technical ability. Lack of skill helped make the Index's first year highly unproductive, increasing the pressure on its administrators to introduce photography. Cahill's aesthetic arguments for the superiority of hand-drawn work evaded the question as to whether federal art could incorporate industrial techniques while remaining classifiable as art.

The experience of the Index demonstrates the importance of heritage and a 'usable past' to FAP. Indeed, Cahill was of the belief that the 'stored up environment of the past' was a precondition for the development of the artist.[44] In organising resources in a fashion that could make this past available to all, FAP was provided with opportunities to train a new generation of American artists, while sparing some of their predecessors from the ravages of recession. Despite the new possibilities they posed, the projects' potential went partially unfulfilled. Arguably this was due to strictures placed upon their activities, such as the technical codes of conduct which applied to the Index of American Design, coupled with political control and regional proclivities for opposing modernism and cubism. Having established a mass media industry which aspired to produce high art for all, WPA/FAP protected its creation from the consequences of its own industrial character. Federal rules and regulations, developed on an ad hoc basis, meant that Federal One remained in effect a state-owned craft production industry throughout its existence. In consequence its output faced structural barriers to fulfilling its capacity as an agency of mass communication. Hence the suggestion in subsequent sections of this paper that Federal One projects were ineffective at fostering ethnic inclusion, while providing an acute record of those discourses in its favour.

In summary, we have presented two key prerequisites for the development of New Deal cultural patronage. The first of these came from the general counter-crisis measures conducted under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, which provided unemployment relief in exchange for work. Such activity was organised so as not to compete with what remained of existing commercial sectors. Public works were a key feature of the new regime which, in turn, led to the availability of resources for an innovative form of arts patronage. In the past, private foundations and benefactors had been the predominant source of such subsidies. Given this, the development of federal arts funding was unprecedented; it constituted both a break with established practices *and* a daring experiment. On this basis, appropriate models of how to implement such policies were hard to find.

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[43] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.136.

[44] Francis V. O'Connor (ed.), *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, CN.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p.34.

The second prerequisite is harder to describe, as it was predicated on a relatively complex relationship between a number of factors. In bringing these influences together, the question of appropriate models was at least functionally resolved. As we saw above, the Mexican muralists, American Scene painting and a less clearly defined notion of 'the national' came to the fore. At the same time, there occurred a process of elimination in which a number of contending models were ruled out. Among these were classical antiquity, European high modernism, and anything approximating the output of the mass culture industries. This process also involved a degree of negative self-definition: federal art *wasn't* what the Commission of Fine Arts wanted it to be, it *wasn't* what New York café society liked, and *was* more than mere illustration, of the kind found in magazines and in advertising. In part, this reflected the personal tastes and training of Roosevelt's cultural advisors and administrators: we should recall that their services, like those of their Commission predecessors, were requested by the state in the course of developing the new policies. It also reminds us of the often tactical basis for the presentation of federal art: concerned not to offend a particular dignitary or commentator, the administrators responsible had to anticipate potential problems in order to avoid conflict. Within the projects this resulted in self-censorship and caution, while in public state cultural patronage was legitimated by other means. As we noted above, a range of activities and a corresponding vocabulary developed within the ambit of 'socially useful' state functions.

Another major concern was the place of such cultural production in the construction of the 'national-popular'. As we have argued throughout this study, an important facet of the New Deal was the role assigned to culture in the mobilisation of support for the state formation. This is not to suggest the conspiratorial deployment of the state machinery to secure social and political consensus, but a semi-conscious process in which a selective tradition was assembled from the material at hand. As such, it gave expression to many of the tensions and contradictions of the era. However, restating these observations is insufficient to explain the orientation taken by such cultural production, which we consider below. On balance, it would appear that the general trajectory of the modes of representation adopted by Federal One corresponds to its place as part of a broader counter-crisis strategy.

In Chapter One it was argued that the Roosevelt administration inherited a specific dimension of the inter-war legitimation crisis from its predecessors. In the early 1920s much of political life had been organised around the exclusion of the urban, 'new immigrant' population. As the decade drew to a close, this became increasingly problematic. Not only was Prohibition becoming discredited, but the excluded masses were playing a central role in industrial expansion. At the ballot box, they played an important role in securing Roosevelt's ascendancy.[45] On this basis, the political influence of nativism receded into the background. An important aspect of Federal One was that it codified this process, for instance through the attempts of the Federal Writers Project to integrate the experience of the 'hyphenated American' into the cultural patronage being conducted under government auspices. In its search for a 'usable past', the documentary work of Federal One drew upon the immigrant experience and presented it as a vital component of American life. Simultaneously, it emphasised the contemporary irrelevance of ethnicity, except as an ascertainable 'way of life' that existed within certain communities. Anthropological work of this nature was conducted by special 'social-ethnic' units.

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[45] In addition, an important consideration was the way that the slump reorganised society's priorities: concerns as to the source of one's next meal took precedent over the maintenance of 'ethnic identity'. Thus, when Chicago's ethnically-owned banks collapsed between 1929 and 1933, the community leaders who

One consequence of this shift was that those who 'serve the nation best' could now have names like Morris Horowitz and Alfredo Tornazzi.[46] The validity of their contributions to the nation was catalogued by the Social-ethnic Studies Unit of the Writers Project, which worked in multi-ethnic areas. Among these, for instance, was the town of Barre, Vermont, where project workers noted the importance of festivals and mother-tongue languages in the *private* sphere. Despite the impact of the slump, social mobility in public life centred increasingly upon the capacity of individuals to present themselves as loyal Americans. Federal cultural production made heroes out of immigrant workers, as can be seen from *Men Against Granite*, a proposed FWP anthology which was never published. The surviving fragments we have, such as those in Ann Banks's edited anthology *First Person America*, are indicative of this process at work. In terms of a relationship to extant popular culture, this new framework had little in common with the Horatio Alger tradition, which presented the good fortune of entrepreneurial individuals as the basis for securing personal prosperity. In federal writing, European ethnic minorities were presented as having made an historic contribution to the nation, even as the activities distinct to their communities were scrutinised from an anthropological perspective. Although the results of New Deal patronage were *nationalist* in orientation, this does not mean that there was a return to the *nativism* of the previous decade.

Federal oral histories democratised ethnic subject matter, by scrutinising it within a framework which began by recording the particular experiences of first and second generation immigrants but went on to project this material as part of a more general American identity. Folk memories became a legitimate aspect of this broad national memory, with organisers like Benjamin Botkin keen to avoid tokenism and expand America's understanding of itself. Research under Botkin was characterised as 'racial group' work, based upon interviews with individuals in their communities. In contrast, Morton W. Royse was appointed in April 1938 to supervise distinctly 'social-ethnic' studies, which represented a more professional approach to this process of compiling memories. Techniques like group participation came to the fore, but the absence of sufficiently trained anthropologists served to hamstring the whole operation. These problems were

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administered such these establishments were held partly responsible (see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990], pp. 230-233).

[46] Both of these are pseudonyms given to interviewees who appear in the FWP manuscripts housed at the US National Archives, Washington DC. They are reproduced in Ann Banks, *First Person America* (New York: Vintage, 1981), pp. 31, 101.

compounded by a number of regional FWP directors who disagreed with social-ethnic studies on principle, such as William Couch of North Carolina, who argued that the extant assimilation in his locale made them undesirable.[47] What Couch did not recognise is that New Deal documentary contributed to a modified process of assimilation, in so far as state cultural policy had become orientated towards pluralist forms of representation of ethnic minorities. Whereas contemporary commentators often present assimilation and pluralism as polar opposites, federal art's implicit acceptance of two successive immigrant generations as *Americans* (while keeping their immigrant 'heritage' intact) suggests their *compatibility* in certain circumstances.

On this basis, representations of citizens produced as part of Federal One often assumed that the workers portrayed were Americans, irrespective of their ethnic origins. That such pluralism led to complaints about the 'extraordinary scarcity of names of Anglo-Saxon origin' among print makers suggests both the art and the artistic personnel of the New Deal era came to resemble more closely America's real ethnic composition.[48] There were also limits to this process; as Barbara Melosh demonstrates, the TRAP and its fellow projects deliberately minimised the presence of African-Americans, in murals and wall carvings.[49] Thus, in a manner perhaps akin to Soviet Socialist Realism, there was a public facade of neutrality in the presentation of minority groups, coupled with a normative selection of 'typical' figures. New Deal art accorded the latter role to white workers in industry and agriculture, which means that contemporary critics often see this as Federal One's way of enshrining racial divisions in public art. Although there is an element of truth in this, claim, it also reflects the erosion of the key 'racial' divide of the 1920s, between 'old stock' Americans and the 'new immigrants'.

Another less conscious limit to such inclusiveness was the prevailing 'common sense' understanding of popular culture, at least among the educated elite. According to this orthodoxy, the success of a mass cultural form could be judged in terms of its appeal to the lowest common denominator. In practice, this meant that federal attempts to lend art and writing mass appeal were tempered by this prejudice, itself little more than a mediated fear of the masses. We noted above that federal writing was far removed from the Horatio Alger tradition of popular narratives; for similar reasons, various dignitaries and hostile critics called for limits on the depiction of sordid aspects of city life, making avoiding causing offence into a priority for cautious administrators. The PWAP organising committee was also upset by mural competition entries on the theme of justice 'which emphasised chain gangs, evictions, third degrees, electrocutions, battling juvenile delinquents, and gangsters'. Concerns regarding unsuitable material also emerged during the Coit Tower episode, with Victor Arnautoff's mural panel attracting criticism for depicting street robbery and a car accident.[50] This theme continued to resurface, and even a number of the prestigious *State Guides* offended provincial sensibilities. The manifold attempts of federal writers and artists to emulate the 'hard-boiled' style in wide readership throughout the inter-war years was quashed, especially in murals destined for schools, hospitals or military establishments.

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[47] Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 154-158.

[48] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, p.118.

[49] Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1991).

[50] McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists*, pp. 60, 26.

In contrast, working class audiences continued to entertain themselves with such texts and, within the limits of censorship, such movies, usually supplied by the commercial entertainment industries. Pressures for conformity from Federal One administrators prohibited the construction of parallel hard-boiled narratives using government resources. Such restrictions were pursued most thoroughly at a local level, even to the extent that historical omissions had to be rectified by the central authorities: 'labour troubles, it seemed, were confined to areas with a dominant foreign population. It was as if the Haymarket riot, Al Capone, the socialist government of Reading, Pennsylvania, the Molly Maguires, and the Wobblies had never been'.[51] Such occurrences perhaps served to further distance federally sponsored cultural production from the constituencies with which it sought to communicate. This is demonstrated by the frequent exclusion of influences that administrators perceived as 'mass culture' (a censorious policy often pursued to the detriment of historical facts). As we have argued previously, New Deal cultural activity embraced the urban majority that was excluded by earlier nativistic policies, at least in terms of the resources it allocated to representing ordinary people. However, this process did not prevent federal administrators from policing what they saw as an unsavoury mass culture, by obstructing its incorporation into government funded art.

Thus, mass participation in New Deal culture developed in a rather uneven fashion. Although a mass audience existed for Federal Theatre, it was dwarfed in comparison to that of Hollywood. This contrast is even more apparent if we compare the readership of the Federal Writers Project's output to that of pulp fiction, where federal cultural policy failed to engage substantially with those constituencies whose representation it had democratised, albeit on an *ad hoc* basis. One aspect of this failure stemmed from Federal One's inability to adapt thoroughly to the existing cultural consumption of participants in the 'revolt of the cities'. Despite the existence of what was almost a mass communications industry built upon WPA relief programmes, it was difficult to build a base of mass support for Federal One. (This diverged sharply from the broader assimilatory successes of Roosevelt's coalition building.) Project regulations actively excluded many of the techniques that had revolutionised US popular culture, such as film and the mass production of generic fiction. Perhaps this explains why no durable point of contact between the nation state and the working class emerged on the basis of federal cultural patronage. However, we would maintain that this failure was not due primarily to the craft character of the projects, although this clearly posed a problem.

Prior to the age of mechanical reproduction, a prerequisite for art appreciation was a substantial amount of access to resources and leisure time. As our previous discussion of 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals suggested, such conditions had never existed in

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[51] Penkower, *Federal Writers' Project*, p.76.

America. Thus, the early pastoral societies of New England produced inadequate surpluses to sustain a significant strata engaged in the artisan production of the 'high arts'; this gave both a more central and perhaps more legitimate role to the mass culture industries which appeared subsequently.[52] In short, the peculiarities of American historical development meant that 'mass culture', shunned by European intellectuals, became an accepted point of the cultural firmament. However, to US intellectuals modelling themselves on European traditionalists - from Charles Moore to Walter Lippmann - the growth of culture industries signalled a terrible danger. Federal One administrators eschewed this outlook, because they saw mass communications as providing the basis for educating the majority, whilst simultaneously avoiding a 'cultural populism' which assumed that popular culture was valuable simply because of its popularity.

This vision - where enlightened intellectuals brought 'the best' to a culturally-deprived majority to improve society as a whole - was roughly analogous to that of Matthew Arnold. (Here we anticipate the comparison between federal documentary and that of Lippmann's former student John Grierson, which appears in Chapter Four.) However, unlike Arnold and European 'traditional intellectuals', New Deal cultural patronage was established in conditions where there was little consensus as to what constituted 'the best'. In so far as agreement existed between the key administrators of government cultural programmes, it was on the importance of a *national* cultural tradition. Such sentiments united a broad spectrum of opinion, spanning from staid Charles Moore to supporters of experimental drama like Hallie Flanagan.

Although the administrators agreed on the necessity of a national tradition, this did not in itself generate cohesion: this required active encouragement. Inter-state disputes over the content of the FWP's famous *State Guides* series expressed a host of regional rivalries, often conducted in the language of the Civil War. Federal administrators worked hard to rein in excessive 'local patriotism', ranging from copious use of adjectives like 'unique', 'first' and 'largest' to the Rousseau County, Mississippi, manuscript which 'made invidious comparisons with North Dakota regarding climate and attractiveness to settlers'. Secondly, what began as a structural flaw of FWP - its lack of regional organisers, compensated for by Washington-based field officers - lent local coverage a unitary federal character. The deployment of field officers in this way also ensured greater local usage of material dropped from the state guides.[53] Divisions between states, sometimes indicative of tensions internal to the US establishment, obstructed the federal authorities from simply imposing a culture of national unity from above. On this national plane, there was a turn to recording America's past.

This was a project which gelled felicitously with the federal criteria insisting that craft production on relief schemes was 'socially useful' in character. Financed from state revenue rather than produced for profit, the output of the Writers Project was under no pressure to generate commercially viable literature. In other words, this orientation toward 'socially useful' work also steered cultural patronage clear of the areas dominated by commercial publishing and Hollywood cinema. Such arrangements facilitated a state guidebook series, technical instruction booklets, and a number of oral history projects. Taken collectively, the state guides project an unambiguous American national identity. (As an aside, the relationship between the WPA and the state guides was in many respects more coherent than that of the Roosevelt administration to individual states[54].) However, the oral histories recorded under the New Deal were more ambiguous, indicative of its pluralist aspirations.

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[52] Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto, 1984), pp. 29-30.
[53] Penkower, *Federal Writers' Project*, pp. 138, 76.

In Studs Terkel's words, such government projects 'recaptured American talk'. In the process they addressed the immigrant experience, by giving it representation in print and archival form. The project combined assimilationist and pluralist elements, in that it aspired to create comprehensive, interview-based anthologies of 'American lore' which treated new immigrants as Americans irrespective of their ethnic background. These divergent elements were exemplified by H.R. Greene, a former *New York Times* promotion manager now attached to FWP, who issued the article 'Have you discovered America?', to 'reveal the country's unfamiliar ethnic colonies and to tell of the Project's plans'.[55] The apparent contradiction between one nation and many was in fact a necessary feature of the presentation of the New Deal state; as part of a broader hegemonic strategy, national culture as constructed by Federal One was both pluralist *and* a melting pot. New arrivals were welcomed as Americans regardless of their background, but this process of assimilation was not to be accelerated by an external force. The language of tolerance, exemplified in federal anthropological projects, was an important component in the assembly of the New Deal as a national-popular hegemonic bloc. (In practice class divisions and the even the shameful immigration controls of the 1920s remained intact, however.)

Another of FWP director Henry G. Alsberg's initiatives in 1935 was the largest exercise in gathering American folklore ever undertaken. State projects were often overwhelmed with material; this led to such titles as *Hoosier Tall Stories* (Indiana), *Idaho Lore, Webfoot Whoppers* (Oregon, unpublished), *God Bless the Devil!* (Tennessee) and *Bundle of Troubles, and other Tarheel Tales* (North Carolina), among others. Benjamin Botkin, the FWP's folklore editor and consultant, was explicit that gathering 'folk fantasy rather than folk knowledge' was his objective.[56] The urban 'new immigrant' had many a 'liar's bench tale' to tell and these were also incorporated into the projects where possible. In terms of the relationship between federal activity and the mass culture industries, discussed above, an informal distinction was established: whereas the spectacular and lurid were acceptable as government-compiled folk culture, they could not be produced by federal employees during work time.[57] Briefly, it seemed that federal writers engaged in compiling lore were creating a division between an acceptable folk culture, predominantly rural, and a highly suspect mass-produced urban culture. They also sought to avoid enraging every critic of

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[54] See James T. Patterson, 'The New Deal and the States', *American Historical Review,* October 1967, especially pp. 74, 77, 82.

[55] Penkower, *Federal Writers' Project*, pp. 134.

[56] Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, p. 270.

[57] Among the most accessible FWP products was *American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse Produced by Members of the Federal Writers Project of New York* (New York: Viking, 1937), compiled largely from 'after hours' material.

WPA who already felt that the content of certain writings was either vulgar, salacious or inappropriate.

As was established previously, the initiators of Federal One largely presented it in terms of its utility to society, in turn provoking further discussion around such themes as public access to art, methods of art circulation, and - significantly - the idea that craft-produced culture had an educational application beyond the printed word or the gallery. These themes were made even more explicit through the work of the Federal Writers' Project, which was committed to producing 'factual' as opposed to 'creative' writing. Although Federal Theatre was permitted to stray off this documentary path by staging 'theatrical' productions, it also devoted resources to educational activities like the Living Newspaper. Only Nikolai Sokoloff's Federal Music Project escaped this obligation to find activities for its employees that produced concretely 'useful' results, in that it could perform an established musical repertoire without fear of appearing anti-social. This aspect of the Music Project did not undermine those of its functions that were performed in tandem with other WPA cultural projects, such as providing music education and occasionally commissioning new orchestral pieces with distinctly American themes.[58] Taken collectively, the four main units of Federal One provided unemployment relief while insisting that the cultural production which ensued conformed to the non-economic imperative that it was socially useful.

The next stage in this process was a shift from 'socially useful' art to the more specific goal of constructing a 'national inventory'. This demands an explanation of the various mediating links. One of these is the 'documentary impulse', which went on to inform the received image of the 1930s. This is a theme that we consider in more depth in Chapter Four. However, this does not explain the underlying impetus towards the production of such documentaries, which we locate in the changing relationship between the cultural practitioner and society. At a discursive level this theme was presented in the language of service, and accompanied by its more radical 'cousin', the concept of the committed writer (which acquires greater significance in Section Two of this study). Readers are reminded that this discourse expressed the reorganisation of hegemony, as the polarisation between Herbert Hoover (the 'great engineer') and Al Smith (the 'Happy Warrior'/hero of the cities) gave way to Brains Trust activities and alphabet agencies. Behind the wide-ranging discussion of a public role for intellectuals lay the ascendancy of a new fraction of state administrators.

The perception that 'the people' were culturally - as well as economically - deprived was also widespread, at least in the rhetoric of New Deal administrators. Thus, Holger Cahill complained of a 'cultural erosion far more serious than that of the Dust Bowl' leaving the country 'practically barren of art and art interest'.[59] Lewis Mumford, among the most prominent American intellectuals of his day, also defended state arts patronage in these terms.[60] Cahill and Mumford were not alone in explaining cultural 'services' by identifying a general need. In effect, the collapse of the market for craft-produced art could be invoked to justify government arts patronage. That is, provided a consensus could be maintained that art could perform a useful service to a constituency far wider than just the artists in receipt of relief.

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[58] Arthur Jarvis Jr., 'The WPA's Forgotten Muse: The Federal Music Project's Civic Symphony Orchestra', paper presented at 'FDR After 50 Years: the Politics and Culture of the 1930s and 1940s', September 1995, Louisiana State University at Shreveport.

[59] O'Connor, *Art for the Millions*, p.38.

This was reflected in a variety of official documents that were central to smooth administration of state projects, notably PWAP and Federal One. For instance, in the government-sponsored account of PWAP, it was predicted that the monetary value of 'embellishments to public property' would increase over time, in line with 'practically all honest straightforward, and capable works of art done in past centuries'.[61] The double-edged character of this formulation is explicit; New Deal public art is placed on a continuum with painting and sculpture throughout history, while its potential advantages for the government's coffers are promoted. Combining these themes in official discussions suggested that the administrators responsible treated art's aesthetic and political aspects as almost interchangeable. Simultaneously, the terms 'honest, straightforward, and capable' were uncritically assimilated as normative aesthetic criteria. Realism - in the loose sense of seemingly unmediated figurative representation - was thus privileged in official discourse, on 'common sense' grounds.

More generally, the very fact of having a cultural policy at all became ‘a sign of the civilised time we are living in through [Roosevelt's] leadership’.[62] The President himself led something of a double life in public arts, which combined adjudicating on personnel matters with commissioning selected public buildings and their attendant embellishments. This process was further reinforced by numerous ceremonial duties, such as when Roosevelt opened facilities which were part of the national cultural programme, whether directly or indirectly (e.g. whether art museums or government offices decorated under the auspices of the WPA or Section of Fine Arts). In recalling our presentation of New Deal cultural patronage as a strategic response to legitimation crisis, we should consider the mutual self-flattery of figures like Bruce and Biddle as an expression of the extent to which they thought that their approach was successful, hence the reference to living through ‘civilised times’. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, this perception exaggerated the depth of support for public arts funding.

The leading pioneers of government arts patronage operated with a degree of autonomy in aesthetic matters, provided their political credentials were compatible with those of the government. However, such conditions did not preclude the direct innovations of the President himself. An example of Roosevelt's willingness to modify long-standing New Deal themes could be seen when he opened the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). In keeping with the prevailing ethics, he argued that the

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[60] Mumford, ‘The Government Should Support Art’, *New Republic* December 30, 1936; reprinted in Howard Zinn (ed.), *New Deal Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p.171.
[61] Public Works of Art Project, *Report of the Assistant Secretary*, p.2.
[62] Bruce to Roosevelt via McIntyre, February 26, 1938, PPF 2577; see also OF 10, FDRL.

'conditions for art and democracy are one and the same'.[63] Indeed, 'in encouraging the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things we are furthering democracy itself'. Hence the argument that the travelling exhibit was the ideal form to 'extend the perspective of the general public which too often has been accustomed to think of the fine arts as painting, and possibly sculpture'.[64] In the process, the definition of art becomes broadened to include contemporary industrial design, architecture (including 'the great social art' - housing), photography, the printed book, illustration, the advertising poster and the moving picture. The accepted conception of the high arts, coupled with their implicit alienation from a popular audience, was being challenged by some of the highest authorities in the land.

A second strand of this approach was the projection backwards across history of contemporary proclivities for popular participation in the arts. Striking a populist note, Roosevelt claimed that American art had 'always belonged to the people and has never been the property of an academy or a class'.[65] In effect, the urban and rural regionalisms of the 'American scene' were being accorded an eternal position in an emerging nationalist historiography.

With the benefits of hindsight, the MOMA radio address allows us to detect a presentiment of the arguments which later devastated the credibility of federal art, and the regionalist traditions it co-opted. Roosevelt ended his speech by stating:

> As in our democracy we enjoy the right to believe in different religious creeds or none, so can American artists express themselves with complete freedom from the strictures of dead artistic tradition and political ideology.[66]

Roosevelt's emphasis on the importance of artistic freedom is unobjectionable, and no doubt tradition and ideology share similar representational and discursive terrain. At the same time, each constitutes a distinct, relatively autonomous level of cultural production, existing and developing from within complex webs of interconnection, sometimes in opposition to each other, sometimes in a more unified relationship. This can be seen in the experience of later years, where the two were subject to further conflation under the pressures of anti-communism. Roosevelt's emphasis on the necessary independence of art from ideology rebounded badly, when it was deployed in a number of arguments against the allegedly 'totalitarian' New Deal state. As free market conservatives attempted to regain the ground that they lost in 1929, a form of political ideology emerged which called into question the orthodoxies of the New Deal.[67] The normative influence of Democratic Party hegemony became frayed at the edges, which affected popular commentary (and, from a different perspective, critical assessments) of the cultural patronage of the 1930s.

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[63] Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Only When Men are Free Can the Arts Flourish, the Civilisation of National Culture Reach Full Flower', Radio Dedication to the Museum of Modern Art, New York City (May 10, 1939).
[64] *Ibid.*, p.337.
[65] *Ibid.*, p.337.
[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.
[67] See George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic, 1976), pp.105-107, 123-124; the impact of this process on the visual arts is explored in Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Conclusion

Reactions against the New Deal's legislative packages engendered a public discussion about what role government should play in social life. Amidst this climate, some commentators felt that the administration missed opportunities for effective communication with its constituencies. Thus Malcolm Cowley remarked:

> 'I do not think that the first New Deal lost heavily by not engaging the interest of writers, except possibly in one respect. If a few writers had been part of it, they might have explained it better to the public. The New Dealers themselves were inspired talkers, but most of them didn't write English; they wrote in the different jargons of economists, sociologists, lawyers, or administrators, or in that mixture of all four to which Harold Ickes, I think it was, later gave the name of gobbledygook ... Good writers in Washington might have helped the Brains Trust to project a less sinister image of itself; in that one respect the projects of those early days might have suffered from their absence'.[68]

Despite Cowley's frustration, it can be argued that over time the administration came to realise the importance of engagement with the cultural practitioner in order to cement its relationship with broader social currents.

The Depression led to an increase in state intervention, especially under the Roosevelt administration. This created a framework with which to overcome some of the problems of political legitimacy, both at the level of reorganising accumulation and cohering for the state a base of popular loyalty. However, such a process was not free of contradictions; indeed, to certain sections of society it proved highly traumatic. Against this backdrop we find the novelty of the New Deal cloaked in the language of the past, where innovation was presented as an extension of established traditions and the outcome of cultural evolution.[69] Those state institutions which supervised cultural production expressed this process most clearly.

The Depression prompted a reorganisation of the relationship between the state and the arts. In some quarters it was even experienced as a new period of creativity, which both allowed residents in the most backward areas of US to see murals, briefly freeing realist art from its exclusive association with illustration and hence the newspaper and graphics industry.[70] Such energies were also channelled in the direction of mass communications, hence the emphasis in our study on the way that Roosevelt himself centred a discussion of artistic development on the question of national identity or, more specifically, what Gramsci termed the 'national popular'.

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[68] Cowley, *The Dream of Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930s* (1965) (New York: Penguin, 1980), p.182.

[69] Jones, 'Search for a Usable Past', *passim.*

[70] See John F. White (ed.), *American Art Centres and the New Deal* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1987).

This process was itself subject to further modification. Federal One itself faced expenditure cuts between 1937 and 1939, commencing with the closure of the Federal Theatre Project and ending in the subordination of its remaining appendages to the US war effort. While this shift did not make New Deal arts patronage into a *political* mouthpiece for American war aims, it did mean that federal cultural production was substantially reorganised. This process was both quantitative and qualitative; the scale of the projects was reduced, while their themes were narrowed down to matters that were largely technical and designed to assist the military. In turn, this allowed for the disassociation of Federal One from the more complex sensibility that had first engendered it: hence much of wartime 'federal art' confined itself to propaganda posters.[71] This trend towards the projects' disintegration was accelerated by the growing chorus decrying 'big government', boondoggles and communist affiliations, all of which assailed the very notion of arts patronage in the late 1930s.

In so far as such negative sentiments suggest a rudimentary form of Cold War demonology, they functioned as a distorted mirror image of the New Deal. In contrast to the latter, which attempted to overcome the legitimacy crisis discussed previously, the attack on the New Deal was itself a reaction to the changing demands of the 1930s. Given the centrality of state intervention to the war effort, its outright abolition was not a practicality. In contrast, cultural patronage based on craft production was a more peripheral component of state intervention, making it an easier target of those who resented the increasing influence of the state. In the penultimate chapter of this study we examine the demise of federal cultural patronage, which denied Roosevelt the opportunity to institute a national artistic tradition in his own image.

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[71] See Cecile Whiting, *Anti-Fascism in American Art* (New-Haven, CN.: Yale University Press, 1989), *passim.*

Chapter 4 - Documenting a National Inventory

WPA Federal One was a department of the state. In previous chapters we argued that the cultural production conducted within state projects could not be assessed with the criteria employed by the pre-depression arts critics. This reflected both the collapse of much of the established market for art, and the WPA's preoccupation with mass unemployment. In consequence, this allowed for cultural policy and types of white collar employment relief to be discussed in language far removed from profit and loss. Thus, instead of judging success in terms of efficiency and a balanced budget, as favoured by Hoover, 'socially useful' activities were put at a premium. At least in terms of presentation, unemployment policy was being guided by non-economic imperatives. At the level of arts patronage, the standards of an earlier generation were called into question.

Critical acclaim was no longer a function of the gallery and museum, underpinned by the arts market; given the impact of the Depression, state intervention displaced many of the accompanying institutional power centres. In comparison, the publishing industry had suffered only a relative decline. Despite the differential impact of the slump upon art, writing, literature and music, the standard of social utility could be applied to the various branches of cultural production. Within limits, it allowed state activity to side step the charge of competing with private industry. Thus the foundation was laid for Federal One to orient its production towards educational goals. Such objectives suggested the scope for an official cultural practice to play a role in the socialisation of US citizens.

As we saw previously, the initial experiment in government arts patronage was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Although locally-based antecedents existed, primarily in New York, the PWAP became the mechanism through which the new strategy was projected onto the national stage. It ran from December, 1933 to June, 1934, whereupon it was wound up, as was its parent body, the Civil Works Administration (CWA). While its output varied from the mundane to the spectacular, PWAP was significant in terms of the precedent it set, hence its differentiation from 'the average governmental activity' in the official report on its work, which was largely accountable to the Treasury.[1] In explaining the dual motivation behind this project, the report's author pointed to two concerns that were central to the employment of the 2500[2] PWAP cultural practitioners: that they needed the work, and that they were sufficiently qualified to embellish public buildings and parks in an appropriate manner.

PWAP stipulations exercised a contradictory influence, in that means-testing artists as the precondition to their employment[3] usually meant that those potentially most competent at furnishing public spaces were often ineligible to work on the project. Cultural workers able to secure PWAP relief then negotiated a second hazard, that of

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[1] Public Works of Art Project, *Report of the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury to the Federal Emergency Relief Administrator: December 8, 1933 - June 30, 1934* (Washington, DC.: Government Printers, 1934) (FDRL copy).

[2] The total given in the report for artists recieving PWAP renumeration was 3,749 (*ibid.*, p.5).

[3] See McKinzie, *A New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton UP, 1973), p.18.

how to produce. The styles available to them were formally unrestricted, with the official report claiming that 'the art of our period had become a highly individualised expression. Therefore, very elastic and sympathetic rules had to be originated in order to deal justly with 2500 individuals, each working in his own highly personal manner'. In the same report, the authors link the inception of the PWAP to 'exactly the right psychological moment [when t]he American artist had just gone through a period of ecleticism, but a few years before the beginning of the project he turned his mind away from theorising for its own sake and toward the life and people of his country'.[4] This formulation tells only half the story, in that it described a process that it actively encouraged as occurring entirely independently. One reason for the relative lack of any government-sponsored art that was influenced by European modernism was that such experiments were ruled out by federal administrators, who instead privileged 'American scene' painting.

Part of the problem of patronage, as PWAP administrator Edward Bruce experienced it, was largely unconnected with its representational style. The closure of the Civil Works Administration in the Spring of 1934 was due to the restructuring of a number of state appendages,[5] and it deprived the PWAP of a patron. Bruce realised that federal arts would require funding from a different branch of the state apparatus; the task was to find one. In turn, this posed the attendant problem of how to secure such support, 'encouraging art with the widest popular appeal and thwarting art which might bring awkward public outbursts that would embarrass or anger Congress and the President'.[6] Despite a formal commitment to artistic freedom, experimental and non-representational art was seldom paid for from the public purse. Running the PWAP schooled Bruce in a form of administration which would more or less restrict public artists to conventional depictions of reality. Although conceived as part of a broader economic counter-crisis strategy, an unintended consequence of public arts funding was the institutionalisation of a documentary sensibility. This also forces us to examine the question, suggested by Patricia Hills, of whether a definition of art can legitimately emphasise a particular 'look' over ideology.[7] In other words, we must consider the relationship between aesthetic styles and the latent, manifest and 'common sense' assumptions about the social order.

In its objectives, PWAP was dedicated to combining relief criteria with finding social applications (i.e. unemployment relief and decorating public buildings) of the high arts. However, simply allocating Bruce this goal would not necessarily solve the problem of the appropriate methods by which to pursue these goals. Confusingly, public discussion was often fixated with the forms and techniques deemed unsuitable. Thus, anything that too closely approximated extant mass culture industries was taboo, and a similar prohibitive aesthetics was applied to avant-garde techniques. Nudity, conventional subject matter for countless artists, was also off-limits. In sum, public tastes and the views of opinion-makers were a key influence in delimiting the forms that became central to New Deal cultural production. As we saw in Chapter Two, similar concerns led to the conflict between Roosevelt and the Commission of Fine Arts. More generally, such a climate ensured that the subjects of New Deal art were represented in a manner that assumed that public comprehension required familiar topics and 'accurate' representation. Among federally funded artists official aesthetics informed an atmosphere that placed realism at a premium.

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[4] Public Works of Art Project, *Report of the Assistant Secretary ...*, pp.1-2. Another factor that reflected the changing fortunes of modernism was the return of US 'exiles' living in Europe. See Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1995), pp.357-358.

[5] Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins, Volume 1: The Men Who Shaped Our Lives* (1948) (NewYork: Bantam, 1950), p.69.

[6] McKinzie, *New Deal for Artists*, p.21.

[7] Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s* (Boston Mass.: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983), p.9.

By coupling this sensibility with the turn to national historical themes, considered in Chapter Three, one can begin reassembling in its entirety the 'documentary impulse' said to embody the 1930s; if the decade had a distinctive 'look', it was that of documentary. As William Stott's influential study argues, 'the documentary approach and the documentary genre were characteristic of the 1930s'.[8] Given our recurrent emphasis on the discursive reconstruction of this decade, further exploration of this distinctive 'look' is necessary, perhaps echoing Hills's claim that the 'WPA spirit' applied to much of the art world, not just art projects.[9] Before considering the relationship of documentary to the decade that popularised it, we should establish the parameters of the category. The term itself came into widespread use during the depression. In etymological terms, it was derived from 'document' - a thing, usually written that furnishes evidence - and the French *documentaire*, or travelogue. It has been an ambiguous category since its inception, raising numerous questions of objectivity, neutrality and truth.[10]

However, this aspect of documentary becomes harder to sustain in light of another definition, more closely related to the verb 'to document', meaning to record and describe (for instance, the process of writing a diary) . Under this definition, the act of documentation brings individual perceptions to bear upon an otherwise 'objective', 'external' collection of facts. In short, documentary acts as a bridge between facticity and interpretation, moving back and forth between these distinctive levels of analysis. The peculiarity of documentary its credibility and reputation for being more 'truthful' than contending representational terrains.[11] Although lack of space prohibits a more detailed discussion of the relationship between documentary and reality, a brief synopsis of our position would suggest the following: it is possible to arrive at a contingently 'true' approximation of reality, subject to subsequent modification, neither reaching an ultimate 'last instance' nor rejecting truth in favour of a plurality of interpretations. Being and consciousness can be temporarily united in a moment of practical intervention, but this does not invalidate their separation into distinctive analytical categories. Documentary can be a mechanism for achieving their unity, but it also has its pitfalls, often reflecting the tenuous proximity of particular documentary sources to an external 'truth'.

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[8] Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (1973: University of Chicago Press, 1986 edition), p.67.

[9] Hills, *Social Concern*, p.12.

[10] For instance, a document can be seen as a neutral bearer of information, such as a passport or bank statement. In law, such artefacts can be given the status of providing documentary proof, devoid of opinion or editorial comment.

[11] The present author's framework for discussing documentary is derived largely from Stott's work, although Forsyth Hardy's anthology of essays *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) has also proved useful in this respect.

None of this answers the question as to why a turn towards documentary occurred in the 1930s. It was certainly not the only cultural initiative specific to the decade - witness the rise of the escapist Hollywood drama - but nevertheless it remains highly significant. We situate documentary's growing stature across a range of arenas; in state intervention, the slump, extant mass culture industries, and the rise of 'commitment' among cultural practitioners. Taken together, such factors allowed documentary to exercise a significant influence upon public art.

In terms of the first factor, documentary was institutionalised; in Stott's rather simplistic formulation, the New Deal 'made the weapon that undermined the establishment part of the establishment'.[12] This argument would certainly accord with the predominant New Left interpretation of the New Deal, which stressed the Roosevelt administration's amelioration of some of the worst features of the depression while preserving the economic and social order.[13] While a useful corrective to the adulation that sometimes characterises the work of such central New Deal historians as William Leuchtenburg and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., it one-sidedly attributes great strengths to the New Deal state. The government's turn to documentary production was essentially contradictory in character, in that it demonstrated a certain flexibility at the level of counter-crisis measures while inevitably codifying the crisis itself, embedding a variety of responses to the slump in the public sphere. It was both part of a process of establishing hegemony *and* a form of compromise. Documentary is among the facets of the New Deal that do not conform to these 'statecraft' and 'containment' schools of traditional and New Left revisionist historiography, reflecting instead the broader compromises of the 1930s.

The documentary ethos found its leading exponent not in America, but on the other side of the Atlantic. In the hands of John Grierson, a Scottish student of moral philosophy and an understudy of Walter Lippmann between 1924 and 1927, documentary became a mechanism for guiding public opinion. The key to Grierson's approach was the 'selective dramatisation of the facts', not to entertain, but to overcome what he conceived to be the problem of modern democracy, namely the impossibility of citizens being sufficiently well-informed to make decisions on all manner of public affairs. There were two sides to this approach; the demand for facticity in representation - and its implicit opposition to 'escapist' entertainment - and the management of public opinion. Given the existence of documentary cultural production (e.g. 'social' novels, Muckraking journalism, and Robert Flaherty's romantic anthropological films) *prior* to Grierson's work, we can assume that the novelty of his documentary vision lay in its attempt to procure popular consent for the hegemonic order. Moreover, Grierson's vision was shaped by his years in the United States, where the influence of Lippmann's ideas came to the fore. Despite their eventual differences, noted below, the common features of their philosophy suggests the applicability of Grierson's approach in an American context. According to Hardy, who is quoted at length below, 'studying the press, the cinema, and other instruments affecting public opinion' profoundly affected Grierson:

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[12] Stott, *Documentary Expression*, p.92.

[13] Ronald Radosh, 'The Myth of the New Deal', in Radosh and Murray N. Rothbard (eds.), *A New History of Leviathan* (New York: EP Dutton, 1972), pp. 154-187. For an acerbic summary of this approach see Irwin Unger, 'The "New Left" and American History: Some Recent Trends in US Historigraphy', *American Historical Review*, July 1967, p.1237.

> What he learned about the sources of power over men's minds determined his outlook for the future. Men like Walter Lippmann were saying at the time that the older expectations of democratic education were impossible, since they appeared to require that the ordinary citizen should know every detail of public affairs as they developed from moment to moment. With Lippmann, Grierson agreed that the view of education which assumed that stuffing the citizen with facts would enable him to act intelligently according to his interest was untenable in a complex society. But Grierson did not share Lippmann's apparent discouragement. For the indiscriminate transmission of facts, Grierson opposed the possibility of a selective *dramatization* of facts in terms of their human consequences. Interpretation through the dramatic media could give individuals 'a common purpose of thought and feeling' with which they could usefully approach the complex issues of modern living. The power to tap the springs of action had slipped away from the schools and churches and had come to reside in the popular media, the movies, the press, the new instrument of radio, and all the forms of advertising and propaganda. Grierson proposed to study the dramatic and emotional techniques by which these media had been able to command the sentiments and loyalties of the people where many of the instruments of education and religion had failed.[14]

Hardy's long summary is useful, in that it brings together many of the key concerns that informed the turn toward documentary. On one hand are the changing conditions that brought Lippmann's preoccupation with social cohesion to the fore. On the other is the attempt to develop a workable body of propaganda techniques to restore a semblence of consensus in society. Both Lippmann and Grierson felt that the mass culture industries eroded a wider sense of citizenship, but Grierson, unlike his mentor, was not averse to using forms of *mass communication*, such as film. His dislike of mass culture did not prevent his application of these industrial techniques to pursue his wider concerns with educating public opinion. (Incidentally, the widespread preoccupation with mass culture meant that adherents of this view failed to recognise its role in forging common experiences across an ethnically heterogeneous American working class, thereby contributing to social cohesion.)[15]

Grierson found American counterparts in Roy E. Stryker, Rexford Guy Tugwell and Thomas Munro, who were effectively the heirs to Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine's tradition of using 'social problem' photography to augment reform efforts.[16] In the late 1920s, Tugwell and Stryker used photography to popularise the idea of a multi-ethnic workforce building America through its steel industry.[17] Under the New Deal, Stryker coordinated the Farm Security Administration's photography projects while Tugwell, an economist informed by a left-wing form of moral philosophy, was a prominent advisor in the National Recovery Administration.[18] Thus, at an institutional level, the links between documentary and state power are self-evident; in turn, they cast a new light on what was probably the definitive 1930s 'look'.

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[14] Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary*, pp. 13-14.

[15] See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919-1939*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), *passim*.

[16] Stott, *Documentary Expression*, p.30.

[17] Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement*, p.32; Pete Daniel *et al*, *Official Image: New Deal Photography* (Washington, DC.: Smithsonian, 1987), p.12. This approach was grounded in a recognition of the way that ethnic divisions had proved obstructive to recruitment in a 1919 Chicago Union drive. See Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p.39.

[18] Conkin, *The New Deal*, pp.36, 42.

Given that Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein were state employees, it appears that their depictions of hungry 'Okies' and the Texan dustbowl were officially sanctioned. In other words, New Deal documentary photography was not simply a reflection of 'the facts' but also a cultural construction of reality, in keeping with the process Grierson described as 'selective dramatisation'. Furthermore, the state can be seen as a constitutive factor in this process of selection, opening two fronts on which to interrogate 1930s documentary culture. It can be assessed both on the basis of its position in government arts policy, and its own 'immanent' logic as a method for constructing facticity.

The 'policy' aspect of federal documentary is explored below, located in the semi-conscious process of discovery through which Roosevelt and his co-thinkers formulated an essential unity between New Deal and 'national' art. In terms of the 'internal' construction of documentary, we should dispense with the notion that it simply 'reveals' hitherto hidden truths. Thus, 'the "actuality" of people's lives is not just transmitted through the filter of political discourse or the camera lens, when politicians or journalists or documentary film-makers "go out" to the people. Rather, the discourses which concern themselves with the people and their culture are mediations of reality which codify the social and political relations of the observer to the observed'.[19] On this basis, we can interpret the 'documentary impulse' as being anchored in concrete social relations; a concern with discovering 'the facts' was also an expression of society's overall trajectory.

This process of mediation is further complicated once the 'actuality' represented becomes more diffuse and indeterminate. For instance, Walker Evans's photographs of sharecroppers presented a tightly defined and 'manageable' object of study than, say, a mural commissioned on the theme of the 'progress of medicine'. The latter would present difficulties at the level of interpretation and presentation; in distinguishing between concrete medical breakthroughs and their figurative representation, the historian could also reveal the arbitrary regulatory framework behind official murals. Since the 'reality' of medicine cannot be reproduced in facsimile form in a mural, its development would be conveyed instead through a selection of representative elements. Formally, fact and opinion are separated, and the mural would ostensibly provide a 'window on the world'. However, this distinction between 'factual' and 'creative' cultural production is one we would wish to qualify. While maintaining that historical processes are not the same thing as 'discourse', we would also contend that documentary should not be viewed solely as a neutral interpretation of external facts. Instead we would echo the spirit, if not the bluntness, of John Mander's claim that 'in "documentary" the author is a transcendant god who may visit and visibly interfere with his own creation'.[20] On this basis, documentary becomes 'a prism, refracting the image of reality through the medium of the observer's "gaze" and the actual cultural apparatus which he/she serves'.[21] As New Deal documentarists served the Roosevelt administration, one would expect them to construct 'realities' that embraced its political outlook.

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[19] Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, pp. 18-19.
[20] Mander, *The Writer and Commitment* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p.106.
[21] Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, p.45.

One aspect of this process was the inclusive, pluralist vision of the American citizen that eschewed the nativist politics of the 1920s. As we argue elsewhere, this represented more than a simple switch in strategy by an all-powerful state. New Deal art accompanied the institutional response to the shifting position of the masses; thus, although between 1918 and 1924 support for the state was cohered around red scares, Prohibition and immigration control, such an exclusive definition of nationhood was becoming unviable. In effect, it left the most productive section of society - the industrial working class - adrift from the polity. Although New Deal measures were designed to address the slump, they also brought the 'new immigrants' (later known as the 'white ethnics') back into the orbit of the state. New Deal cultural policy proved entirely commensurate with this shift, in that it rehabilitated the masses, rather than concentrating on the coercive functions practiced by the preceding Republican administrations. Indicative of this shift was the way that the working class was deemed worthy of study, resulting in the establishment of the FWP's social ethnic units.[22] Moreover, the 'worker' emerged as a key emblem, in conditions where 'both putatively Communist (USSR) and Democratic (USA) states mobilized the rhetoric of economic and social transformation within their official ideological missions - the supposed creation of Socialism in the USSR, and the reorganisation of capitalism into a managed, morally defensible democratic system in the USA'.[23]

Thus, the documentary content of federal cultural patronage sprang from often contradictory moral imperatives. On one hand, it had to be accessible to a popular constituency; on the other it could not compete directly with the mass culture industries. Likewise, it provided employment for cultural practitioners on an industrial scale while preserving the craft character of their production. Illustrators and easel painters alike were given an opportunity, albeit in controlled conditions, to engage in an approximation of mass communication using murals, but this innovative method of circulating such images was insulated from analogous modifications of technique. Whereas documentary cinema combined industrial production with extant forms of anthropology, New Deal art and writing was predicated on long established techniques. (An important exception to this was the Living Newspaper, considered at greater length below.) Its novelty lay in the notion that such craft production was shifted from the gallery and used to embellish public buildings, in order to bring to the fore a vision of a renewed America. We have characterised this attempt at connecting a cultural apparatus with external 'facts' the *documentary impulse*, and its impact cannot be confined to New Deal patronage alone. State-subsidised documentary formed a connection between cultural apparatuses and 'the people', but this alone is insufficient to explain why this relationship came about. As we see in later chapters, the prevalence in the 1930s the literary uses of reportage suggest that an emphasis on documentary pervaded the intelligentsia's outlook on many levels. In order to understand these trends better, we should consider the norms and strategies of representation that took shape under the tutelege of state arts bodies.

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[22] This argument also appears in Barnfield, *Addressing Estrangement*. Apart from the rather leaden prose style, the present author would stand by much of this study. However, with hindsight it is clear that it underplays the impact of the slump on the legitimation crisis that it depicts.

[23] Jonathan Harris, 'Modernism and Culture in the USA, 1930-1960', in Paul Wood *et. al.*, *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1992), p.13.

In recent years this consensus-forming activity has drawn a number of criticisms. Barbara Melosh, for instance, notes the dominance of gendered images in federal art and theatre.[24] Elsewhere, John Tagg offers a challenging reading of the photography of the Farm Security Administration. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorisation of the relationship between power and knowledge, Tagg encourages the reader to question 'documentary realism'. As we saw previously, such realism informed FSA photographic practice, as it did Federal One art and writing. In presenting photography as an institutional practice rather than a technical 'window on the world' reproducing some external reality, he reminds us of the specific social function of photographs and their relationship to broader discourses; in this instance he refers to New Deal politics. These connectives are important, in that they suggest both the specificity of photography's technical applications, and the particular forms assumed by the genre of representation often referred to as realism. Moreover, they detect the 'traces' of an underlying cultural policy that made resources available to the FSA's photographic unit in the first place.

However, in keeping with a broader anti-Enlightenment current in contemporary cultural theory, Tagg cites approvingly Foucault's intention of constructing 'a new politics of truth':

> This does not mean emancipating truth from every system of power; such an emancipation could never be attained because truth itself is already power. In politics what must be our aim is to detach the power of truth from the specific forms of hegemony in the economic, social and cultural domains within which it operates at the present time. For the historian, however, the problem is to *reinsert* the forms of knowlege under examination within the specific regime of truth and the regulating institutions of the social formation which produced them as true.[25]

Whereas Tagg quite rightly counterposes the historical specificity of acts of representation to their uncritical treatment as being inherently 'true', he forecloses further development of this position. For instance, focussing on two pictures of paired individuals, he argues that their positioning, interior decor and activity are used to construct 'home' in a manner that naturalises class and gender relations. This is fair enough; however, this leads to the implication that a rejection of photography *per se* is somehow an alternative to control. Likewise, he argues that, since we do not accept pictures of UFOs as evidence, we should extend this scepticism to the 'truth' of other photographs. (Presumably he underestimates our capacity to reason, and to *differentiate* between such images!) If truth and knowledge are features of an inegalitarian power structure, there is no sense in developing an alternative approximation of the realities, or contingent truths, that they construct. Although he argues against formulating the problem as a crude 'conspiracy', Tagg's conflation of power and knowledge endows the institutions of social control with an equivalent invulnerability. This sits uneasily with his account of the contradictory experiences of federally-subsidised photography, at one moment an influential part of the state apparatus, the next under siege from its would-be gravediggers.

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[24] Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1991).

[25] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.173. Subsequent citation from pp. 158-159, 60.

In short, while our account would not wish to disguise the uses and discursive strengths of New Deal photography, neither would we treat it as wholly inseparable from these attributes. Photography, like knowledge more broadly, can be a contested domain as well as a hegemonic discourse. In buttressing a politicised cultural practice into an invincible instrument of coercion and control, Tagg's methodology assumes *a priori* that the technology and practice are suspect and immune to intervention. As such, it belittles human subjectivity. In terms of the limits to postmodern relativism, Tagg expresses a tension between his non-hierarchical dissolution of the distinctions between power, knowledge and discourse, and his adoption of a position of his hostility towards them. In short, what begins as a critique of the power relations behind federal documentary ends in the assertion that such power was absolute, ignoring the more contradictory features that first galvanised this shift in policy.

Such contradictions were also present in the discussions of government arts funding that required the active construction of the 'American people', as expressed in terms of presenting the 'truth' about them. This was marked by a shift from exclusion in the 1920s to inclusion in the 1930s. Whereas nativism defined national identity in opposition to immigration from Europe, the broad brushstrokes of New Deal nationalism portrayed the new immigrants as welcome members of an enlarged American family. Not only did it do so on the basis of opposition to European high culture, but also by working from an indigenous artistic tradition. Since these established artistic styles and practices were primarily realist, their incorporation into federal art coalesced easily with documentary.

The focus of most controversy was the 'Living Newspaper', an innovative modification of established theatrical and documentary forms. Symbolic of much of what Federal Theatre stood for,[26] such 'newspapers' mixed politics and entertainment. Explaining how this enterprise was initiated, Federal Theatre director Hallie Flanagan gave the following description:

> The staff of the Living Newspaper was set up like a large city daily, with editor-in-chief, managing editor, city editor, reporters and copyreaders, and they began, as Brooks Atkinson later remarked 'to shake the living daylights out of a thousand books, reports, newspaper and magazine articles,' in order to evolve an authoritative dramatic treatment, at once historic and contemporary, of contemporary problems.[27]

Flanagan enjoyed a degree of relative autonomy from the state that meant her immediate superiors were often unclear about the trajectory of the theatre she ran. The Works Progress Administrator noted that Stephen Early had to send a memo to find out what the Living Newspaper was and whether it was federally financed. He also advised caution over the representation on stage of international affairs and world statesmen, notably in relation to the Italio-Ethiopian War, although proposing a blanket ban on such productions as the vetting of individual scripts was impractical.[28] However, self-conscious attempts to create a national theatre out of government expenditure were also likely to incur the wrath of that government's opponents. One of the most damaging allegations one could make of such arrangements was that public money was being used to promote the Democratic party, hence the allegation that they were 'propaganda'.[29] Interestingly, both Hopkins's and Flanagan's strenuous denials were party to the construction of this category in anti-New Deal demonology.The arguments deployed against 'propaganda' drew heavily on select aspects of popular culture, invoking the spectre of Tamanny Hall, by implying Federal Theatre was little more than a WPA racket consisting of sinecures for bureaucrats' friends and acquaintances. This in turn echoed those perceptions of machine politics that contributed to the crushing of Al Smith in the 1928 Presidential election.[30]

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[26] 'The now almost forgotten living newspapers of the Federal Theater of the depression era ... introduced a new form of American dramaturgy. But social changes and the demise of the Federal Theatre closed this chapter of our theatrical history.' John Gassner, *Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p.278.

[27] Hallie Flanagan, 'Introduction', Federal Theatre Plays (New York: Random House, 1938); reprinted in Louis Filler, (ed.), *The Anxious Years: America in the 1930s* (New York: Capricorn, 1964), p.141.

When Flanagan declared, 'I will not have the Federal Theatre Project used politically. I will not have it used to further the ends of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party or the Communist Party',[31] it suggested that uniting the aims of theatre with those of politics was illegitimate, despite the fact that less than 10% of federal plays depicted social questions. Such defensiveness handed the opponents of social documentary theatre a hostage to fortune.[32] Simultaneously the FTP's opponents mobilised philistinism, by presenting the theatrical profession as an aloof elite, far removed from the concerns of the average taxpayer. When one congressman opposed a plea for a permanent arts programme with the words 'Culture? What the hell - let 'em have a pick and shovel',[33] he was drawing on long-established populist repertoire. Such approaches attempted to rekindle some of the small town sentiments that were marginal to the political discourses of the New Deal. However, in contrast to the 1920s, where one's ethnicity, religion, or locality could arouse suspicion, the 1930s saw one's political affiliations provoke a similar response. This was relatively muted, as the slump demanded novel if not drastic solutions, but a consensus was forming that excessive upheaval was to be avoided. In this context, the term 'propaganda' was reconstituted to have a stigmatising effect.[34]

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[28] Memo, Works Progress Administrator to Roosevelt, January 11, 1936; PPF 6115, FDRL.

[29] Propaganda, derived from the Vatican's notion of 'propagating' Papal encyclicals, acquired a negative connotation in the twentieth century. Unless otherwise specified, or used in quotation, the present study's usage treats it as meaning the transmission of a relatively complex body of ideas to a small audience (as opposed to agitation, the conveyance of an idea to a large number of people, e.g. the slogan 'bread, peace and land'). However, we recognise that this is complicated by the rise of mass communications, creating the scope for propaganda on an industrial or even global scale. While rejecting the moral overtones that make 'propaganda' into a negative epithet, we would also maintain a distinction between 'black' and 'white' propaganda.

[30] Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp. 382; 386.

[31] Cited in Mathews, *The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays Relief and Politics*, (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.112.

[32] *Variety* estimate, cited in Malcolm Goldstein, *Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University press, 1974), p.253. Flanagan suggests a higher figure, recalling that Living Newspapers alone constituted some 10% of all federal plays. See Hallie Flanagan, *Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre* (1949) (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1965), p.361.

[33] Cited in Mathews, *The Federal Theatre*, p.309.

[34] The *Indianapolis News* viewed the vast crowds attending simultaneous openings of Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* in multiple venues as one of Federal Theatre's sinister crimes: 'If it can produce a play simultaneously in fifteen cities, it can be regarded as one of the nation's most powerful agencies for the dissemination of propaganda.' Cited in Flanagan, *Arena*, p.155.

Likewise, the Living Newspaper technique itself was considered illegitimate by those suspicious of the FTP's radicalism. The technique's actual origins are the subject of a complex dispute, regarding the extent to which it was derived from left-field practices, notably Soviet agit-prop, the German *Proletbuehne*, and American New Playwrights' theatre.[35] Irrespective of the degree to which socialist dramatic influences had been integrated into an American setting, this background furnished sufficient evidence to the suspicious minds of professional red-baiters. Thus a number of innocuous episodes, from Flanagan's studies of Soviet drama produced in the 1920s to her 1931 Vassar College dramatisation of *Can You Hear Their Voices*, based an a *New Masses* short story by one Whittaker Chambers,[36] became fuel for future opponents of the FTP. Flanagan's even-handed assessment of John Reed Club and *New Masses*-sponsored drama in an old journal article[37] was also singled out for criticism. That leading critics considered the Living Newspaper to be 'eminently a product of the spirit of free inquiry ... the most native form of theatre which this country has produced' or the 'most dynamic US theatre' that generated a 'sense of the artist belonging to his own country' provided little defence.[38]

In part, the ease with which opponents of the FTP could rationalise their own characterisations of Federal Theatre as agit-prop was a consequence of the their own fear of the masses. Significant social trends forming the backdrop to this interpretation of Federal Theatre included labour unrest (particularly surrounding the rapid growth of industrial unionism), and the spread of a number of populist anti-New Deal mass movements, centred on such figures as Huey Long, Father Charles Coughlin, and Dr. Francis E. Townsend.[39] Unionisation campaigns and peculiar schemes for wealth redistribution had little in common, but both served as a catalyst for speculation about the threat posed by mobs. In European elite theory, the crowd dissolved personality, becoming a seething mass receptive to the ranting of demagogues, analogous to an individual accepting hypnotic suggestion.[40] In American society before the depression such fears appeared in a racialised form, albeit tempered by popular culture's comparative respectability and a distrust of intellectuals. As the changes wrought by the slump brought American conceptions of the crowd much closer to their European counterparts, the plays of Federal Theatre became a focus for such phobias.[41] Bernarr MacFadden contributed substantially to this genre of journalism, which hinged on the prediction that the Living Newspaper would precipitate a Soviet America.[42]

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[35] Although Whitman identified the Living Newspaper's European antecedents (pp.150-151), its American exponents Morris Watson and Arthur Ardent were particularly vague on this issue when interviewed by Douglas McDermott in the early 1960s. Bigsby credits Flanagan with its invention, while noting Elmer Rice's claim to have devised it following a meeting with the Newspaper Guild and watching *March of Time* newsreels. Abdul-Aziz Hammouda is emphatic that Federal Living Newspapers were 'highly derivative' of revolutionary drama, despite the denials of those working in the field. Most accounts assume a degree of knowledge on the part of Flanagan, Watson, and Arent of 'agit-prop' dramatic techniques prior to their involvement in the FTP. See Douglas McDermott, 'The Living Newspaper as a Dramatic Form', *Ph.D Thesis*, State University of Iowa, 1963, pp.15-16; 23-26; Bigsby, *Twentieth Century American Drama*, pp.214-216; Abdul-Aziz Abdul-Salam Soliman Hammouda, 'The Living Newspaper: a Study in Sources and Form', *Ph.D Thesis*, Cornell University, 1968, pp.39, 51.

[36] McDermott, 'The Living Newspaper as a Dramatic Form', p.37.

[37] Hallie Flanagan, 'A Theatre is Born', *Theatre Arts Monthly*, November 1931, pp.908-915.

[38] John W. Gassner, 'In Praise of New York', *One Act Play Magazine*, February 1938, p.938. Brooks Atkinson, cited in James Wechsler, 'Record of the Boondogglers', *Nation*, December 25, 1937, p.717.

[39] See Rhonda F. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital and the State* (Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 1988), pp. 109-154. John Houseman suspects that the coalescence of such fears around Marc Blitzstein's musical *The Cradle Will Rock* was a factor in its suppression. See *Unfinished Business: A Memoir* (1972) (London: Columbus, 1986 ed.), p.129; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982). Chicago Federal Theatre was prohibited from assisting George Murray and David Peltz's *Townsend Goes to Town*, a satirical view of the Townsend movement; it was felt that this would be seen as political involvement.

Perhaps the theatrical event most suggestive of the power of agitational theatre was the Group Theatre production of Clifford Odets's *Waiting For Lefty* (1935). Concerning a New York taxi drivers' strike and the speculation surrounding its absent organiser, its closing scene mingled company and audience in a union-hall vote to 'STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE'. This famous piece of spontaneous audience participation enhanced the play's standing on the left, and agit-prop's more general notoriety; if became a common point of reference in the culture of the US left.[43] Such overlap of depression era theatrical milieus was not restricted to those of audience and cast at this particular Odets performance; Harold Clurman recalls the appearance of Group Theatre performers in New York FTP plays and vice versa,[44] perhaps providing further hostages to fortune for those who presented Federal Theatre as a 'Red Nest'.

It was clear from the beginning that the relationship between Federal Theatre and politics would be particularly hazardous. The first Living Newspaper production, *Ethiopia*, did not go beyond a special preview presentation for the press. Its censorship, widely believed to have been initiated by White House Press Secretary Stephen Early and provoking the resignation of producer Elmer Rice, was based on WPA rules forbidding the impersonation of foreign statesmen.[45] Officials assumed that such depictions would be interpreted as government policy: Early himself stated that 'if this is a government production we are skating on thin ice when dealing with international affairs'.[46] Ironically, in recent years, it has been suggested that this focus on events abroad was a device for avoiding controversies based on domestic issues.[47] This suggests that, despite the radical image of the Living Newspaper, its place in federal cultural patronage was more didactic than revolutionary. This is not to downplay the contradictions: sections of the cultural left, both on and off the project, attempted to use the Living Newspaper for political ends more radical than those of the New Deal. Once again, a particular practice has become situated behind the distorting lens of 'the Thirties'.

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[40] Robert S. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975). In later years the US war effort enlisted movie director Frank Capra to generalise such perceptions of the Japanese in his *Why We Fight* films. See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp.19-21.

[41] A further consequence of this mood was that 'propaganda', a term used in this instance to stigmatise political bias in the theatre by both Flanagan and her opponents, was effectively narrowed down to mean *agitational* theatre.

[42] Bernarr MacFadden, 'Inciting to Riot', *Liberty*, May 23, 1936, p.4.

[43] For instance, in coverage of a Chicago cab drivers' strike the *New Masses* evoked the play in its reportage (George Robbins, 'No Waiting For Lefty', *New Masses*, April, 1937, pp.15-16). A festive parody of proletarian drama even appeared under the title 'Waiting for Santy' by S. J. Perelman, 'Waiting for Santy' in Louis Filler (ed.), *The Anxious Years: America in the 1930's* (New York: Capricorn, 1964 ed.), pp. 162-164; see also Dorothy Herrmann, *S.J.Perelman: A Life* (London: Papermac, 1986), pp.113-114! The episode where a New York audience joined the theatrical strike call is described by Bernard F. Dukore, *American Dramatists 1918-45* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.102. See also author interview with WPA veterans Jack and Lillian Elkin, October 1993.

[44] Among the author's cast of such characters are an unamed FTP actress- 'tiny, blonde, miserably poor, and equivocally attractive'- who drifted in and out of left wing and Group Theatre circles and those FTP members who appeared in socially-conscious cabaret at Chez Firehouse, East 55th Street, New York, in 1937 under the auspices of the Theatre Arts Committee for Democracy. See Harold Clurman, *Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theater and the Thirties* (1945) (New York: Hill & Wang ed., 1957), pp. 110,200. However, in a recent interview David Kortchmar said he was unaware of any such connections. Kortchmar to author, January 1994, p.1.

[45] A useful account of the banning of *Ethiopia* is Eleanor Flexner, *American Playwrights: 1918-1938: The Theatre Retreats from Reality* (1938) (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1966), p.321. The

With hindsight it may seem as if the Living Newspaper was less revolutionary than many critics have argued, but at the time it was a *bete noire* for cultural conservatives. Moreover, such controversies were not restricted to the Living Newspaper. In 1936 for instance, Edward Rodan of the Democratic National Campaign Committee complained that Communist and Spanish Republican pamphlets were on sale outside a WPA production of *Injunction Granted*.[48] Two years later, Harry Hopkins was petitioned by the trustees of Vassar College, as part of a protest ostensibly concerning the way that 'the campus was last summer the home of WPA theatre cohorts, about whose radical and revolutionary purpose there is no question'.[49] The Trustees' campaign also targetted Joseph P. Lash and Gil Green (b.1906), activists in the American Student Union and the Young Communist League respectively.[50] These examples are two of many that suggest Federal Theatre's detractors pursued a vendetta based on 'guilt by association'.

Opponents of government spending on the arts presented a variety of arguments that often conflated otherwise disparate elements - economic liberalism, anti-communism and sexual prudishness - into a comprehensive case against patronage. In such conditions, despite Soviet and German antecedents that were more comfortable with the term 'propaganda', the Living Newspaper found that this label stuck, damaging its reputation even before it was firmly established as part of the FTP's repertoire. In turn, this conflict has shaped much of the discussion of Federal Theatre.[51] In keeping with a premise widespread in the present study, we would locate the emphasis on this

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Roosevelt administration's position on the Ethiopian crisis is discussed in Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working With Roosevelt*, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p.175.

[46] Memorandum, Early to Jacob Baker, January 11, 1936, Official File 80, Roosevelt MSS, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Himelstein thinks this ridiculous, on the grounds that news would necessarily portray historical personalities (Morgan Y. Himelstein, *Drama Was a Weapon: the Left-Wing Theatre in New York, 1929-1941* (New Brunswick NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p.90.)

[47] Stephen Baskerville and Ralph Willett, eds., *Nothing Else to Fear: New perspectives on America in the thirties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 236-237.

[48] Memo to Roosevelt, September 10, 1936; PPF 6115, FDRL.

[49] Memo to Hopkins, September 8, 1938; Federal Theatre 1935-1936 file, Hopkins Papers, FDRL. For an account of Experimental Theatre's appearance at Vassar, see Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.196.

[50] Impressed with their conduct in the Spanish Civil War, Lash flirted with joining the CP, but later characterised his generation's involvement in such causes as being 'little better than apologists' for the left (Cohen, *Old Left*, pp.168, *xvii*). For biographical details on Green, see Ruth F. Prago's entry in Buhle et al (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), p.279.

[51] It is also reflected in subsequent scholarship debunking the hysteria of such Congressional antagonists of Federal One as Martin Dies and Joseph Starnes.

interpretation of the Living Newspaper more in 'the Thirties' as a mythic narrative than in the reality of the inter-war period. Once again, whereas scholars have proved adept at criticising the pragmatism and outright lies that contributed to the FTP's demise, it is rarer for an account to explain the Living Newspaper in terms of its overall relationship to the crisis. Following FTP's closure a grateful Roosevelt wrote thanking Flanagan for her contribution.[52] In the process, he recognised the FTP's ability to perform two distinct functions, those of unemployment relief *and* of raising the nation's cultural horizons.

Subsequent commentary has proved more uneven. Thus, in the 1990s, the FTP's Living Newspaper productions can appear both timebound and simplistic. For one thing, the concerns raised in various short plays - agricultural adjustment, syphilis vaccination and electrification - are seldom the central priorities of contemporary dramatists. Likewise, many of the devices central to such productions as *Triple A Plowed Under*, *Spirochette* and *Power* now appear clumsy and didactic. A loudspeaker addressing actors with questions ('What do you pay for electricity, Mister?')[53] can be taken as meaning that either the play is incapable of addressing emotions, sheltering instead behind a cold facticity, or that it lacks adequate complexity to express such concerns in a more subtle form. In effect, such productions risk becoming trapped within a false polarity; they are subjected to conventional theatre criticism and found wanting, or dismissed outright as documents confined to the Depression, thereby foreclosing any further discussion. (This process has also affected the critical reception of prominent 1930s playwrights like Clifford Odets.)[54]

In concluding our discussion of the example of the Living Newspaper, we would argue that neither traditional theatre criticism nor outright dismissal provides an adequate basis on which to approach the Living Newspaper because it fails to situate it in the wider cultural moment in which documentary came to the fore. Moreover, whilst the growth of documentary in the fissures created by the Depression can partially explain the impetus towards compiling - or documenting - an overview of national life, this does not account for the chosen representational terrain for such subject matter, nor its particular forms. At a discursive level, the legitimacy of compiling a national inventory was established, but it proved more difficult to secure a consensus behind either the basis of such documentary in craft production or an appropriate content for such works.

In Chapter Eight we summarise the developments central to the breakdown of Federal One as a cohesive federation of four autonomous units. As we saw previously, a number of positions that served to bridge the Red Scares of the 1920s and Cold War politics were developed in opposition to cultural patronage, most sharply in relation to the Federal Theatre Project. McKinzie portrays a similar discourse and its effects on Federal One as a whole. Taken collectively, this suggested a new departure in the relationship between New Deal culture and legitimation crisis. After 1938, the pressures on relief art were considerable, especially when it attracted complaints that unemployed artists threatened to go 'on relief' on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, despite acknowledging this perceived problem, Roosevelt maintained that the average voter didn't appreciate the need to encourage art and literature, declaring 'we need all the help we can get to educate the Congress and the nation!'[55]

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[52] Roosevelt to Flanagan, July 19, 1939; PPF 6115, FDRL.

[53] This scene from *Power* is described in Stott, *Documentary Expression*, p.105.

[54] For instance, see Evan Wiener (review of *Rocket to the Moon*), 'Odets Needs a Cleaning', *Columbia Daily Spectator*, October 22, 1993, p.22.

Significantly, an alternative form of 'public education' was taking place, to which Roosevelt acquiesced, even if he did not actively promote its propagation. As we saw in the previous chapter, the late 1930s saw the theme of 'cultural freedom' popularised by the President. Shortly before a speaking engagement at the Museum of Modern Art, Rockwell Kent requested advice over quoting Lincoln in a section of his speech in support of WPA arts expenditure. Roosevelt felt that this would be entirely appropriate, declaring 'there can be no freedom in the arts unless there is individual freedom and only in nations which guarantee both will culture derive from the masses'.[56] The expectation that culture can be derived 'from the masses' is significant, in that it suggests the 'national-popular' orientation of New Deal. It contrasts sharply with subsequent developments in the field of 'cultural freedom', which defended an elitist 'art for art's sake' and often blamed the masses for 'totalitarianism'.[57]

On balance, however, Roosevelt seemed to be suggesting that freedom from state control defined the national art of the New Deal against those states perceived as totalitarian, primarily Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. P.L. Shannon, secretary to Stephen Early, estimated that FDR made a dozen speeches devoted to cultural freedom in an official capacity.[58] Despite the existence of an unofficial Committee for Cultural Freedom composed primarily of increasingly anticommunist New York Intellectuals, the issue of cultural freedom began life within the administration. In so far as this signalled a shift in arts policy, it implied that heritage and documentary were less important than American art's independence from ideology and state control. Suggesting the illegitimacy of a relationship between art and the state, arguments conducted on this terrain profoundly endangered state arts patronage. Whereas Roosevelt thought freedom from the state and state funding were compatible, his critics - whether in Congress or in the CCF (which was dismissed as 'Sidney Hook's faction')[59] - exploited the contradictions in this argument, foreshadowing an aspect of Cold War ideology. Just as Roosevelt presented 'totalitarian' state control of the arts as a problem, his opponents expanded this perception to include the patronage of the New Deal state.

If federal arts funding became suspect so too did its predominant, closely related forms of representation, documentary and realism. Both were gradually downgraded on largely political grounds. Whereas regionalist painters were accused of an incipient fascism, 'social realism' became conflated with 'socialist realism' - Stalin's official style - in popular discussions of the arts. Likewise, documentary's fortunes changed considerably, although its ostensibly factual character guaranteed it a prominent place amid the exigencies of wartime mobilisation. By the time of Federal One's total demise in 1943, federal cultural subsidies were low on the list of public priorities. Although individuals continued to enjoy participation in community art centres and night school classes, they were less active in the defence of such projects. On one hand, the economic arguments against federally funded arts found resonance amid wartime hardship. On the other, a degree of political momentum was building up behind the idea that freedom from the state was a defining characteristic of American life. It became a salient point in the construction of US national identity *despite* the repression and surveillance widespread in the 1920s and during wartime mobilisation.

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[55] Roosevelt to Nelson A. Rockefeller, June 6, 1939; PPF 5983, FDRL.

[56] Roosevelt to Rockwell Kent, May 16, 1939; PPF 5983, FDRL.

[57] See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[58] Shannon to Rockefeller, April 27, 1939; PPF 5983, FDRL.

[59] For more on the relationship between Hook and Roosevelt, see the penultimate chapter of this study. The quotation is from Archiabald MacLeish to Stephen Early, February 19, 1940, PPF 5259.

In summarising the themes of the first section of this study, we should note the following: federal arts patronage was primarily concerned with white-collar employment. It developed as part of a package of counter-crisis measures and, as such, it occupied the same contradictory position as other forms of state intervention. The New Deal was a heterogeneous reorganisation of the state apparatus designed to rescue the accumulation process from the onset of slump. Simultaneously, it violated the market relations central to that process, reminding politicians and industrialists of the failure of their system. At the level of politics, the Roosevelt administration signalled a rejection of the elitist nativism of its predecessors, instead recasting the masses as the nominal bedrock of the new society. Once again, this proved both necessary, in that it brought the majority back into political life, and repellent, in that it signified a compromise with those treated as outcasts by the Palmer Raids, Prohibition, and the National Origins Act. Such sentiments were articulated both by different sectors of the state and even within the same institution. The significance of federal art is that it embodied these trends by giving formal expression to the development of wider social processes. Herein lay the paradox of New Deal cultural patronage: it presented an opportunity to help resolve the crisis, but it also intensified it, by embedding the general experience of social upheaval in cultural production.

The New Deal brought employment to hundreds of cultural workers. Its productions - state guides, murals, living newspapers and so forth - invited popular attention and enthusiasm; many Americans attended their first theatrical performance under the auspices of the WPA Federal Theatre Project. In effect, conditions of social crisis led the state to attempt to create a popular culture of its own. This arose more from the array of moral imperatives which politicians attatched to state-funded projects than a conscious, coordinated plan. Hence, the emphasis on heritage or the usable past, a threefold process involving a nostalgic appeal to the past, the active invention of tradition, and a semi-conscious pragmatic element. Obviously, a complete 'New Deal culture' could not be created from scratch and hope to acquire a mass purchase; therefore it had to draw on extant forms and practices, without competing directly with culture industries such as Broadway, Hollywood and pulp publishing. Although it was stipulated that such projects avoid the 'unfair competition' of pitting the state against private industry, this warning was to prove unnecessary, as they proved incapable of securing the depth of durable popular support attached to other aspects of the New Deal. Likewise, they were relatively extraneous to economic recovery, despite expressing in clear form the pluralist but integratory dynamic of the New Deal. On this basis, we argue that it was possible for Roosevelt's opponents to effect a 'hanging in effigy', dismantling federal arts funding to compensate for their inability to reverse the New Deal as a whole.

Our assessment concludes in the penultimate chapter of this study, where we take into account the impact of the war on federal arts funding. As we attempt to demonstrate in the next section, the state was not the only public institution mixing culture and politics in response to the slump, nor was it the sole force behind the 1930s 'documentary impulse'. Whereas we would maintain that the state set the underlying pace on issues as diverse as censorship, rural regionalism and 'cultural freedom', this had ramifications beyond its immediate zone of influence and out into the literary left intelligentsia. To this we now turn.

Introduction to Section Two - Literary Politics and the Left Intelligentsia

In the preceding section of this study, we identified a number of key trends that developed as a consequence of federal arts patronage. In part, such patronage was a response to the Depression, although it also addressed some of the damage done to political legitimacy in the immediate post-1918 period. As we sought to demonstrate, what began as an attempt to provide relief for unemployed artists led to a collision between the Roosevelt administration and the traditionalist Commission of Fine Arts. In turn, discussions occurred concerning the appropriate content of state-sponsored murals, sculptures and other project works. The inclusive character of New Deal politics became embedded in the cultural forms produced under its auspices, in keeping with the broader 'documentary impulse' abroad at the time. However, whereas the New Deal was accepted as an *ad hoc* package of recovery measures, this pragmatism did not necessarily extend to its cultural endeavours, which came under increasing pressure from its opponents. The political opposition to which New Deal arts fell victim also anticipated the language of the Cold War, from its focus on 'big government' to an incipient hostility to 'propaganda' reconstructed as a term of abuse. In sum, despite the negligible status of state-supervised cultural production in the American cultural canon, our study has insisted on its centrality to understanding the cultural politics of the Depression.

One function of the state was as a site of cultural production, a patron of the arts that turned 'high art' into *de facto* mass communication industries, informed by a political and aesthetic project. However, these developments cannot be viewed in isolation from more established developments in US culture. Literature - primarily poetry and the novel - was also profoundly affected by legitimation crisis. In this section we explore the relationship between crisis, state cultural patronage and literary life. Certain symmetries are apparent, suggesting the possibility of establishing a common framework of experience out of the inter-war period. This is visible in the documentary-realist character of numerous works, the emphasis on social experience and 'discovering America', and the relatively egalitarian content of such works. As we have argued previously, part of the influence of the Cold War on literary and popular culture was a shift in perceptions of the key dynamics of the 1930s. Thus, there has been an ongoing process of constructing a narrowly focussed, largely mythological version of the inter-war period or, as we have referred to it in this study, 'the Thirties'.

Moulding a Myth

Before suggesting an alternative to this construct of 'the Thirties', it is worth outlining some of its key features. The literature of the 1930s has been subject to two clearly defined phases of re-assembly. The first of these exists on a continuum that we can schematise as stretching from the prototypical anti-communism of the early forties to the literary politics of the 'high' Cold War; the second is a comparatively tolerant liberal paradigm, expressed most clearly in Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (1961).[1] Both of these 'schools' were subject to subsequent critiques, in a number of important works upon which this study draws.[2] Likewise, this also brings us back to the methodological debates concerning how best to write the history of US Communism. Traditionally the CPUSA has been presented as an adjunct of Soviet foreign policy. Numerous historians have attempted to substantiate this claim by referring to official sources, US and Soviet, and by analysing the Party as a political institution.[3] The usefulness of such accounts has varied enormously; some were scholarly, others written according to a disingenuous, *a priori* anticommunist formula. In such studies the coverage of cultural affairs has been largely perfunctory, depicting 'proletarian literature' as a form of patronage, with Party functionaries commissioning works of dubious artistic merit on purely ideological grounds.[4]

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[1] For an assessment of the influence of *Writers on the Left*, see Alan Wald's introduction to the 1992 edition (New York: Columbia University Press). Another important, contemporaneous work to that of

On balance, most conventional histories of the CPUSA present 1930s cultural politics according to norms derived from the generic template of 'the Thirties'. This formula obliges the critical historian to work on two levels simultaneously, through an engagement with theory and empirical evidence, and by deconstructing the prevailing mythology and conventional wisdom. Hence, the overall theme of Part Two of our study. First, a broad culture of the political left existed within the intelligentsia, that centred upon a public institution, the Communist Party. This was also a site of cultural production, suggesting the general applicability of the category patronage to describe the relationship between the two (and therefore the scope for its inclusion within this study.) Secondly, for over sixty years it has been asserted that the CP was a significant cultural patron (albeit a sinister one). On both counts, a study of cultural patronage as a response to the slump that omitted the left intelligentsia would appear to be at best ducking issues, at worst dishonest.

Political culture in the 'high' Cold War led to a re-evaluation of Eugene Lyons's book *The Red Decade* (1941), a polemical tract stressing communist infiltration of American institutions, including the arts.[5] According to Lyons, the US Communist Party was almost omnipotent, with the power to dictate cultural forms, to generate careers for the mediocre and to control foreign policy, all in accordance with the interests of the Soviet Union. In retrospect, it would appear that the book's title gained currency as a description of the 1930s as a whole. If anything, this demonstrates Western ideological and political uncertainty about how to respond to the crisis; it now appears extraordinary that a social formation as chaotic and backward as the USSR could be credited with

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Aaron was Frank A. Warren's *Liberals and Communism: The 'Red Decade' Revisited* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), which owed much to Hannah Arendt and sought to overcome the partisan divisions in scholarship accounting for 1930s intellectual politics. Warren placed liberals on a continuum: 'progressive', fellow traveller and anticommunist, by assessing their responses to concrete political issues.

[2] We should also note the growth of a contemporary 'new historicist' approach to such writing, stressing local and fragmentary developments, further reinforced by the application of Foucauldian and postmodern methodologies, perhaps gaining sustenance from the collapse of Cold War 'grand narratives'.

[3] Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking, 1960).

[4] E.g. see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic, 1984). In other accounts, further discussion of this topic is often farmed off as a footnote citing Aaron's *Writers on the Left*, taking it as a complete account.

[5] Lyons's account subsequently fared rather badly in terms of sales and reviews, although he exaggerated its unpopularity, alleging a conspiracy against the book. See Judy Kutulas, *The Long War: The Intellectual People's Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930-1940* (Durham NC.: Duke University Press, 1995), pp.201-203.

such capacities. The same can be said of the minuscule party that supported it almost uncritically. Nevertheless, in an atmosphere of hostility towards 'fellow travellers' and critics of the free market, such caricatures of the 1930s acquired plausibility. *The Red Decade* was valued for its capacity to dent the moral authority of the Soviet Union, at a time when more traditional conservative arguments were largely discredited.[6] That the literature of the inter-war period became embroiled in such conflicts suggests the all-embracing character of the Cold War, coupled with the comprehensive sense of disaster and embarrassment associated with the 1930s during the forties and fifties (and beyond).

A McCarthyite reading of literary history had a limited life-span in academic and intellectual circles, although it has persisted in more subdued forms in popular journalism. One reason for this was perhaps Joseph McCarthy's anti-intellectual orientation, in which academics, administrators and cultural practitioners made up much of the Wisconsin Senator's rogue's gallery. More broadly, an insistence on a primarily political interpretation of a generation of writers was incompatible with Cold War liberalism's emerging cultural standards; i.e. 'art for art's sake' and an emphasis on individual creativity over social context exercised a normative influence in the 1950s. In terms of 'the Thirties', this meant revisiting the decade in such a manner as to disentangle worthwhile cultural production from dubious political choices. Although it resulted in a continuation of the controversy that had surrounded 'proletarian literature' after the crash of 1929, this was by far preferable to Cold War caricatures.

Among the first to develop this paradigm was Walter Rideout, in a comprehensive work entitled *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956). In a manner that suggested revulsion with the 'literary' approach of Lyons and McCarthy, he prefaced his work with a warning:

> If the general reader has picked up this volume in the hopes of finding the sort of thing which should be entitled *The Novel on the Barricades* or, conversely, *I Read Red Fiction*, he had better put it down at once.[7]

Rideout's remarks reflected a perception that the preoccupations of the Cold War were distorting the study of literature. His assumptions were consolidated with the appearance of Aaron's *Writers on the Left*, which explicitly took issue with Lyons's characterisation of the 1930s as the *Red Decade*, 'a polemic written without charity or understanding ... reflect[ing] the acrimonious spirit and attitudes of the decade he deplores'.[8] The thrust of both works was to separate radical cultural production from the radicalism - real or imagined - that was exciting hostility across America. The contribution of Aaron and Rideout was the creation of a vantage point from which to examine 1930s literature *without* acquiescing to a form of cultural McCarthyism. (However, a key weakness was that their emphasis on New York-based literary struggles tended to abstract culture from some of the broader social conflicts played out in the 1930s (and beyond)). Thus, in keeping with our discussion of New Deal arts patronage in previous chapters, we present the inter-war period as a totality, where key conflicts developed in the cultural arena, impacting on the specificities or 'inner logic' of cultural production itself.

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[6] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[7] Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956) p.*vii*.

[8] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961) (New York: Columbia University Press Morningside Books Edition, 1992), p.231*n*.

Recent years have seen the development of numerous studies seeking to transcend the liberal paradigm of Rideout and Aaron, and the handful of substantial works that they influenced. In all probability, the most prolific object of study has been the New York Intellectuals, investigation of whom has been the organising principle of at least half a dozen major works.[9] Further reinforced by memoirs, autobiographies and obituaries, it is clear that the influence of the New York 'Family'[10] will outlast its surviving members (i.e. the stable of writers closely associated with the journals *Partisan Review*, *Encounter* and *Commentary*). In terms of cultural history, the issue of proletarian literature is constantly reposed because, perhaps perversely, it exercised a constitutive influence on the Intellectuals at a key point in their development. *Partisan Review*'s break with Communism (and all forms of radical politics) was posed as a literary issue.

In addition to the debate over the 'Family', a younger generation of revisionist scholars have attempted to scrutinise cultural radicalism more closely, identifying continuities between past and present. However, despite the ongoing critique of the idea that 'all left-wing writers were ideological fanatics, drenched in the sectarianism of Marxist doctrine',[11] a myth of 'Proletcult' as a form of cultural patronage has become firmly entrenched. This process is outlined below, as it forms a significant element of contemporary perceptions of 1930s cultural patronage, *despite* having been in scholarly disrepute for several decades.

The development of an homologous package of anti-Soviet ideas servicing political life in the mid to late-1940s can be located, in part, in the previous decade's literary debates. Most notable are the various formulations which emerged on the question of the relationship between the committed writer and organised politics. Looking backward, it is all too easy to take as our starting point two influential primary sources; Max Eastman's 'Artists in Uniform' (1933), a depiction of the stultifying life of Soviet Writers, published in the *Modern Quarterly* and expanded to a book-length essay the following year, and Philip Rahv's 'Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy'(1939), which appeared in the *Southern Review*. Prior to Aaron's *Writers on the Left*, these pieces were often taken as the last word on literary and critical matters surrounding political literature in 1930s America, although they remained largely unread. Subsequent - and simplistic - bricolages of articles have usually suggested that:
i) 'Proletarian Literature' was simply an attempt to impose Moscow's aesthetics upon an indigenous literary culture;

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[9] Among these we would include Alexander Bloom, Terry Cooney, James B. Gilbert, Alan Wald and Hugh Wilford.

[10] Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[11] Alan M. Wald, *The Responsibility of Intellectuals: Selected Essays on Marxist Traditions in Cultural Commitment* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1992), p.64. Wald correctly contends that few contemporary scholars write literary histories that reproduce the tropes that we have characterised as 'the Thirties'; however, as we argue throughout this study, such myths were (and are) reproduced at a popular, 'common sense' level in a wide range of accounts.

ii) modernism was denigrated, favouring dreary reportage, strike novels, and poetry eulogising Lenin;
iii) a brave and isolated minority broke with American Communism over this issue, and from moral abhorrence of Stalin's activities; they faced subsequent ostracisation from not simply the left, but from the New Deal, mainstream publishing houses and, eventually, the mass cultural production of the postwar boom.[12]

This body of ideas is increasingly inappropriate to a post-Cold War context, in which its unspoken assumptions are no longer axiomatic. It is harder to sustain the myth of the Kremlin's omnipotence when economic autarchy and political crisis have torn the Soviet Union apart. It would now appear possible to marshal together sufficient empirical material to begin undercutting the wildly inaccurate representations of 'literary Leftism', by teasing out the true extent to which such characterisations substituted assertion for argumentation. This is not because of a new surfeit of archival material or oral history, but because the old anti-Soviet arguments have lost much of their authority.

That the critical standards of Cold War historiography were a product of McCarthy era concerns is apparent when they are compared to the actual conduct of hostile critics during the 1930s. Such writers often approached the proletarian school by mocking the political project associated with it, rather than assessing individual texts. This often led to superficial debates, such as when Granville Hicks accused *Hound and Horn* magazine of being anti-social and elitist, and its editors replied that Hicks was neither working class nor appreciative of the classics.[13] Likewise, taking its claims to cultural superiority at face value, Ernest Boyd demolished the *Proletarian Literature in the United States* anthology (1935) because it offered oversimplifications in place of 'real' - i.e. literary - engagement, hence failing to match the bombast of the volume's introduction. It is also ridiculed for claiming an intimate connection with a mass working class audience, which was actually the domain of pulp magazines and Hollywood.[14] Boyd conflated his political disagreement with the anthology's editors with a cursory account of the book's shortcomings. Although this pattern was reproduced in some of the treatment subsequently meted out to proletarian authors, in the 1930s it was largely a response on the part of individual critics. Moreover, it had yet gain the status of conventional wisdom. A Cold War orthodoxy was arrived at in later years and similar to the approach adopted by Boyd only in form. (In turn, the orthodoxy became a subsequent target for revisionist critiques, many of which we draw upon in writing this thesis.)

The major consequence of these new studies is a pluralistic reading of 1930s literature, making the myth of a homogenous left-literary radicalism untenable. Yet, paradoxically the myth of 'Thirties' proletarian literature persists. Although specialised scholarship has revealed the myth to be mendacious, it is nevertheless perpetrated in 'institutional' and 'middlebrow' forums. The term institutional refers to the construction of 'the Thirties' within the teaching of literature. On one hand, there are canonical works of criticism written while the proletarian controversy was still fresh. Alfred Kazin's *On Native Grounds*, for instance, is largely a measured consideration of the development of modern American letters. On the question of 'the Thirties', however, it is markedly partisan. Discussing 'the more fashionable kind of hard-boiled writing', Kazin claims that 'the left-wing naturalist surrendered his craft to what seemed ultimate considerations beyond literature. Literature, in the Communist jargon, was a 'front' and each militant writer a guerrilla fighting in his own way for a common purpose.'[15]

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[12] Recent issues of *Partisan Review* and the *New York Review of Books* feature William Phillips and Theodore Draper respectively, engaged in similar skirmishes, often directed at the 'new histories of American Communism' school.

[13] Letter, *Hound and Horn* editors to *New Republic* editors, June 9, 1932 (reprinted in Mitzi Berger Hamovitch (ed.), *The Hound and Horn Letters* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), pp.156-157. The *Hound and Horn* editorial board consisted of Bernard Bandler, Lincoln Kirstein, and A. Hyatt Mayor.

[14] Ernest Boyd, 'Books' (r. *Proletarian Literature in the United States*), *Current Controversy*, November 1935, p. 32.

Kazin is both an erudite scholar and a principled liberal who avoided the red-baiting approach adopted by many of his contemporaries. However, his formulaic synopsis of radical writing forms a barrier to understanding it, perhaps perpetuating a misleading vision of literary responses to the slump. The book both demands deference as a major literary work (even warranting special fortieth anniversary editions) but goes largely unread on undergraduate courses, further compounding the difficulty of identifying its precise role in constructing 'the Thirties' on the faultline of literary radicalism. Nevertheless, because it insists that a 'party line in literature' was a characteristic feature of the period, *On Native Grounds* introduces the general reader to proletarian literature whilst embedding the predominant stereotypical tropes. Kazin creates the impression, never empirically demonstrated, that the CP was a powerful *direct* cultural patron.

This problem is often also reproduced in chronologically-arranged introductory literary histories. It reflects a generic standard that was firmly established in the 1950s. This pattern has persisted to this day, albeit in a more liberal form. Unlike Kazin, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury are sympathetic to individual authors like Michael Gold (1893-1967) and Henry Roth (b.1906). However, they bracket them with the left-wing critics with whom they disagree. Writing of V.F. Calverton and Granville Hicks, Ruland and Bradbury locate 'the sterility of their approach' in a 'limited conception of what is real', before making an imaginative leap unsupported by evidence, with the claim that 'the Marxist world of the 1930s, was a world preoccupied solely with the play of economic forces; the only place for literature in such a world was as a weapon in class warfare'.[16] Likewise, Bradbury quotes Gold as urging writers to '"go left", become workers identified with the workers, experience and record and radicalise the proletarian world which provided a writer with "all the primitive material he needs"'.[17] Aside from a synopsis of the novel *Jews Without Money* (1930), there is little to balance this one-dimensional portrait, conflating Gold as agitator with Gold as critic and cultural practitioner. In both examples a part is substituted for the whole, hence the inflation of Calverton and Hicks into 'the Marxist world of the 1930s'. Given the role that both Bradbury's texts play as introductory guides for a general readership, it is clear that a one-sided view of the writing of the inter-war period can persist *despite* revisionist scholarship.

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[15] Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (1942) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), p.387.

[16] Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 361.

[17] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p.125.

As we mentioned previously, similar trends become apparent in such 'middlebrow' forums as the literary memoir or autobiography. Thus, Kazin further enhanced his depiction of 1930s literary life in *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1962). Perhaps by way of disclaimer, he establishes his own position as a sharp contrast to that of his contemporaries among the Depression-era *literati*:

> I was sick of Communists. I had the deepest contempt for those middle-class and doctrinaire radicals who, after graduating from Harvard or Yale in the Twenties, had made it a matter of personal honour to become Marxists, and who now worried in the *New Masses* whether Proust should be read after the Revolution and why there seemed to be no simple proletarians in the novels of Andre Malraux.[18]

A variation on this theme appears in *Making It*, where Norman Podhoretz presents *Partisan Review* as 'refusing to accept the Stalinist dogma that experimental poets of a politically conservative bent were to be attacked as decadent while tenth rate proletarian novelists like Jack Conroy were to be promoted as great'.[19] Appearing within a year of each other in the late 1960s, both memoirs employ a stereotype that conflates the Communist Party with its literary sympathisers and their cultural activities. The general and imprecise formulations of a Kazin or Podhoretz were circulated in mediums intended for a largely non-academic audience, thus allowing the stereotype to acquire a purchase as 'common sense' to an extent disproportionate to its accuracy. On this basis 'the Thirties' was constructed through a constant preoccupation with the literary left, often presented as a two-dimensional clash of good and evil.

Similar constructions have continued to circulate to this day. For instance, the 1990 Modern Language Association convention was attacked by Roger Kimball (author of *Tenured Radicals*) who claimed that 'one might have been forgiven for believing that the year was 1969 - if not, indeed, 1935'.[20] Significantly, the focus of Kimball's attack is Barbara Foley, herself a major authority on - and revisionist defender of - the proletarian novel.[21] In bracketing contemporary 'Political Correctness' with an earlier cultural milieu influenced by Stalinism, Kimball can rely upon unstated assumptions to undermine a strand of 1930s writing *and* to engage in present-day polemics.

Deploying straw men in pursuit of a contemporary agenda also distorts the reading of cultural history, in so far as the campaign against 'PC' has framed a discursive approach that is largely characterised by fixed, dogmatic positions. As with 'middlebrow' forms like the autobiography, one could reasonably assume that people aware of the PC controversy outnumber the readership of revisionist accounts of 1930s radical literature. Once again, we see the writing of the past caricatured and corralled up with the concerns of the present, as the wider debate about the (ostensibly related) preoccupation with PC informs public perceptions of the inter-war period. On balance, the evidence would suggest that, even before revisiting such ostensibly aesthetic concerns as historically specific genres and critical modes, we must first confront the politics of memory, as expressed in a consensus based on selective amnesia.

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[18] Alfred Kazin, *Starting Out in the Thirties* (Boston Mass.: Little, Brown, 1962), pp.4-5.
[19] Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p.86.
[20] Kimball, 'The Periphery V. the Center: The MLA in Chicago', reprinted in Paul Berman (ed.), *Debating PC: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (New York: Dell, 1992), p.75.
[21] Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in US Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham, NC.: Duke University, 1993).

Such 'presentism' is significant in its constitutive influence on the ways in which the past is assimilated. Little wonder that Fredric Jameson opens his study of Marxism and Form, which we cite at length, with the following observation:

> When the American reader thinks of Marxist literary criticism, I imagine that it is still the atmosphere of the 1930's which comes to mind. The burning issues of those days - anti-Nazism, the Popular Front, the relationship between literature and the labour movement, the struggle between Stalin and Trotsky, between Marxism and anarchism - generated polemics which we may think back on with nostalgia but which no longer correspond to the conditions of the world today. The criticism practised then ... has been relegated to the status of an intellectual and historical curiosity.[22]

Jameson's exasperation was, like the conventions he describes, rooted in reality. Indeed, the inter-war period saw literary and political concerns discussed interchangeably. However, the phenomenon he describes as 'relegation' was also accompanied by the transformation of 'Marxist literary criticism' into a cipher for totalitarianism. Moreover, the *Marxisant* cultural critique developed in the 1930s is recalled in the same breath as political struggles precisely because the two became conflated in accounts of the period. The difficulty facing the cultural historian is one of explaining the mediations linking politics and culture without collapsing one into the other, in the style of Cold War literary history. Thus, given this prevailing mythology, a closer engagement with the historical controversy over proletarian literature can help to explain the following question. Why has a body of literature with formal origins in a broad realist tradition and mass produced popular narratives been represented as a short-lived attempt to create a Communist working class culture from scratch by critics based at the *New Masses*? The impetus for this was rooted not in the 1930s but in contemporary concerns, primarily those of the Cold War.

If the critical consensus that persists to this day is reducible to a formulation, it is that found in Rahv's famous 'Political Autopsy' essay; proletarian literature was 'the literature of a party disguised as the literature of a class'.[23] Subsequently, this phrase became incorporated into a wide range of hostile attempts to account for a significant literary tendency of the Depression years. 'Proletarian literature' has served as a cipher for a number of assumptions that owed little to a direct engagement with cultural production. Even as the Cold War has thawed and notions of 'Communist infiltration of the arts' fell into disrepute, the allegation that writers worked according to the *diktat* of an authoritarian party has maintained its purchase. It finds its most widespread expression as a means of suggesting that art and politics are incompatible, drawing on 'the Thirties' to corroborate an 'end of ideology' argument or, post-Cold War, to discuss 'Political Correctness'.

In the process, a number of important distinctions have been lost, including that between the New York-based literary critics who developed a form of self-styled proletarian criticism, and the bulk of actual poets and authors, often located outside of the cultural capital. Moreover, the discussion, as currently constituted, risks obscuring the connections that link such writing to the US literary mainstream *and* a wider social setting. For instance, it is clear that a variety of networks - both political in character and based on personal friendships and informal acquaintances - played a substantial role in the development of a 'literary left'. In other words, this common pattern of commitment cannot be explained in purely generic or aesthetic terms. We contend that it was the experience of cultural organisations (and their intersection with broader political trends) which primarily informed the widespread complaints about a 'party line in literature', rather than the direct experience of having a 'line' itself imposed. Thus, Cold War reconstructions of proletarian literature represent a fetishistic view of history, albeit one loosely derived from the experience of cultural practitioners becoming disillusioned with the organisations to which they once flocked in conditions of acute social crisis. In consequence, a monofocal discussion of CPUSA cultural patronage - informed by the largely self-serving accounts of those who rejected it - has come to the fore.

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[22] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1971), p.*ix*.

[23] Philip Rahv, 'Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy', *Southern Review* 4 ,Winter 1939, p.625.

Why has the period between, say, 1929 and 1941 been singled out for enormous opprobrium (of the kind that also afflicts 'the Sixties')? Why has so much energy been channelled into constructing 'the Red Decade', 'the Depression Decade', 'the Anxious Years', and so forth? And why have such accounts selected out a handful of features - notably the sections of the intelligentsia who flirted with the CPUSA - and taken them as emblematic of the inter-war period in its entirety? Although our conclusions are by no means exhaustive, we attempt to resolve these question through an exploration of the playing out of crisis tendencies, in 1930s literature and beyond. Coupled with our earlier explorations of New Deal arts patronage and its relationship to its particular historical 'moment', we offer an interpretation of 'culture and the crisis', which attempts to challenge the perpetuation of the mythologised 'Thirties'.

Although restricted by available space, we now attempt to locate those elements of literary life between 1918 and 1929 that foreshadow and typify the experience of the 1930s. We argued that New Deal art was not conjured up out of a vacuum, but that it was a product of processes of continuity and change between earlier state formations and cultural policies influenced by a hitherto unimaginable crisis. To treat it solely as a product of the slump and the Roosevelt administration would be to ignore all that went before, contributing to the hermetically-sealed 'Thirties' against which this study is an intervention. Likewise, 1930s literature can be assessed in terms of both its distinctive character and the extent to which it developed out of discourses latent within society. At the level of the personnel involved, there were numerous clearly-identifiable connections and experiences linking together specific milieus and peer groups. We cannot hope to undermine vulgar allegations of the 'treason of the intellectuals' without also acknowledging the common bonds that made cultural practitioners into part of a wider collectivity yet distinct from the rest of society.

Thus, Chapter Five provides an analysis of the hard-boiled fiction which was written in a demotic idiom that loosely approximated the language of the streets. In discussing Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961), the most famous hard-boiled author, we enter the world of so-called 'pulp' writing, allowing further consideration of the relationship of literature to history and social change. This chapter explores the capacity of those producing popular narratives within a mass culture industry to engage with the broader trends that concern this study. In terms of their connections to public institutions, a selection of such cultural workers became well-known as Popular Front fellow travellers, Hollywood screenwriters, and figures in numerous McCarthy Era conflicts. We explore the inception of this process, dealing with the methods through which the hard-boiled novel mediated broader crisis tendencies and their social impact.

A commercially lucrative genre that displaced the Western as market leader, hard-boiled detective fiction provided a model for those seeking a mass audience for politicised creative writing. Traditionally, the debate over proletarian literature has revolved around the role of Soviet-inspired aesthetics and their corresponding organisational forms. However, this chapter locates one of US *Proletcult*'s[24] constitutive elements in crime fiction publishing. Formal hostilities between the two genres existed, which were expressed in dismissive abuse and negative depiction of radicals respectively. However, the chapter attempts to demonstrate what they had in common. (This relationship makes a nonsense of the far-fetched but widespread claims that literary proletarianism was an external imposition based on Soviet foreign policy.) As numerous writers have pointed out, US literary radicalism had a rich heritage *prior* to the 1930s 'Heyday of American Communism', in which the 'Proletarian Moment' was said to have occurred.[25] Our focus on the hard-boiled genre further strengthens such analysis, as its idiom became intrinsically connected with attempts to articulate the status and experiences of the working class through the mass communications forum of pulp publishing.

The place of hard-boiled in the Depression is a topic that would warrant an extensive study in its own right.[26] In terms of our overall argument three key strands are developed in Chapter Five. First is the observation made above, that hard-boiled writing mediated the legitimation crisis of the inter-war period. Secondly, we consider the literary representation of violence which, according to later detractors was the main infection - along with sex and communism - that afflicted contemporary fiction. A third strand in the chapter concerns documentary technique and the preoccupation with experiential knowledge, which characterised much of the writing of the 1930s, including hard-boiled. Taken together, these three factors underline the emergence of a common culture *across* the 'national-popular' bloc which was under Roosevelt's hegemony.

Although the chapter explores these trends with reference to works by Eleanor Clark, Ben Field, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Roth and Raoul Whitfield, its key focus is Dashiell Hammett, considered by many to be the inventor of hard-boiled writing. By concentrating upon his realism, his reworking in fiction of the situations that he lived through whilst a Pinkerton detective, and his political activities, we can potentially develop a 'shadow history' of the 1930s. This also allows us to suggest that the patronage of a public institution was *not* a necessary precondition for a cultural practitioner to interrogate 'culture and the crisis'. Furthermore, it draws our attention to the output of the mass culture industries, which any substantial engagement with national and popular culture would need to take account of.

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[24] Strictly speaking, the term *Proletcult* was not officially used as a designation of the American proletarian literature, but the misplaced enthusiasm of the *New Masses* for the Soviet movement, and its recurrence in literary memoirs, such as Malcolm Cowley's, suggests its acceptability as a short-hand reference.

[25] Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*; James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy Over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

[26] Sean McCann, '"A Roughneck Reaching for Higher Things": The Vagaries of Pulp Populism', *Radical History Review* 61 (Winter 1995) is a promising step in this direction.

The question of experience and literature invites us to reconsider the 'documentary impulse', first examined in the section of this study devoted to federal arts patronage. Regardless of their political disagreements, the Roosevelt administration and pro-Communist cultural practitioners were virtually united in a consensus over the importance of concrete facticity in artistic representation. A recurrent mechanism for revisiting this consensus is, as mentioned above, the controversy over proletarian literature in America. First codified in Michael Gold's call for such a movement in 1921[27], this approach became associated with the CPUSA-associated cultural practice of the Comintern's 'Third Period' (1928-1935), in which imminent catastrophe was the predominant outlook and the non-Communist left was a 'social-fascist' menace. The experience of such politics was reworked into a largely mythical framework.

At this level, the analogy with the state as a cultural patron holds, a pattern that is further reinforced by the similarity of their orientation towards documentary. Exploring a specific organisation and its approach allows us to restore such relationships to an appropriate historical context, hence our focus on the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, and the significance of its *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto.[28] In terms of a lasting contribution to US culture and politics, its role was negligible. Its significance lay not in its actual activities, but in its subsequent impact on intellectual life. That 53 prominent intellectuals signed a manifesto supporting the Communist Presidential slate in the 1932 election spoke volumes about the legitimacy crisis unfolding around them. In hyperbolic prose, *Culture and the Crisis* argued that capitalism was incapable of defending even its limited gains. Instead, a politically active intelligentsia, akin to Gramsci's 'organic intellectuals', was presented as offering a way out of the crisis through revolutionary means.[29]

Seldom were manifesto signatories were engaged in anything more than a glorified protest vote, but it nevertheless unsettled the Establishment to watch America's best and brightest appear to advocate a repetition of the 'Soviet experiment' in the United States. League activities were a dramatic expression of widespread disillusion with the status quo, predicated upon the material reality of the Depression. Its manifold effects would include the emergence of a body of apologetics divorced from the horrors of slump and war, that presented *Marxisant* campaigns of the 1930s as the 'treason of the intellectuals'. More concretely, its campaigning paraphernalia - celebrity endorsements, open letters, public statements, caucuses - informed an organisational pattern that was emulated by others throughout the decade (even among the CP's rivals), from the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League to the Committee for Cultural Freedom. One outcome of this process was the 'common sense' view of proletarian literature which presents it as a vulgar expression of the CP's programme, itself formulated in Moscow. On this basis the notion that American *proletcult* resulted from a form of patronage has been firmly established.

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[27] Gold, 'Towards a Proletarian Art' reprinted in Michael Folsom (ed.) *The Mike Gold Reader* (New York: International Publishers, 1974).

[28] For more on the League of Professional Groups, see the appendix of the present study.

[29] League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, *Culture and the Crisis* (New York: League of Professional Groups, 1932).

Up From Below?

A significant counterpoint to the mythology described above is to investigate 'history from below', and a number of scholars have attempted to undermine earlier orthodoxies. They join a number of revisionist accounts written over the last decade or so. Although they would deny being part of a unified 'school', their arguments can be taken collectively as a rebuttal of the conventional discussion of 1930s culture. Thus Eric Homberger has drawn our attention to the disparities between Soviet literary politics - including the abolition of the *Proletcult* group and its doctrine - and the editorial stance of the *New Masses*.[30] James F. Murphy and Lawrence Schwartz have pointed out the thematic and aesthetic overlap of proletarian literature in America with such movements as German Workers Theatre (*Proletbuhne*).[31] Douglass Wixson, like Homberger before him, sought to locate US worker-writers (especially Jack Conroy and the *Anvil/Rebel Poets* milieu) in an indigenous tradition of literary radicalism.[32] Barbara Foley has interrogated current scholarship and, importantly, original proletarian texts, in order to demonstrate the fine balance of political manoeuvring and aesthetic incoherence that in reality underpinned the so-called party line in literature. Taken collectively, these revisionist accounts provide a compelling challenge to the idea that this significant current in 1930s writing was the unmediated result of 'party patronage'.

A second line of attack has been to deconstruct the various claims made in support of the orthodox formula. Thus, Homberger reveals Max Eastman's deliberate mistranslation of Soviet Writers Congress documents in *Artists in Uniform*, while Murphy and Wixson reveal *Partisan Review*'s Philip Rahv as a sectarian advocate of proletarian literature during the early 1930s. Murphy, like Schwartz, disinterrs the *Daily Worker*'s cultural pages, in order to refute the idea that the CP press was uniformly hostile to modern writing.[33] Others point to the disingenuous conduct of the New York Intellectuals, whose claims of differences with others on the left over aesthetic matters concealed the growth of deradicalism and careerism.[34] Thus, the second major strand in a critique of the myth of party patronage is a close examination of the main propagators of the myth.

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[30] Eric Homberger, *American Writers & Radical Politics, 1900-1939: Equivocal Commitments* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.119-140.

[31] James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over 'Leftism' in Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Lawrence Schwartz, *Marxism and Culture* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1980).

[32] Douglass Wixson, *Worker Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1899-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[33] Unfortunately, they often conflate this rather broad category with *modernism*. See Alan M. Wald, *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 144; 151.

[34] Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

A third important element of such a critique would draw upon the 'new histories of American Communism'.[35] The close study of the lives and works of cultural practitioners as individual agents, and their attempts to transform political institutions according to their own concerns, is an important activity for cultural historians.[36] A growing number of literary historians have adapted this approach for the purpose of considering communist writers. This has led to at least one remarkable book, James Bloom's *Left Letters: The Culture Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman* (1992), while paving the way for future investigations of such neglected 1930s topics as race, gender, ethnicity, popular culture and even 'non-canonical decades'. The proximity of the present study to these various 'schools' should be apparent from Chapter Five, which suggests an interaction between the literary left and the mass culture industries, at the level of themes, style and personnel.

An individuated, localised orientation can also provide a useful mechanism for undermining the myth of party patronage and the received image of 'the Thirties' of which it is part.[37] This becomes clear if we consider the contrast between the orthodox presentation of 1930s writers and their actual careers. For instance, in Dixon Wechter's contribution to Arthur Schlesinger's 'History of American Life Series',[38] Albert Halper (1904-1979) is presented as a doctrinaire writer of negligible ability. However, Halper's career bore little relation to the stereotypical subliterate political fanatic he is portrayed as. Born in Chicago to Lithuanian Jewish parents, Halper was a songwriter and mail sorter who resigned on being awarded the post of a regular clerkship. Arriving in Manhattan in 1928, he went on to write four novels that were largely concerned with employment: *Union Square* (1933), *On the Shore* (1934), *The Foundry* (1934) and *The Chute* (1937). Like a number of socially concerned writers, he was represented by the literary agent Maxim Lieber, who himself maintained a broadly socialist orientation even at the height of the Cold War.[39] In 1935, Halper worked in London and Hollywood before returning to New York, joining the League of American Writers. His relationship to fellow authors, and the CPUSA, was somewhat prickly, further confirming the difficulty of generalising about literary-political conduct in the 1930s.

During the 'Third Period', Halper avoided the partisanship that often animated his colleagues. Whilst Alexander Godin complained to him of 'the *New Masses* brothel', and Eliot Cohen called the *Menorah Journal* 'an obvious corpse' that was closed to new writers, Halper maintained friendly relations with both periodicals and their critics.[40] When *Union Square* was published, it was condemned by Michael Gold as 'stale bohemianism' but praised by the more traditional critic Carl Van Doren. This produced even more confused reviews, including one headlined '*Union Square* IS - or is not - the Proletarian Novel; Halper Even Refuses to Take Sides in the Matter'.[41] This hardly suggests a doctrinaire mind churning out Communist propaganda, or a unified response to such work.

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[35] In contrast to the orthodox approach of Draper, Klehr *et al* (which treats the CP as an institution), the new histories express an orientation toward 'history from below'. Writers such as Maurice Isserman, Mark Naison, Robin D.G. Kelley and Fraser Ottanelli have used interviews and the conduct of Party units in a localised setting, in order to present a picture of a heterogeneous CP pursuing a variety of policies *irrespective* of the wishes of Moscow. In turn, this has provoked a furious response from traditionalists like Draper.

[36] Wald, *Writing from the Left*, p.109.

[37] In this respect Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) is significant.

[38] Dixon Wecter, *The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941*, History of American Life Series, Vol.13, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p.253. Cited in Foley, *Radical Representations*, p.21.

[39] See 'Postscript', in Maxim Lieber (ed.), *The American Century* (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1960), pp.502-518.

Likewise, Halper's literary tastes bore little resemblance to the Stalinoid clone portrayed by Wechter. He liked the *American Mercury* under H.L. Mencken's editorship, while condemning Ernest Hemingway's early writings as 'horse shit', an argument presented in more formal terms in a scathing essay penned at the Yaddo artists' colony.[42] Significantly, this was at a time when the Party press justifiably treated Mencken as a reactionary influence, while Hemingway - purportedly the father of hard-boiled fiction - had been sympathetic to Italian Communists and would renew this acquaintance within two years, influenced by developments in Spain and Popular Front politics.[43] Despite the assertions of Cold War commentators, there is little in Halper's background to suggest he subordinated his cultural practice to a Party line.

Halper was both praised as a proletarian writer and as someone who remained largely aloof from the proletarian literature debate. When *Union Square* was promoted as part of a renaissance in proletarian publishing, he complained to Lieber that 'the publicity crap ladled out horribly distorts my book', while berating Viking Press for advertising it as *not* being 'the advocate of a cause'.[44] This suggests that he wanted to avoid being pigeon-holed, but maintain a reputation for political commitment. His stature improved in the mid-1930s, with promotion of *The Foundry* in Russia and a proposed film contract on the way,[45] although such patronage may well have compromised the prospect of upholding his desire to be an independent political commentator. Nevertheless, even when proletarian fiction was becoming increasingly *passe*, Halper suggested 'Heroes of Our Time', an anthology of his own short stories, featuring tales of dentists, taxi drivers and clerks.[46] Rejecting formal identification with politically-defined genres, but portraying the workplace in a series of realist narratives, Halper defied simplistic categorisation. As an unpublished autobiographical sketch concluded, he felt that writers should 'do away with labels and merely call ourselves commentators, or historians'.[47]

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[40] Godin to Halper, February 5, 1932; Cohen to Halper, April 19, 1932 (Albert Halper papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, Astor Lenox, and Tilden Foundations: referred to hereafter as Halper papers).

[41] New York *World Telegraph*, May 6, 1933.

[42] Halper to Fante, October 20, 1933; Halper to Fante, January 8, 1934 (Halper papers).

[43] Kenneth S. Lynn, *Hemingway* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp.186-187; 442-443. Likewise, Granville Hicks completely slated Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* despite praising his notorious *New Masses* reportage piece, 'Who Murdered the Vets?' (Hicks, 'Review and Comment: Small Game Hunting', *New Masses*, November 19, 1936, p.23.

[44] Halper to Lieber, February 1, 1933; Halper to George Oppenheimer, February 2, 1933 (Halper papers).

[45] See Albert Halper to Rose Halper, April 8, 1935 and May 31, 1935 (Halper papers).

[46] Halper to Harold Guinzburg, August 29, 1938 (Halper papers).

[47] Autobiographical Sketch, Outgoing Correspondence file 1936-1939, (Halper papers).

Halper did not become alienated from communism because of Party control of his writing, but as a result of the latter's politics and organisational forms. In 1935, such tensions were negligible, except insofar as he thought his political associations imposed additional burdens on his time, such as the unsolicited mail he received from CPUSA members, requesting personal appearances and so forth.[48] But after the Hitler-Stalin Pact, he resigned from the League of American Writers and turned his back on the possibility of cultural practitioners enacting any wider social change. 'The intellectuals today are the most fly-blown, moth-eaten group in the nation', he fulminated, declaring that 'culture', 'democracy' and the hopes of mankind were demeaned when used by 'glib people'. 'Piddling statements' were no help, the Soviet Union could fight alone, and the League should fold, he concluded. In Halper's opinion, 'a writer should not sign statements but should write'.[49]

Halper's letter of resignation from the League embodies much of the despair that intellectuals felt at the onset of war. This alienation was rooted in the realities of Stalinism, especially its political contortions over whether or not to support the US war effort. As a writer, Halper was influenced by the close relationship between culture and politics in the early 1930s. However, in contrast to the myth of Party-controlled literature expounded in the post-war period, his work was autonomous from the CPUSA. As with numerous other writers, a common pattern emerges, of broadly similar conduct, albeit informed by numerous specific experiences.

Like many of his contemporaries, Halper's orientation during the 1930s was that of a radical response to the depression followed by growing disillusionment with radicalism. This suggests not writers marching in unison, as a monolith mouthing slogans, but the widespread sense that society was perched on the edge of an abyss. Perhaps this alertness to hardship and an out of control economic system made proletarian literature - as construed by the conventional stereotype - into a ghost that post-war commentators sought to exorcise. This process of 'exorcism' could be more accurately described as the development of a body of apologetics in response to the inter-war period. On this basis, the characterisation of proletarian literature as an insidious form of patronage can be read as displacing discussions of legitimation crisis into the cultural sphere. Constructing 'new histories', based on the concrete relations of cultural production, provides a partial antidote to the myth of 'the Thirties'. However, our study makes no claims to provide such an account.

Focusing on the local poses problems of its own. While agreeing with the overall attempt to 'recover' lost writers, we would argue that this task can also entail a parallel danger. As our familiarity with the individual 'trees' of the 1930s becomes greater, can we also risk losing sight of the 'wood'? Local histories express a reticence about totalising; they can enrich our knowledge of authors and organisations, but are less capable of discerning general trends. Undoubtedly, the present study is indebted to literally dozens of such accounts that contest the orthodox view of 'the Thirties'. At the same time, we would note a recurrent methodological limitation of revisionist writing, expressed in the underdeveloped connections made between the local circumstances described and broader social processes. This is clearly expressed in the falsely polarised nature of the 'new histories of American Communism' debate: rather than counterpose history 'from below' to its antithesis (as found in Draper, Klehr *et al*), we would argue that the CPUSA was both part of an international movement *and* a vehicle for the specific aspirations of a generation of activists and intellectuals.[50]

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[48] Halper to Godin, February 6, 1932 (Halper papers).

[49] Halper to Franklin Folsom, December 14, 1939 (Halper papers). For further details concerning the League's collapse, see Kutulas, *Long War*, p.171.

This thesis embarked upon the task of locating a number of key 'moments' in cultural history, in order to chart the development of a national culture in conditions of slump. Patronage - the organisational relationship between cultural production and public institutions - formed a central category with which to pursue this objective. However, our chapter on hard-boiled writing, and our comments on the proletarian literature controversy, have implications for this argument. Each would suggest that direct patronage was *not a necessary precondition* for the legitimation crisis to manifest itself in cultural production. As Chapter Six attempts to demonstrate, there existed a body of writing that that was beyond the formal controls of the state or of political parties, but nevertheless refracted many of the themes associated with Federal One and the *New Masses* magazine. Such writing thrived within a broad culture of the left, albeit for the duration of a specific 'moment'. We call this literary fringe 'the proletarian periphery'.

Unlike the extensive controversy over proletarian literature, there has been a marked reluctance to engage with this periphery. The category itself is best explained in relation to what is perhaps the key paradox of proletarian literature, that of its peculiar location within US literary history. For much of the twentieth century, the scattering of proletarian texts constituted a pariah branch of the canon, a genre referred to darkly as a symbol of folly and Communist duplicity. Until recently, this led to a rather one dimensional discussion, from which archetypal works like *Jews Without Money* (1930) and *Call It Sleep* (1935) are seldom missing, but 'lesser' publications are more likely to be considered in generic terms. In other words, Cold War norms have shaped the mainstream perception of the literary 'Thirties' producing, in turn, a more open-minded response, albeit one hemmed in by the conventional orthodoxy. Indeed, outside of the left and university presses retrieving radical texts and the specialist scholars reassessing them, it appears that little progress has been made beyond Rideout's four categories of proletarian fiction: 'the strike novel', 'bottom dogs', 'conversion' and 'middle class decay'. This claim is made not to dismiss scholars working in the field, but to highlight the disparity between the growing number of substantial revisionist accounts and the persistence of a myth of totalitarian control of left-wing art and creative writing in the public domain.

Rather than reformulating the various positions associated with this debate at length, the chapter considers how the idiom and nuances associated with proletarian literature were replicated *across* the literary spectrum. We examine such writers as James M. Cain and Horace McCoy, none of whom could be directly associated with 'party patronage', in addition to those whose 1930s political associations did not bar their subsequent entry into the annals of American letters, such as John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck. Expanding the focus of the study to include English language adaptations of B. Traven's work allows us to suggest that a 'proletarian periphery' was an important component of the writing of the inter-war period. Thus, many of the qualities and characteristics crudely attributed to the generic proletarian novel are replicated in the more 'middlebrow' but socially-oriented literature of the period, in a fashion not dissimilar to the 'documentary impulse', or the egalitarian thrust of hard-boiled fiction, discussed in Chapters Four and Five respectively. In concluding Chapter Six, we note two key tendencies that contradict the mythology of 'the Thirties'. On the one hand, it appears that the intensity of social crisis registered across literature, not merely in the writing associated with CPUSA cultural projects. On the other, those working within the ambit of the Party had far greater creative freedom than was later acknowledged.

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[50] By way of a political critique of Stalinism, we would present 'socialism in one country' as having a fragmentary logic of its own. Given that the Soviet perspectives of world revolution collapsed into various brands of national reformism, a more 'local' approach can substantially assist our understanding of an international phenomenon. However, we would not wish to sever the historically specific development of national Communist parties (and states) from global trends. See Frank Furedi, *The Soviet Union Demystified: A Materialist Analysis* (London: Junius, 1986).

Party organisers often assumed that sympathetic cultural practitioners were also political activists, hence the slogan 'Art is a Class Weapon'. This commitment, to a sort of praxis, was not solely the domain of writers associated with the Communist *New Masses* magazine. Another who attempted to develop such an approach was V.F. Calverton, author of numerous books and editor of *The Modern Quarterly* magazine. Chapter Seven considers his attempts to develop a comprehensive critique of society, both as a social/literary critic and as an unsuccessful novelist. Calverton is included in this study not on account of his individual significance, but as a 'typical' 1930s intellectual. Once again, we use 'typical' not to mean ordinary, but to present Calverton's exemplary conduct as typifying some of the key tensions of his age. Moreover, Calverton established continuities between Greenwich Village radicalism and the Depression-era literary left. He attempted to rework the post-war, pre-Crash 'culture critique'[51] as the basis upon which to oppose the slump and its consequences. Such activity has led to his subsequent representation as the voice of 'independence', the defining theme of most writing on Calverton. Implicitly or explicitly, this has been taken to mean that he rejected the 'party patronage' alleged to have occurred elsewhere on the left. However, a closer look at his career reveals numerous organisational affiliations *and* a tendency to write didactic fiction (usually melodramatic in form) for which proletarian writers have been criticised.

Ultimately this approach proved difficult to sustain in the face of fascism, Stalinism and war. Calverton's Marxist commitments were problematic because of his theoretical eclecticism, and his frequent avoidance of political discipline. Later on his ideas became more equivocal, including rather sinister explorations of 'social hypnosis' (crowd psychology). As a consequence, little is salvageable from Calverton's crude theory and often tedious prose. Nevertheless, he managed to avoid the increasingly anticommunist and conservative trajectory of many of his peers and, at great personal cost, he maintained an anti-war position until his premature death in 1940. Such exemplary qualities run counter to the predominant 'Thirties' mythology, while enriching an analysis of the inter-war period. On balance, his courageous attempts to present an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism, derived from what he saw as an historically specific analysis of a rapidly changing global situation, sets an important example. For all its faults, this tragically short career illuminates the basic prerequisites for developing and sustaining a radical and humanist political outlook during the 1930s. This chapter also concludes Section Two of our study.

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[51] A key category in Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA: From 1870 to Present Day* (London: Verso, 1987).

The interpretations of Calverton's individual experiences have been affected by subsequent debates in cultural history, but this is little different to the process that has afflicted the entire inter-war period. Chapter Eight deals directly with the conditions that informed this mythology of 'the Thirties' as a 'red decade'. In addition to discussing the winding down of Federal One, which curtailed the predominant patterns of patronage, we consider the collapse of the literary left. By the onset of war, much of cultural radicalism was in an advanced state of disintegration. Following the Nazi invasion of Russia, uncritical support for the US war effort appeared to be unanimous across the literary left, resulting in the postponement or sacrifice of long standing aspirations. Many of those ostensibly connected to Trotskyism - such as the *Partisan Review* group - also became supporters of the war. Federal cultural projects were incorporated into the war effort, closing down entirely by 1943. In short, the war deradicalised and disoriented the cultural left (a more detailed examination of this process would require a full length study). It also undermined the 'national popular' forms of patronage that came to the fore in response to the slump. Thus, in the closing section of this study, our penultimate chapter offers a cursory synopsis of the debilitating effects of wartime mobilisation on 1930s cultural radicalism. Given that the war was central to America's transition to a global power, one could also expect it to have a transformative impact upon the literary left.

Low Horizons, Friends in High Places

Although not formally allocated a chapter in this study, an underlying concern of the thesis is the milieu referred to as the New York Intellectuals, given their role in the construction of 'the Thirties'. Frequently, their cultural critique anticipated Cold War liberalism, producing arguments more durable than those associated with *The Red Decade*. By their own account, the group based around *Partisan Review* defended literary standards and modernism against '*Proletcult*', thus allowing them to grasp the brutal realities of communism. They argued that their principled stand left them well-placed to defend 'cultural freedom', a position that included hostility to Party (and state) 'patronage', of the kind described in previous chapters. However, *Partisan*'s position in the proletarian literature controversy was more complex, and sometimes closer to the Party, than the recollections of editor William Phillips choose to reveal. In turn, this type of selective amnesia has coloured the predominant interpretative approach for comprehending 1930s culture.

We will present a different view to that of Phillips and his associates. We would argue that by emphasising differences with the CP over the relationship between cultural production and Communist organisational forms, *Partisan* and its associates rationalised their growing distance from the central political questions facing the entire left, not simply its literary fringe. Such general issues and specific cultural concerns became intertwined with the question of 'totalitarianism'. In characterising the Soviet social formation as being synonymous with fascism and organised by an omnipotent bureaucracy, caste or class, the *Partisan* group foreshadowed the political language of Cold War liberalism. At a time when Soviet moral authority was in the ascendant, and

Russia appeared to be the only power that was both immune to the slump and doggedly anti-fascist, the New York Intellectuals' critique of Stalinism offered (albeit unwittingly) a lifeline to a badly compromised elite. Apologists for the social order attempted to deflect criticisms of free market by pointing to Soviet infringements of the free mind. Inflected through debates over cultural policy and generalised across society, literary politics became an arena in which a Cold War conceptual framework developed. As the conclusion to our study suggests, part of this process involved constructing 'the Thirties', in a manner that highlighted the menace of 'totalitarianism' and downplayed the impact of the slump.

At each stage of Section Two, as with the study more broadly, we will emphasise three factors: legitimation crisis and the inter-war period, its impact upon cultural practice and the latter's capacity to embody and mediate such wider social trends, and the construction of a distinctive 'Thirties' mythology to rationalise these developments. Popular culture and Cold War liberalism have tended to invert this process, making 'the Thirties' into the prism through which subsequent interpretations are arrived at. For reasons entirely bound up with Cold War preoccupations, characterisations of 'the Red Decade' and 'Artists in Uniform' have acquired a common sense character, even whilst a growing band of scholars have chiselled away at the supposed empirical foundations for such mythology.

To an even greater extent than Section One, the second section of this study is perhaps open to misreading. It may appear that we endow the institutions of authority with enormous power, at most offering a conspiratorial view of cultural history. Crudely put, having argued that the New Deal reintegrated the masses into political life, and saw off the Depression, we now appear to be suggesting that the section of the intelligentsia most intransigently opposed to US capitalism were incorporated into the system and transformed into its most articulate apologists. However, this would suggest a supremely well organised and resourceful approach to problems of hegemony on the part of Roosevelt and his successors. This is not our argument, and to present 1930s cultural politics in this manner would be to recycle a 'Thirties' myth of the decade concerning the state. We would in effect be replicating the simplistic view of the Soviet Union put forward by theories of totalitarianism, only to transfer its conclusions to the United States.

Finally, to return to the question of 'the Thirties' as a discursive construct, it is not entirely accurate to see it as the product of a series of unified and internally coherent descriptions. This would imply a degree of conscious planning and discursive unity seldom present in responses to the inter-war period. We argue that although the development of an apologetic and selectively amnesiac interpretation of the Great Depression has required a degree of fine tuning and rehearsal, it has been largely a semi-conscious process, in which the chaotic character of the inter-war period has meant that those seeking explanations have had to work with the materials at hand. Implicit in a framework that mixes partial recollections of the 1930s with a search for scapegoats is an attempt to denigrate historical change. Moreover, its motives stemmed more from contemporary considerations in a variety of historical conjunctures than from a desire to explain the problem of crisis in its multifarious manifestations. This is not to deny the scope to learn from the 1930s, an objective in its own right that perhaps justifies the present study. The point, however, is to remove the debris that obstructs a thorough-going understanding of the events of 'the Age of Catastrophe'[52], the better to evade their repetition.

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[52] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

Chapter 5 - Hard Boiled Cities: Counter-Hegemonic Discourse and Popular Narrative

In previous chapters the New Deal was characterised as a series of compromises, in which economic crisis led to government violations of the free market, and state-supported cultural production made the 'American Scene' and documentary realism occupy centre stage. Each such shift had the paradoxical effect of ameliorating the symptoms of crisis while intensifying an awareness of the problem among the hegemonic elite's traditional and organic intellectuals. Art and literature became arenas in which such changes were experienced and contested, especially once the state was involved in their production. Likewise, craft-produced cultural artefacts were collectively incorporated into a *de facto* mass culture industry under federal auspices. A side effect of this process was that, through this process, they came to serve as a repository of society's anxieties. In the following chapter we consider the relationship of the hard-boiled genre, itself a product of commercial publishing, to the crisis unfolding around it. As we shall see, the lack of sponsorship by public institutions did not prevent hard-boiled fiction from articulating the ways in which social values were coming under strain.

Logically, the relative novelty of state patronage in the United States begs the question of pre-existing patterns of cultural production. The production of American literature was a long-established practice, although the novel was perceived by the Puritanism-influenced academy as a rather lowbrow form. According to Warner Berthoff, it 'developed largely in response to vulgar as opposed to learned taste ... appealing to an audience already partial by settled habit to topical broadsides, to circumstantial chronicles of real events ... and to the grossly sensational news, and newspapers, of the day'.[1] These patterns of 'cultural lag' (i.e. in relation to Europe) were gradually eroded throughout the 20th century, however. Thus, works by Herman Melville and his contemporaries (as considered in F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*) were becoming ensconced as literary masterpieces prior to the 1930s, but they exercised limited direct influence upon Depression-era literature.[2] Matthiessen's best-known work 'established a canon of great American authors with such authority that we tend to forget its recent creation'.[3] Likewise, the realism and naturalism that was considered part of a revolt against convention appeared exhausted, while the experimentation that accompanied Parisian 'exile' was collapsing, both from personal conflicts among 'lost generation' cultural practitioners and the effects of economic slump.[4] This is not to write off established literary movements entirely, but to point out their incapacity to mediate social change and convey this to a mass audience during the Depression.

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[1] Warner Berthoff, *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature 1884-1919* (1965) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981 edition), p.5.

[2] Significantly, it is by reviewing Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* that Lionel Trilling's Gifford Maxim, a character based on Whittaker Chambers, publicly signals his break with the Communist Party. Trilling's only full-length novel was a milestone in the decline of 1930s cultural radicalism (*The Middle of the Journey* (1947) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981 ed.), pp. 171-175).

[3] Jonathan Arac, 'The Struggle for the Cultural Heritage: Christina Stead Refunctions Charles Dickens and Mark Twain', in H. Aram Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 122-123.

[4] See Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return* (New York: Norton, 1934); Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Trans-Atlantic Mythologies and the Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), pp.351-352.

Conversely, most writing that attempted to fulfil this role could be located in the cleavage, described above, between high literature and the nascent mass culture industries. Hence this chapter is concerned with hard-boiled fiction, in which a relationship between 'culture and the crisis' is demonstrable *without* an intermediate dimension of organised politics.

Such connections were apparent at the time of writing this study, when obituaries for Hollywood screenwriter Albert Hackett revealed an interesting 'shadow history' of twentieth century America. Hackett, and partner Frances Goodrich, were the husband and wife writing team who adapted Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man* (1934) for the big screen. Both spent the Depression decade on the fringes of the *noir* sensibility and, slightly later, associating with the West Coast's vogueish Popular Front political milieus. The political consequences of the Popular Front became apparent in later years; in the 1940s Hackett and Goodrich worked on allied propaganda films, and the following decade they came into conflict with the McCarthyite activities of the American legion.[5] Thus, we can observe how the broader historical picture - the slump, the Second World War, the Cold War - runs like a thread through the lives of individual cultural practitioners.

This observation points us in two directions. On the one hand, it reminds us of the process which led to the construction of a peculiar literary prism through which the cultural life of the inter-war period has been comprehended ('the Thirties'). On the other, it points back in the direction of Dashiell Hammett, the author from whom MGM acquired Nick and Norah Charles, the detective duo which Hackett and Goodrich made their own. In this chapter, we will try to outline the factors which bind Hammett, and the hard-boiled style which he personified and pioneered, to the social developments central to recent American life.[6] In keeping with the broad sweep of our study, the issue in hand is not Hammett as an individual author, but assessing the points of intersection between legitimation crisis with the space provided by the mass culture industries (at a push, their patronage).

In line with our earlier observations, the historical development of American literature problematises European designations like high, mass, popular and folk culture. Lacking a national tradition with the continuity suggested by notions of 'English Literature', US writers operate in a peculiar institutional context. On one hand, traditionalist literary critics have displayed considerable reticence about according American authors the same prestige given to a selection of their European counterparts. On the other, admission to the canon can occur in a considerably shorter space of time. Thus, in an archetypal critical study of 'the novel of violence', we find a vertical scale of excellence, in which Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell are contrasted favourably with Hammett and James M. Cain. (Cain is singled out for particular opprobium; his novels are considered an abuse of the writer's trade, comparable to a pianist playing in a whorehouse.)[7]

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[5] Ronald Bergan, 'The ideal Hollywood couple', Manchester *Guardian*, 9 May 1995.

[6] Less mention is made of Carroll John Daley, whose stories adopted the terse and colloquial dialogue credited to Hammett prior to the latter's first *Black Mask* appearance (see Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* [London: Pan, 1995 ed.], p.154).

[7] W. M. Frohock, *The Novel of Violence in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1957), pp. 14, 13.

American crime fiction occupies a peculiar place in the interstices of the literary order. It exists on a spectrum where its status varies wildly, from being a 'junior branch of canon' to a commodity mass produced in order to realise profits for publishers. In contrast to the fleeting renaissance of documentary-oriented representational forms under the New Deal, hard-boiled detective fiction has seldom been accorded any respectability. The issue is further confused because dismissals of such narratives have frequently served as a thinly veiled attack on their popular readership, suggesting elitist sentiments that were often made tangible, whether by state regulation of dime novels[8] or fifties moral panics about the 'menace of the paperback'.[9]

This chapter is concerned with relocating such questions in their appropriate historical context. We pursue this goal with reference to four distinct factors, before attempting to integrate them into our central argument regarding patronage and the cultural mediations of crisis tendencies in 1930s America. We open the discussion with a brief outline of the development of US crime fiction, both considering its antecedents and analogous cultural forms. Secondly, we detail the economic backdrop to publishing such material, and its relationship to a popular audience. In the third part of this chapter, we reflect upon the contradictory - yet democratic - impetus behind the genre, expressed in its 'hard-boiled' idiom and in the opportunities that it presented the organised left. In conclusion, we consider the processes that disengaged such writing from its democratic orientation. Each of these four developmental stages enunciates the mediations between culture and the crisis; by treating the publishers of crime fiction as a source of patronage running counter to that of the state, we can move from the specific 'hard-boiled' experience to a more general interpretation of Depression-era culture. Moreover, the popular constituency for such writing suggests the extent to which a radical 'war of position' waged within the mass culture industries was a realistic possibility. In short, a focus on hard-boiled literary endeavours can also pencil in something resembling a 'shadow history' of the inter-war years.

The basic elements of hard-boiled writing are familiar to many - the city, the crime, the detective. Moreover, those casually acquainted with these publications will acknowledge their gritty realism, perhaps echoing Raymond Chandler's praise of Hammett, who 'gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse.'[10] A more sophisticated analysis demands that we move beyond such generalisation; by asking 'which city', 'which crime', 'which detective', we are drawn immediately towards the malaise which racked American society in the aftermath of the First World War. Moreover, the pursuit of this line of investigation alludes to some significant continuities based on longstanding questions of legitimacy.

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[8] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987), pp.50-52.

[9] Frohock, *Novel of Violence*, p.14.

[10] Raymond Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder' (1948), reprinted in *Pearls are a Nuisance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.195.

Thus, the 1870s saw the growth of a marked sensitivity to the perils of urbanisation, expressed in fields as diverse as literature and public health discourse.[11] Cities were viewed as a challenge to Victorian values. Those expressing such fears also witnessed the emergence of the dime novel, a commercial venture that housed several of detective fiction's predecessors, including the 'Old Sleuth' stories and tales of the Molly Maguires. As Irish-American trade unionists, the Molly Maguires were frequently portrayed as a criminal conspiracy; conversely, the strike-breaking activities of the Pinkerton agency were represented as a struggle against evil. The Molly Maguires were twenty Irish coal miners hanged for murders committed while allegedly participants in a conspiracy; as such their story made sensational material for dime novelists and story writers on the staff of such publications as *The Fireside Companion*, the *New York Weekly*, and the *Saturday Journal*. Regardless of developments in 'respectable' literature, the short-lived 'Molly Maguires' serial novel enjoyed a brief renaissance as a popular narrative in the 1870s.

In reworking this episode for publication, writers took sides; some offered sympathy by articulating the voices of Philadelphia mining communities, while others, closer to the conventions of crime reporting, discussed the affair in terms of innocence and guilt. Eponymous detective agency founder Allan Pinkerton (1819-84) wrote *The Molly Maguires and the Detective* (1877), which paved the way for an indigenous American style with a detective as its central actor. Significantly, both hard-boiled fiction and writing about the working class have a common antecedent in the 1870s and, in several respects, this combination of social unrest and documentary form foreshadows developments in American letters during the inter-war period. Moreover, its considerable popular readership suggests that new formations were emerging which combined class politics with mass communications. Campaigns to subdue a perceived urban menace furnished the material for a predominantly urban readership yet, despite its frequently conservative content, the prototype detective novel was considered suspect in 'respectable' society. Accentuated into a moral panic over the malign influence of the dime novel, such sentiments ensured that Victorian America connected its fear of the city to the popular entertainment that city dwellers consumed.[12]

In the 1920s these ideas were elevated into an organising principle of society. The Red Scare, Prohibition and the National Origins Act made hostility to urban life into the bedrock of national politics. However, the now excluded cities were also the powerhouse of an expanding economy. The impossibility of combining economic growth with WASP hegemony was embodied in the failure of Prohibition; extensive social change undermined the puritan elitism of old. As we argued in Chapter One, only with Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal were urban 'new immigrants' partially integrated into national political life.[13] Paradoxically, these developments coincided with the city - as presented in detective fiction - becoming *less* respectable.

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[11] Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 7-9; Deborah Lupton, *The Imperative of Health: Public Health and the Regulated Body* (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 31-32

[12] Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, pp. 118-124.

[13] Lydia Morris, *Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 61; George E. Mowry, *The Urban Nation, 1920-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 93-95.

Hard-boiled writing embodied the sensibilities of the city, yet at the same time it expressed transition within culture at a national level. It addressed its audience in a language far removed from the genteel approach of the English amateur sleuth. Modifications in language accompanied modifications in formula, removing the 1930s American crime novel from a scenario 'where a detective in the English or Anglophile tradition can rely on everybody staying clearly in place on the Cluedo board'.[14] The style developed through a democratically-inclined representation of everyday discourse, in contrast to the 1920s, where the literary imitation of colloquial speech was presented as an alien aberration from literary norms. Prior to the emergence of realist fiction, working class vernacular often appeared in quotation marks, if at all, but detective writers of the *Black Mask* school achieved a different synthesis, by incorporating urban populations as characters, rather than as scenery. Moreover, in contrast to those developments largely internal to hard-boiled style, it also interacted with the changing fortunes of the Western. As both a popular, mass-produced narrative and a mythologised common past, the Western faced a period of relative decline, creating spaces for other genres to fill.

The first of these trends, which resulted in the exclusion of urban life from the novel, was noted by V. F. Calverton, a prominent 'sociological' literary critic examined in Chapter Seven. Referring to the 'Colonial Complex', he suggested that American literature would lack the maturity necessary to reflect a modern society until it shook off the legacy of eighteenth century British rule.[15] Calverton's argument is interesting in that it foreshadows the post-colonial literary and social theory fashionable today,[16] but it is less germane to this discussion in that it primarily concerns a selective tradition of Great Works, rather than the mass-produced commodities with which we concern ourselves here. This post-colonial problem and its resolution in detective fiction has been summarised thus:

> The search for a native American idiom is among other things an expression of the traditional American ambivalence felt for British life, culture and institutions... rooted in the historical circumstance of having inherited a mother tongue from a rejected fatherland.[17]

Two kinds of process occurred within such narratives, albeit to differing degrees. The restrained English tradition which treated detection as a hobby made way for an approach driven by action and professionalism; in turn, this helped to rehabilitate the vernacular of the streets. Through its concern with the city and the underworld, detective fiction acquired a democratic content, irrespective of its failure, in Chandler's view, to serve as a documentary representation of working class speech.

In the late 1920s the critic Vernon Louis Parrington suggested that realist literary technique and what he called ideology (i.e. society's central preoccupations) overlapped continually. This argument was demonstrated by highlighting the coincidence of Jack London's writing and Muckraking journalism with the depression of 1907, and through an analogous emphasis on the works of Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson appearing alongside the recessionary trends that emerged after 1918.[18] Parrington's critics, such as Matthiessen, felt this to be a limited reading that confined literary theory to complaining about the lack of explicitly political meanings in particular writers.[19] This debate about the interpretation of social realism is still germane for contemporary analysis of hard-boiled writing. Thus, while Hammett's most productive years can be paralleled with a chronology based on cycles of capital accumulation, it would be mistaken to reduce his work to a mere extension of economic breakdown. Moreover, this explanation would not account for Hammett's immediate antecedents, namely the adventure formula/Western, and the crime fiction of the 19th century.

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[14] Peter Humm, 'Camera Eye/Private Eye', in Brian Docherty (ed.), *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.30.

[15] V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) (New York: Farrar Straus, 1973), pp. 19-22.

[16] Post -colonialism is distinguished by its assessment of contemporary developments through the prism of their relationship to prior historical stages of external domination or nationalist revolt.

[17] Dennis Porter, 'The Language of Detection', in Tony Bennett (ed.), *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.81.

If we assess the adventure formula as plot-centred, then the hard-boiled detective narrative can be seen as an outgrowth of the genteel English tradition, discussed above. However, if we locate its development in a series of breaks with the Western and its conventions, as popularised in dime novels, then a different picture emerges. For instance, whereas the Western treats lawlessness as part of a transitional phase of American history, in the urban crime narrative it is symptomatic of society's ills in general. Likewise, becoming wealthy on the wild frontier is a test of character; in detective fiction, resources are already concentrated in the hands of the wealthy, exposing a relationship between riches and immiseration. When hard-boiled fiction suggested that adventure led to material gain, it was usually abroad,[20] or by expropriating the powerful.

Moreover, historical development deprived the Western of its contemporary relevance. Growing industrialisation, the closure of the Frontier,[21] and the collapse of the 19th century ideal of a nation of independent farmers all contributed to the Western's decline. In so far as the Western sustained its power as a coherent American mythology, this was expressed through Hollywood cinema rather than popular fiction. Perhaps this explains the promotional package for John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), which suggested that cinema managers invite an 'old timer' to tell customers how the West really was.[22] The Western's fall from grace as an influential genre in popular publishing was offset by its cinematic renaissance. Westerns did not suffer a complete collapse in sales and library borrowing, but they lost ground to more contemporary genres, thus problematising their relationship to national identity. Their declining significance also opened a window of opportunity for detective fiction.

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[18] Vernon Louis Parrington, 'The Development of Realism', in Norman Foerster (ed.), *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* (1928) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1959), pp. 139-141.

[19] Leo Marx, 'Double Consciousness and the Cultural Politics of F.O. Matthiessen', *Monthly Review*, February 1983, p. 43.

[20] For instance in B. Traven's celebrated novel, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which we discuss in Chapter Six.

[21] Noting Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 'Frontier Thesis', Gelfant argues that the sociological theory of urbanism can be used as a literary tool, in a manner analogous to the application of Turner's approach to earlier writing. See Blanche Housman Gelfant, *The American City Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p.28.

[22] Edward Buscombe, 'Introduction' *Stagecoach* (London: BFI Books, 1993), p.43.

Paradoxically, hard-boiled writing developed as both a national and a regional style. In part, it originated in Californian locales, notably San Francisco and Los Angeles. With reference to the second of these cities, the hard-boiled writer could embellish an extant cultural convention in which proximity to the Mexican border signalled danger and exotica, a *Heart of Darkness* scenario tailored for American imperialism.[23] Hammett develops this trend in his short story 'The Golden Horseshoe', in which the Continental Op investigates a missing persons case in an assortment of Tijuana bars. It is also present in a letter to the police in *The Dain Curse*, which informs them of the killing of a Cockney confidence trickster in Mexico City.[24] Hammett's punchy tone and tempo works as well in describing social life on either side of the border, but if we focus excessively on adventures on the 'periphery', we could become distracted from an assessment of the 'core', namely the urban metropolis inhabited by Sam Spade, Ned Beaumont and the Continental Op.

An important aspect of the hard-boiled detective story was the shift to detection as a form of wage labour, in that the reader's sympathies are drawn to the plight of the 'working stiff'. As Ralph Willett has observed, 'the hard-boiled detective novel is one of the few fictional genres where the depiction of work is a major concern'.[25] Hence the violence in such narratives was often represented as a variation on the labour process itself, a form of concrete labour inextricable from the generation of surplus in society. Implicitly, the worlds of work and crime were interchangeable, echoing perhaps a society in which crime and public life mixed openly in conditions of Prohibition.[26] Furthermore, the rhetoric of free enterprise, like the monopolistic tendencies it concealed, overlapped with illegal activity, while the wealthy and powerful were represented as corrupt and degenerate. From *Red Harvest*'s presidential near-namesake Ellihu Willson[27] to *The Dain Curse*'s failed society boy Eric Collinson, the elite found few friends among hard-boiled writers. Hence, the formulation *'a style of crisis'*, describing their rejection of dominant institutions and social groups.

Such oppositional currents were more qualified when it came to the role of the detectives themselves. Public perceptions of the Pinkerton Agency, from where the phrase 'private eye' was derived, were ambiguous. Its activities led many to regard it as little more than a private army, prostituting its operatives to the powerful. As late as 1935, Herber Blankenhorn (1915-1956), Senator Robert F. Wagner's assistant on the National Labour Relations Act, kept files on professional sleuths, under such headings as 'Company Unions Formed By Detective Agencies'.[28] Likewise, he advised miners' leader John L. Lewis to launch a blistering attack on the 'high-power corporation lawyers, who also sit on the boards of directors of the tear gas companies and of the spy corporations. Next day they sit on eminent committees of the Liberty League solemnly "finding " labour laws unconstitutional'.[29] As the rise of the Federal Bureau of Investigation deprived it of its 19th century parastatal role, suspicions of the Pinkerton agency were displaced by a hatred of company 'goons'.

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[23] Graham Bishop, 'The Good, the Bad and the Western', *Living Marxism*, September 1992, p.40.

[24] Hammett, *The Dain Curse* (1928) (London: Pan, 1975), p.49; the 'Ashcraft' character of 'the Golden Horseshoe' is reworked as 'Flitcraft' in Sam Spade's famous philosophical interlude in *The Maltese Falcon*.

[25] Willett, 'Another Big Slug of the Hard Stuff', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2 July 1993, p.17.

[26] Daniel Bell argues that the 'rise of the Italian political bloc was connected, at least in the major northern urban centres, with another important development which tended to make the traditional relationship between the politician and the protected or tolerated illicit operator more close than it had been in the past.' Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1961) (New York: Free Press, 1965), p.143.

[27] An observation made in Christopher Bentley, 'Radical Anger: Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*', in Docherty (ed.), *American Crime Fiction*, p.68.

[28] 'Company Unions Formed By Detective Agencies', Blankenhorn papers, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit. Other typical headings include 'What conditions are necessary for "successful fascist preparation"?', suggesting an anti-authoritarian current among New Deal administrators.

Despite popular distaste for detective agencies, published accounts of their exploits were commercially successful, suggesting a degree of popular fascination, if not active endorsement. In a similar vein, the fictitious 'Old Sleuth' enjoyed steady success following his first appearance in George Munro's *Fireside Companion*[30] (1867). In sum, long before Hammett, an American detective genre was developing independently of its British counterpart. It enjoyed a mass audience and a place in popular culture, but what is significant is the reworking of those themes into the tropes and generic elements that characterised hard-boiled writing.

Evidence suggests that the distinctive hard-boiled approach was pioneered by Carroll John Daley's 'Race Williams' melodramas, although the issue is somewhat confused by discussions of Ernest Hemingway. On his admission to the selective tradition of American letters he was praised as the initiator of a style he had now transcended. While there is undoubtedly an emphasis on the violent and the vernacular in Hemingway - in Harry Morgan's Havana, for instance, replete with machine gun fire and racial epithets[31] - the debate over who invented the style obscures the more important issue of the historically specific meanings which a given society would derive from it. Given its diffuse origins, it is not implausible that the genre and its idiom developed across a range of different writers and, although less documented, through different centres of cultural production. Hence the need for a rounded understanding, developed by considering the coalescence of Hemingway, *Black Mask*, and a wide range of neglected a but significant trends.[32]

In terms of 'generic' authors, the invention of hard-boiled fiction is more generally attributed to Dashiell Hammett than Daley or other more 'minor' figures. Hammett, whose previous occupations included that of Pinkerton operative, incorporated real experiences into his short stories, fascinating the reader and perplexing his editors with street language and underworld argot. Raised in Baltimore, a home town he shared with such cultural-politicos of the 1930s as Calverton, Cain, Upton Sinclair, and H.L. Mencken,[33] Hammett was well acquainted with the American city and, following his frequent departures for new surroundings, with the experience of dislocation. Mobility presented Hammett with few problems, however; one account recalls how his failure to

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"successful fascist preparation"?', suggesting an anti-authoritarian current among New Deal administrators.

[29] Blankenhorn to Lewis, 'Suggestion for Radio Speech', June 26, 1936; Blankenhorn papers. Blankenhorn's biographical details appear in 'Obituary', *Washington Post*, January 2, 1956.

[30] Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, p.23.

[31] Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (1937) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 7-17.

[32] Morris Dickstein, 'Popular Fiction and Critical Values: The Novel as a Challenge to Literary History' in Sacvan Bercovitch (ed.), *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 52-53.

[33] Stoddard Martin, *California Writers: Jack London, John Steinbeck, The Tough Guys* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.134.

travel prompted him to resign from the Pinkerton agency. Hammett was searching an ocean liner on behalf of an insurance company, in the certainty that it contained 'missing' gold bullion. Unsuccessful in his investigations, he was delighted at the opportunity to accompany the vessel to Australia. Hours before departure, he uncovered the gold during a routine search.[34]

Others note Hammett's growing disgust with the agency's coercive role. Perhaps these experiences shaped the notions of 'cosmic uncertainty' which informed his writing for *Black Mask*. His drift into earning 'a small living from pulp magazines and squibs and even poems sold to Mencken's *Smart Set*'[35] saw him take advantage of the new opportunities offered by mass circulation popular narratives.[36] (Despite Mencken's reported dislike of detective fiction, he and George Jean Nathan first established *Black Mask* in order to finance their upmarket *Smart Set* venture,[37] and to recycle material considered unsuitable for other publications.[38]) Hammett's success at *Black Mask* is suggested by a readers' poll in the late 1920s which placed him among the magazine's three most popular writers.[39]

Economics

None of this should distract us from the genuinely transformative impact of *Black Mask* magazine upon popular fiction. Part of its success can be located in the impact of modernity. Illiteracy declined from 17% in 1880 to 6% by 1920, while urbanisation quickened the pace of development in publishing. Likewise, state intervention, in the form of copyright laws commencing in 1891 banned the piracy of texts from Britain, spurring publishers to commission contributions by indigenous writers.[40] Cumulatively, such trends transformed the possibilities available to writers; 'nearly a quarter of all the new novels published in the 1930s were detective stories, rising from twelve in 1914 to 97 in 1925 to 217 by the last year of the thirties.'[41] Commensurate with this groundswell of interest in detective fiction was the rise of the *Black Mask* magazine, with a circulation estimated at a quarter of a million.[42]

However, Ernest Mandel suggests relatively low sales of detective novels, which 'only sold a few thousand copies at the most in the 1930s, read by the same lending library addicts'.[43] This can be attributed, in part, to the slump, although such an explanation takes little account of other mechanisms through which such texts could be circulated. Moreover, the distinction between novels and magazines is important, given that the former were usually circulated in expensive hard-cover form. Thus, *Black Mask* represented a crucial moment in the development of hard-boiled writing, reinforced by a host of lesser publications. (After all, even the declining *American Mercury* featured hard-boiled contributions from Cain and Jack Conroy.) Overall, popular narratives were acquiring a significant readership and beginning to articulate the growing strain placed upon the social order. Our study now turns to the question of challenging the conventions of the twenties, in that it helps to frame an opposition between hard-boiled writing and post-1918 reaction.

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[34] Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.214.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.
[36] Another writer to import radical messages into Mencken's mass media was Jack Conroy. See Jack Salzman, 'Conroy, Mencken, and the *American Mercury*', *Journal of Popular Culture* 7, Winter 1973, pp. 524-28.
[37] Martin, *California Writers*, p.134.
[38] T.J. Binyon, *'Murder Will Out': The Detective in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.38.
[39] Cynthia S. Hamilton, 'American Dreaming: The American Adventure Formula in the Western and Hard-Boiled Detective Novel' *Ph.D. Thesis*, University of Sussex, 1981, p.23.
[40] Statistics from *ibid.*, p.39.
[41] Dickstein, *'Popular Fiction and Critical Values'*, p.35.
[42] Hamilton, 'American Dreaming', p.23.
[43] Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto, 1984), pp. 64, 67.

In sum, although the varying interpretations of hard-boiled fiction's origins can contribute to a more comprehensive genealogy of the genre, they can also obscure its relationship to the city. As we see below, such relationships are both contingent and constitutive, yet there is no direct correlation between the city's shifting fortunes in history and the genre that used it both as a setting and as a sensibility.

In a symmetrical world, rehabilitated cities and their inhabitants would appear as such in fiction. However, as was suggested previously, a post-Prohibition division emerged between the city's new-found parity of esteem with the rural populace and its representation in popular novels. Prior to the New Deal, the key faultline in detective novels was that of the gentleman amateur and arch criminal counterposed to the Pinkerton agent and bestial mob. Perhaps these conservative antecedents help to explain why the pulps 'came to define a kind of disgruntled faction in the rearguard of the culture industry' in the late 1920s and beyond.[44] In short, the factors that constituted hard-boiled writing as a distinctive genre also articulated a distaste for the predominant patterns of consensus and exclusion that unfolded under the Coolidge and Harding administrations.

Audience

In the moral cosmos of the 1920s, the city became an alien 'Other' against which respectable society could define itself. This intersected with broader concerns about public morality and criminal populations, expressed in the 'cleavage [which] developed between the Big City and the small town conscience. Crime as a growing business was fed by the revenues from prostitution, liquor, and gambling that a wide-open urban society encouraged and that a middle class Protestant ethos tried to suppress with a ferocity unmatched in any other civilised country'.[45] Such arrangements informed contemporaneous crime narratives, albeit indirectly.

If the city was the site of these tensions, it was likely that they would also be expressed in literature. While some 1930s novelists opted for a broadly sympathetic portrayal of the urban ghetto,[46] others suggested its capacity to frustrate ambition and drag down the better off.[47] The hard-boiled genre's continuing success has a similar relationship to the city, owing much to a visceral fascination with representations of society's underbelly. Normative public propriety is set at odds with reading pleasures. Suggesting a process of continuity and change, 'the mysterious, fascinating and frightening image of the city recurs throughout the nineteenth century. It represents an outside to the rule of order. To the individual swallowed up in the crowd, to the law in the refuge given to the criminal, to the morality faced with a profusion of bars and prostitutes the city at night epitomises chaos and uncertainty.'[48] Such sensibilities continued into the twentieth century.

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[44] Sean McCann, '"A Roughneck Reaching for Higher Things": The Vagaries of Pulp Populism'; *Radical History Review* 61, Winter 1995, p.17.

[45] Bell, *End of Ideology*, p.128.

[46] For instance, Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (1934) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 198? ed.) and Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), which are discussed elsewhere in this study.

[47] One critic cites Nelson Algren and Tess Slesinger as typifying this approach. See Gelphant, *American City Novel*, pp.23-24.

However, this scenario remains far too general. We need to examine the specific representation of the city as shaped by particular historical circumstances, as this impacts upon subsequent critical readings. Why, for instance should James T. Farrell's role be characterised as making us realise the 'drab and vicious character of city life,'[49] when authors of previous and subsequent generations represent the city as the site of liberation? One source of the differentiation between these responses can be found by shifting from general perceptions of the American city, bound up with issues of public morality and social control, to the way particular cities gave a regional flavour to hard-boiled writing. Whereas once 'the city' had suggested New York, Boston or Chicago, hard-boiled writers made West Coast cities, especially those of California, central to their chosen genre. Indeed, by the 1940s, according to one critic, 'there followed a procession of epigones, usually distinguishable from one another only by the city in which they work'.[50] Given the general arguments of our study concerning national identity, the contribution of cities and regions to this process warrants further consideration.

This becomes clear if one considers the fragmentary nature of the 'Golden State', which made temporary living arrangements the norm. Significantly, the local economies thrown up by the Gold Rush offered little that could sustain a local literary tradition.[51] Yet if 'California writers' seemed like an oxymoron, it also indicated a vacuum which others could fill. Among the most prominent were Baltimoreans like Hammett, Cain and Sinclair; the Chicago-born Englishman, Raymond Chandler, *and* significant indigenous writers, such as John Steinbeck from Salinas.[52] Once again, a relationship between hard-boiled style and social breakdown becomes apparent; hence the observation that 'the thirties saw toughness by itself developed into a standard fashion, which reached what may be called its high point in James M. Cain's ... *Postman*'.[53] Cold War-era critics echoed this theme by alleging that writers of Cain's generation were obsessed with violence.

Cain is important in this respect, as he codified his interpretation of his adopted home in Southern California in an article written for a Mencken publication. He offered humorous and detailed descriptions of such Californiana as a shop in the shape of a

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[48] Laura Mulvey, 'Melodrama In and Out of the Home', in Colin McCabe (ed.), *High Theory/Low Culture* (New York: St Martins, 1986), p.90.

[49] Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel, 1789-1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p.356.

[50] Binyon, *'Murder Will Out'*, p.42.

[51] Martin, *California Writers*, pp. 2-3.

[52] The relationship between writer and state is discussed in Freeman Champney, 'John Steinbeck, Californian', *The Antioch Review*, September 1947, pp. 345-62.

[53] Van Doren, *The American Novel*, p.332.

Kangaroo head, staffed by polite, well-spoken people, all bleached with a 'gray, sunbaked tan'. In contrast, Cain notes a 'dreadful vacuity', and that there is 'no reward for aesthetic virtue here, no punishment for aesthetic crime; nothing but a vast cosmic indifference'.[54] Cain's representation of public space, while lacking Hammett's darker undertones, expresses the sense of foreboding which characterises the hard-boiled genre. The suspense Cain loses by omitting dark alleyways is regained in his California sunshine, which removes *all* colour and character.[55] In short, what makes Cain's Golden State sinister are the tensions unravelling beneath otherwise calm, even bland and artificial, surfaces.

One explanation of the recurrence of these themes in Southern California writing is the relative group coherence of its intelligentsia. Los Angeles was 'invariably destructive of the "true" intellectuals, still self-defined as artisans or rentiers of their own unique mental productions',[56] thus consolidating an existing common experiential backdrop. Likewise, a multitude of occupations, from lumberjack to wartime ambulance driver, was among the similar biographical factors which added to a sense of group identity among California writers. A separation between these 'fabricators of spectacle' and 'the "practical intellectuals" who actually build cities'[57] emerged, organising the public image of intellectuals in the cities of the Golden State exclusively around its cultural practitioners. However, this distinction did not prevent them from demonstrating sympathy and solidarity with the victims of the Depression.

The Depression made Hollywood into a peculiar colony of American novelists and European exiles, reworking the general and specific notions of the American city discussed above, but usually refraining from attacking the studio system.[58] Little wonder Marxist economist Lewis Corey's 'invocation of the dual immiseration and radicalisation of the middle class applied more literally, and appositely, to Los Angeles during the early thirties than anywhere else in the country'.[59] Amidst such conditions, LA writers adopted, to varying degrees, two key responses to the slump: firstly, elaborating narratives which portrayed the actions of declassé individuals suffering from the declining viability of the American dream; Frank Chambers and Cora Panpadakis, the anti-heroic drifters of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) typify this trend. A second significant strand in such strategies was the proletarian novel, itself not incommensurate with typical 'crime' themes (examined previously).

As a genre, the hard-boiled narrative pulled together a number of the key tensions of its age. The social conditions in Southern California that were instrumental to this process included endemic corruption, unmediated class violence, and a pervasive alienation from society. The history of Los Angeles makes it an extreme, but not atypical location for public fears. In the uncertain climate of the inter-war period, the American city and its mean streets were an ideal setting in which to articulate widespread unease. Although formally the city novel was often distinguishable from what may be called city problem fiction (i.e. that presenting particular social injustices in order to urge immediate reform),[60] the 1930s saw this distinction become increasingly blurred. Simultaneously, changes in the publication and distribution of detective stories enabled the hard-boiled style to achieve national rather than regional significance. We explore this theme below.

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[54] James M. Cain, 'Paradise', *The American Mercury*, March 1933, pp. 266-280; citations from pp. 272, 268.
[55] Frank Krutnik, 'Desire, Transgression and James M Cain', *Screen*, May/June 1982, pp.31-44.
[56] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), p.18.
[57] *Ibid.*, p.22. A useful summary of Corey's *Crisis of the Middle Class* appears in Paul M. Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/ Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1995), pp. 128-131.
[58] However, Richard Fine disputes the idea that a majority of screenwriters were unhappy in the film industry, while Leslie Fiedler argues that the anti-Hollywood novel was more significant to the 1930s than proletarian fiction. This would suggest a hotly contested and unresolved issue. See Fine, *West of Eden: Writers in Hollywood, 1928-1940* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1993 ed.); Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (New York: Stein & Day, 1964), p.51.
[59] Davis, *City of Quartz*, pp. 21, 37.

However, a short detour is necessary, recalling that examinations of responses in popular culture to the Depression face the disorienting influence of 'the Thirties'. Especially for hard-boiled writing, this mythology was supplemented by Cold War preoccupations; with a few exceptions, its writers were dismissed as the architects of mindless mass culture, or persecuted as the conspirators behind Kremlin attempts to influence American opinion.[61] In short, hard-boiled fiction became morally suspect, creating a danger that the piece-meal yet cumulatively thorough onslaught against it might influence our interpretation today.[62] In contrast to notions popularised in the 1950s, the historical development of hard-boiled, as a formula, an institution, and a site of contested meanings, contributed to its status in the inter-war years as a style of crisis. On this basis, we consider the changing commodification of detective fiction and the influence of the city, and assess the ability of hard-boiled as a literary genre to mediate such influences. We also point to its similarities with the proletarian novel, further reinforcing this argument.

A Democratic Impetus

Hammett became almost synonymous with hard-boiled writing,[63] at a time when such writing came to signify the American city. The interaction of regional and national influences discussed above acquires greater significance here, affecting our consideration of the hard-boiled 'burg'. In short, we can locate a tension between the general image of the city in American letters and its specific form and location under the direction of the hard-boiled author. Such tensions are clearly expressed in the following passage:

> 'Are you - who make your living snooping - sneering at my curiosity about people and my attempts to satisfy it?'

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[60] Gelfant, *The American City Novel*, p.7. Emphasis in the original.

[61] Lillian Hellman recalls Hammett's imprisonment in 1951 and its destructive effects on his health (*Unfinished Woman*, pp.210-211).

[62] Approaching such narratives in the 1990s also takes us through the prism of *film noir* of the forties, remoulding our vision of the Op as a surly Humphrey Bogart. Entertaining as this detour is, it also risks dehistoricising the specific relationship of the popular texts developed by Hammett and his long-forgotten peers to the turbulent inter-war period in which they matured.

[63] Robert I. Edenbaum, 'The Poetics of the Private Eye: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett', in Madden (ed.), *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, p.81. This has also been suggested by the contemporary crime writer James Ellroy, whose self-image is that of Hammett heir. See for instance 'White Jazz' (broadcast 11 March 1995, Channel Four).

> 'We're different,' I said. 'I do mine with the object of putting people in jail, and I get paid for it, though not as much as I should.'
>
> 'That's not different,' he said. 'I do mine with the object of putting people in books, and I get paid for it, though not as much as I should.'
>
> 'Yeah, but what good does that do?'
>
> 'God knows. What good does putting them in jail do?'
>
> 'Relieves congestion,' I said. 'Put enough people in jail, and cities wouldn't have traffic problems.'[64]

A chance exchange between the Continental Op and fiction writer Owen Fitzstephan in *The Dain Curse* begins to unveil the peculiar place occupied by the American city in the hard-boiled detective narrative. Verbal 'third degree' interrogation techniques mix with casual conversation: a weary cynicism, a wisecrack, a detective's disdain for the literary world typified by Fitzstephan, and a notion of justice in which due process takes a back seat to social control. This is far removed from the genteel world of conventional detective fiction, which is largely unconcerned by urban congestion. Instead, Hammett and his peers broke with the old formulae, reconstructing the city to confirm the puritans' worst fears, albeit in a manner that implicated the elite and the detective in the process. Whereas public discourse regarding the city was becoming less hostile, an imaginary city was used to interpellate the reader from the standpoint of hostility toward respectability. How was this achieved?

Firstly, references to the city's geographical layout seldom expended energy on descriptive details. Although Raymond Chandler has been credited with making hard-boiled style baroque, it is the sparse and laconic wisecracks of Sam Spade that Hollywood has integrated most recognisably. In narrating urban sprawl as a disparate aggregate of offices, hotel rooms, bars and back streets, the hard-boiled writer undermines any familiarity with place. Simultaneously, at an almost instinctive level, the reader becomes aware that the unfolding fictional events occur in a city on the West Coast, probably Los Angeles or San Francisco. The cartography unfolding around the reader relies not on geographical detail but on the conveyance of a particular sensibility, in which urban space is a subsidiary component.

As wider society came to accept the city's residents back into national life, much of the abusive tone that had accompanied Prohibition was reworked into hard-boiled style. Previously, ethnic epithets denigrated social groups as the accompaniment to the policies of the Coolidge and Harding administrations. By the 1930s, their repeated occurrence within hard-boiled writing reflected an increasingly ambivalent status, suggesting the partial rehabilitation of the 'new immigrants' in national life *and* popular fiction. Hammett was not 'speaking for the subaltern', but revisiting the language of ethnic exclusion, the better to signify the relative ascendancy of the Eastern and Southern European immigrants who Prohibition made into outcasts.[65] At almost that moment when the city was losing its outlaw status, this invidious position was reproduced in detective fiction. The contradictions apparent in this formulation become clear if we consider Hammett's capacity to populate urban space with a rogue's gallery of roughnecks and cut-throats.

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[64] Hammett, *Dain Curse* (1982 ed.), p.210.

[65] Significantly, the position of Mexicans and African-Americans in such fiction did not improve much, suggesting the distinction between 'race' and ethnicity: whereas black people faced discriminatory treatment as a 'racial'group, the 'new immigrants' became increasingly exempt from such treatment, rehabilitating their ethnicity as a local culture.

Characters in pulp fiction address each other - and their readership - in a language far removed from that of the English amateur sleuth. According to Dennis Porter, this process reflects 'the search for a native American idiom ... rooted in the historical circumstances of having inherited a mother tongue from a rejected fatherland'.[66] However, the process is not simply that of forging a national identity through a rejection of British culture; it also suggests an inclusion of new factors within the emerging 'national popular'. Hammett's alternative orientation is towards the city and its inhabitants who were excluded, both in literature and from society, in part due to the forms of social control prevalent between 1918 and 1933. Admittedly, the hard-boiled novel thrived off the widespread unease with the city as a site of danger, but one has to balance this against its humane representation of society's alleged criminal element.

Thus, when *The Maltese Falcon*'s Sam Spade rules out co-operation with a fellow fugitive, he demonstrates a loyalty to his urban surroundings:

> This is my city and my game. I could manage to land on my feet - sure - this time, but the next time I tried to put over a fast one they'd stop me so fast I'd swallow my teeth. Hell with that. You birds'll be in New York or Constantinople or some place else. I'm in business here.[67]

In presenting 'his' city as his workplace, Spade's overriding commitment to personal survival becomes apparent, downgrading justice and civic responsibility. The shift to this largely amoral stance, replacing the pleasurable puzzle-solving of the English detective with wage labour, is executed in gruff slang. Encoding a masculinity that is further magnified by the contrast between Spade and the effeminate Joel Cairo, such language offers a stylised take on that of the streets.

Hammett accords a more specific role to the ethnic epithet, expressed by the Continental Op's pursuit of 'Pete the Finn' in *Red Harvest*. Previously such words had served to exclude new immigrants; they now signified urban hardness, premised on the suggestion that such dialogue was the domain of the unrespectable. Given that the latter compare favourably with members of the social elites who wield much of the power in Hammett's fiction, the implication is clear: street language, as constructed by those writing in the condensed and telegraphed hard-boiled style, should be considered fit for public consumption. Moreover, this linguistic arrangement converges with the broader impetus towards inclusion that characterised Depression-era literary radicalism. Representation was at once both realistic and dismissive of social hierarchies. For instance, when Raoul Whitfield describes the educated suspect Howard Frey stepping out into the hard-boiled city, detective Max Cohn tells his partner 'he's a killer - or a damned fool, Ben. He should have stayed at home'.[68] Private eye and ordinary citizen alike seem prepared to reclaim their streets from middle class professionals and other outsiders.

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[66] Porter, 'Language of Detection' , p.81.

[67] Dashiell Hammett, *The Four Great Novels: Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, The Glass Key, The Maltese Falcon* (London: Picador, 1975), p.532.

[68] Raoul Whitfield, *Death in a Bowl* (1931) (Harpenden, Herts.: No Exit Press, 1988), p.165.

Even the pulp stories that were shorn of this populist outlook replicated this pattern, such as a market leader like *The Shadow*. In the run of 1932 *Shadow Magazine* serial episodes that were compiled as *Hands in the Dark*, we encounter Richard Harkness, a sensitive architect to whom Greenwich Village has offered a safe haven from the pressures of Manhattan life. The futility of this sanctuary becomes clear when he is abruptly murdered by a duo of roughnecks, seemingly reclaiming their territory from the hapless, educated professional. In contrast, the retribution later enacted by the Shadow suggests a dispute within a community of urban predators, albeit one dominated by a ruthless masked avenger.[69] Time and again, detectives are portrayed as an instrument of vengeance, dispensing a form of rough justice in a rough environment.

This pattern even recurs when hard-boiled appears to be going soft.[70] Although *The Thin Man* (1933) is widely regarded as Hammett's departure from hard-boiled writing, it uses similar tropes to mark out city space. As a potential client passes on the information that frames the case, a discrete collection of details emerge, providing a thumbnail sketch of New York. Those figuring in the case are either 'in town' or 'out of town', their rough location identified through references to Riverside Drive, Fifth Avenue, Greenwich Village and Colombia University, landmarks that figure in the fictitious memories of detective Nick Charles and his wife Norah, but elicit a degree of recognition on the part of the reader. These central characters further establish their bearings through recurrent references to San Francisco, the site of their unwritten adventures prior to the novel and a preferred place to spend the festive season.[71] Recurring dialogue of this geographical character provides both a bridge and a point of differentiation between East and West Coast cities, lending a contradictory dynamic to Hammett's style. While constructing signifiers of urban space as before, Nick and Norah's presence in the hard-boiled city lends it a genteel, affectionate edge (a pattern which was further extended in Hackett and Goodrich's *Thin Man* screenplays[72]). In short, the hard-boiled city was acquiring respectability.

Symptomatic of the shifting status of the hyphenated American, Norah explains how the surname of her husband was anglicised to gain him admission to the United States. Whether true or not, this revelation provokes little hostility on the part of cocktail-quaffing socialite Dorothy Wynant. Perhaps this reflects the growing truth in Nick's wry suggestion that 'everybody trusts Greeks'; Hammett's initial depictions of decadent WASPs are now complemented by his accentuation of the positive qualities of a 'white ethnic' detective. When Nick finds that the unwanted financial advice of a drunken reveller becomes the complaint that 'fellows like you ... put the country on the bum', he is quick to reply that 'fellows like me don't go on the bum with it'.[73] The phrase has a double meaning; Nick refuses to go 'on the bum' in the sense that he maintains his own business despite economic slump, even as his half-hearted return to detective work has him revisiting the cartography of the city established in the earlier Hammett novels. In this respect, he goes 'on the bum' in the manner of the documentary *bildungsroman* that enjoyed a brief renaissance in 1930s fiction, where characters explored America as hoboes, portraying the nation through chance encounters with specific national types.[74] In both instances such travel was a product of individual survival strategies, the difference was one of degree, based on the strategies chosen. Even as Hammett's writing softened, he became increasingly imbued with a sensitivity to economic turmoil and a capacity for impromptu interrogations of national identity. This was also reflected in his political activities.[75]

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[69] Maxwell Grant, *The Shadow: Hands in the Dark* (London: New English Library, 1977), pp. 32-39.
[70] E. Margolies, *Which Way Did He Go?: The Private Eye in Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes and Ross* Macdonald (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Paul Duncan, (r. Lawrence Block), *Crime Time*, Oct/Nov 1995, p.35.
[71] Dashiell Hammett, *The Thin Man* (New York: Vintage, 1972), pp. 4, 96-97, 132.
[72] Bergan, 'Ideal Hollywood Couple', *passim.*
[73] Hammett, *Thin Man*, p.98.

In sum, hard-boiled fiction has continually provided a literary mediation of the changing status of the American city. Initiated primarily but not exclusively by Dashiell Hammett, such writing has interacted throughout its history with the hegemonic tropes deployed to characterise the city. Seen as a malign, 'unamerican' influence during Prohibition, its inhabitants were denied equality. Likewise, they were marginalised within literature, especially in terms of the presentation of their speech. Hard-boiled fiction challenged these arrangements through the use of urban settings and underworld slang. Perhaps paradoxically, it was a genre that shifted the city from margin to centre by feeding off existing prejudices against it. In coupling this with a mockery of society's upper echelons, it upgraded the city's status by demonstrating contempt for its powerful detractors. This endowed hard-boiled style with a democratic kernel, expressed in a vernacular tongue that had seldom appeared previously in American letters.

Such dialogue was important in that it supported an urban sensibility while seldom mentioning the city *per se*. The clipped, terse idiom that characterised hard-boiled prior to Chandler, replete with wisecracks and neologisms, spared few words on the metropolis and its ghettos. Such economising meant that architecture and geography barely intruded into a narrative, except as short-hand details to assist the private eye. Nevertheless, the dialogue used within the confines of these urban spaces is such that it announces the fictitious terrain that the reader has entered. In signifying a city population in terms that lacked both condescension and a falsely celebratory tone, Hammett initiated the stylistic changes that accompanied the emergence of an urban electorate as a decisive factor in New Deal politics. Aligned to a vision of social progress, hard-boiled style treated the masses with none of the disdain that had characterised Prohibition and immigration control. It also reworked many of the attendant fears, albeit converting them into entertainment for a substantial readership. In sum, the style was intrinsically linked to an historical shift towards the integration of the masses into political life.

In contrast to the allegedly stultifying effects of mass culture, many of the most substantial works in crime fiction combined an air of cynicism with left-leaning observations. Hammett's *Red Harvest* merged the seedy side of law enforcement with small town and urban America amidst the toxic waste of 'Poisonville' in an exemplary and dense piece of fiction that reads as a critique of capitalist mores. This was in keeping with the approach of *Black Mask* magazine, seething with distaste for the blurred lines between business elites and organised crime, 'probably as much as the text could bear without becoming more of a social tract than a hard-boiled thriller.'[76] In a similar vein, Cain's bestseller *Postman* mocked the holy trinity of law, family and private property when Frank remarks to Corah: 'Stealing a man's wife, that's nothing, but stealing his car, that's larceny.'[77]

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[74] See Phillip H. Melling, 'Samples of Horizon: picaresque patterns in the thirties', in eds. Stephen Baskerville and Ralph Willett, *Nothing Else to Fear: New Perspectives on America in the Thirties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

[75] Hammett was a prominent supporter of Popular Front causes, and reputedly a member of the Communist Party (Hellman, *Unfinished Woman)*, p.210.

In so far as the organised left developed as a consequence of reaction in the 1920s, we can observe similar trends in the relationship of hard-boiled writers and their work to the history unfolding around them. The contrast between writers like Hammett and an earlier generation were apparent; 'Hawthorne and Faulkner were reacting against cultures where puritan repression was all too ascendant. Hammett, via Spade, is responding to a culture, where, by contrast, licence was beginning to run amok.'[78] Yet this response, as we see below, was not a call for the return of Puritanism. Hammett's reputation as 'mystery writer to the intelligentsia'[79] suggests he was undergoing a similar process to his supposed clientele.

To clarify this issue, we return to the controversy over 'proletarian literature', a debate which consumed the time and energies of a number of Hammett's peers. In the early 1930s pro-Communist writers were enthused by the project of creating a culture where workers wrote for the working class, and enjoyed the art and culture produced by the working class, itself a reflection of workers' lives and experiences. Such ambitions suggested that culture and propaganda could be interchangeable, hence the slogan 'art is a weapon in the class struggle'. Although this phrase was eventually abandoned, in favour of a broad front of liberal and communist writers against fascism, both phases of literary/political direction coexisted with a rejection of hard-boiled detective fiction. Paradoxically, this backdrop also ensured that the latter would be refracted through the distorting lens of 'the Thirties'.

The persecution and imprisonment of the Hollywood Ten and Hammett himself, coupled with the high modernist proclivities of *Partisan Review* and their rejection of mass culture, has contributed to the perception that hard-boiled writing was aligned to the CPUSA (at least until the rise of Mickey Spillane, that is). However, the real picture is more complex, and the Communists were often hostile to detective fiction. Official sanction for the 'line' on pulp fiction came from Andrei Zhandov at the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, who derided 'the "illustrious persons" of bourgeois literature - of that bourgeois literature which has sold its pen to capital - [all of whom] are now thieves, police, sleuths, prostitutes, hooligans'.[80] Such invective was repeated in *New Masses*, the Communists' main cultural organ; a feature article declared that 'the cheap fiction magazines grind the reactionary political axe in a way that slick-paper periodicals would never dare attempt.'[81] Party material did not always conform to this pattern; for instance, the guidelines for cadres working at sea gave these explicit instructions regarding the ship's library: 'Don't throw "pulp" junk overboard - it looks sectarian!'[82] However, even this temporary respite for '"pulp" junk' stemmed from tactical considerations.

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[76] Bentley, '*Radical Anger*', p.66.

[77] James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) (London Picador, 1985 edition), p.22.

[78] Martin, *California Writers*, p.134.

[79] Maxwell Aley, 'How Large is our Book Reading Public', *Publishers Weekly* CXIX, 6 June 1931, p.2686.

[80] Cited in Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (London: Verso, 1983), p.45.

[81] H.B. Ucello, 'Propaganda in the Pulps', *New Masses*, March 2, 1937, p.6.

This suggests that Cold War attitudes could often function more as unspoken assumptions than as a reasoned argument, as demonstrated in the contrast between the official Communist attitude towards detective fiction during the so-called Red Decade, and the attendant myth. Rather than inhabiting a world of institutionalised mediocrity, under the hypnotic influence of the Five Year Plan, detective writers were derided in the Communist press. Michael Gold, regarded subsequently as the vulgarian pariah of American letters, suggested that an aspiring proletarian author would degenerate without sufficient attention to technique: 'He may learn, if he persists long enough, to write cheap detective and cowboy stories for the pulp magazines, but he will never become the real thing.'[83] Whereas Eugene Lyons and the second incarnation of *Partisan Review* portrayed proletarian writing as a literary gravy train on which one could substitute ideology for talent, Gold's remarks tell us otherwise. In placing skilled authorship and 'cheap detective and cowboy stories' in opposition, he signals his party's orthodox disapproval of mass circulation popular narratives.

Allegations of subservience to Moscow among hard-boiled writers are also implausible in the light of Zhandov's position at the Soviet Writers Congress, as previously cited. Likewise, the *New Masses* echoed Gold's hostility to pulp writing, foreshadowing the low esteem in which the latter was regarded in the 1940s. Prior to the Popular Front, it appeared that detective stories had few prominent friends in Communist literary circles,[84] although their real radical readership was undoubtedly larger. Insofar as the allegation of Communism can be plausibly levelled at hard-boiled writing, it relates to Hollywood screenwriters and their endorsement of Popular Front politics.

Hostility to mass culture, an outlook which became associated with *Partisan Review*, was widely expressed in the official Communist press, even as it attempted to co-operate with non-Communists working in publishing and cinema. Potentially, these cultural industries could have been subverted so as to augment radicalism, by expanding the implicit distaste for the consequences of capitalism in the narratives of Hammett *et al.* (This is not to suggest that popular culture has subversive qualities in and of itself, but merely to maintain the discussion of finding appropriate, historically-specific idioms in which to advocate political change.) Little wonder Hammett himself was later subjected to a HUAC hearing, which he called the 'national defence effort against civil liberties'.[85] But this particular show trial was based primarily on his affiliations in the 1930s; Hammett's actual *writings* were fashioned in autonomy from the organised left.

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[82] (CP) Waterfront section, *A Guide for Communist Work Aboard Ship* (New York: Publisher Unknown, circa. 1937), p.2. Incidentally, *Partisan Review* contributor F. W. Dupee was a member of this CP unit at the time (author interview with Barbara Dupee, September 1995).

[83] *Daily Worker*, 29 December 1993, p.5, Cited in James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy Over 'Leftism' in Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.123.

[84] For instance Richard Wright read them to learn about plot development, thus shoring up his own literary talents. Douglas Wixson, *Worker Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p.552*n*.

[85] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961) (New York: Columbia University Press Morningside Books Edition, 1992), p.385.

Despite 'the attempts of American intellectuals ... to generate alternative cultures - a hard-boiled "proletarian culture" first',[86] the CP largely ignored thriller writers until they were needed as sponsors for Popular Front causes. This is despite a hard-boiled aesthetic that apparently pervaded the output of the proletarian school, who were said to 'have given the whole hard-boiled manner not only a new impetus but a new direction'.[87]

Steering an interesting 'middle way' between hard-boiled style and political commitment were the proletarian writers themselves. Textual analysis of selected works of their fiction reveals continuity between earlier naturalistic writing, notably that of London and Sinclair, and a kinship at the level of narrative and generic conventions with the hard-boiled writing of the West Coast. To illustrate this, let us explore the representation of violence in both schools of 1930s 'Red Writing'.

If we take the anthology central to the popularisation of the 'proletarian school' and the subsequent controversy over it, namely *Proletarian Literature in the United States*,[88] a number of conventions become clear. On one hand there is a fidelity to the recent radical past. Robert Cantwell's 'Hills Around Centralia' concerns an encounter between two boy scouts and two Wobblies, following the massacre of associates of the latter. It is based on real events which culminated in the mutilation and lynching of Wesley Everest, a radical war veteran.[89] The story is interesting in that it attempts to incorporate both vernacular language and a child's-eye view of life into a portrait of state repression and ethnic division. A violent event serves as its key reference point, a source of temporary community between the major protagonists. It is sparsely descriptive; albeit with stylised representations of coughing, spluttering, facial tremors and the like, all of which are stylistic devices deployed by Hammett and Cain.

Likewise, Ben Field's 'Cow', reprinted from *Horn and Hound*, incorporates violence into the labour process itself. The central character in the story, known only as Cow, is the personification of 'Proletcult', embodying the qualities idealised by Communist cultural functionaries. He is represented as a muscular autodidact, his chest adorned with a tattoo of a woman wielding a hammer and sickle. The narrator, an aspiring worker-writer living on the novels of Jack London, feels inadequate and bookish when in Cow's company. In turn, Cow's influence upon the wife of a fellow worker is the source of simmering sexual tensions, leading to an accident in which Cow is killed. He dies a slow, lingering death:

> He was lying still and at last opened chewed lips. 'No discipline,' he mumbled, 'I'm a bug too' ... His face twisted as he whispered something about poor redhead, then his muscles knotted and a great red bubble broke from his mouth.[90]

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[86] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.12.
[87] David Madden, 'Introduction', *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, p.*xxx*.
[88] Granville Hicks *et al.*, *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology* (New York: New York International Publishers, 1935).
[89] *Ibid.* pp. 39-57. Everest also appears in a biographical chapter of Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy. The details of his lynching appear in Joyce L. Kornbluh, 'Industrial Workers of the World', in Mari Jo Buhle *et al* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), p.357.
[90] Field, 'Cow', in *Proletarian Literature* in Hicks *et. al.*, pp. 78-79. A key reference point in the story is Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (p.74). Field (pseud. Moe Bragin) used his agricultural experiences to write

Hard-boiled dialogue and an agitational message; such was the mood of the 1930s.

A similar aestheticisation of violent death can be found in Eleanor Clark's 'Hurry Hurry'.[91] Not formally part of any proletarian literary trend, it appeared originally in *Partisan Review*. A wealthy household, complete with French poodle called 'De Maupassant', is literally falling apart in an earthquake.[92] The narrator's mother, desperate to retrieve her antique furniture, continually exhorts Myrtle, her deformed servant, to rescue the precious belongings. The narrative ends with the house collapsing into the ground, taking Myrtle and her employer with it. Violence is transferred from the strike novel, in which it was endemic, and spread across a range of human activities, notably wage labour and domestic work. At the level of representation, such violence is described in short, punchy and minimalist terms. This contrasts with an earlier school of naturalism, echoing instead the 'Continental Op' stories in their terse prose.

Stylised violence is also a central feature of *The Dain Curse*, in which the nameless Op does battle with the leader of a religious cult:

> I was afraid. I fired. The bullet hit his cheek. I saw the hole it made ... I worked the automatic's trigger, pumping six more bullets into his face and body. I saw them go in.[93]

The description is rendered as factual; his reference to being afraid reflects not an emotional state, figuring instead as a physical detail in his conduct of the case. The violence has occurred simply in order that the Op earn a living. This amoral objectivity is reinforced while he recovers from the attack amidst the bodies of a number of incapacitated characters; the narrative becomes cartographic, meticulously locating the survivors and the corpse in relation to his own battered frame.[94]

Pressures of work, it can be argued, force the pace of this mode of interpellation. It is debatable, however, whether this is the work of the Op or his creator, the former lacking a subjective commitment to the task in hand, the latter an artisan producer writing mass circulation texts. Irrespective of the precise combination of such influences, their cumulative impact is such that we can begin to link Hammett's style to the documentary impetus which preoccupied 1930s writers.

'farm sketches', which were submitted to H L Mencken (Wixson, *Worker Writer in America*, p.268). The initial publication of 'Cow' in *Hound and Horn* caused quite a stir. See Mitzi Berger Hamovitch (ed.), *The Hound and Horn Letters* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982).

[91] From *Partisan Review* 4, January 1938; reprinted in Paula Rabinowitz and Charolotte Nekola (eds.), *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers 1930-1940* (New York: Feminist Press, 1988), pp. 89-95.

[92] One is reminded here of the *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto, in which the United States is compared to a house with rotten foundations. See *Culture and the Crisis*, and Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of Golden Mountains*, (1964; New York: Penguin, 1981 ed.), p.115.

[93] Hammett, *Dain Curse*, (1975 ed.), p.87.

[94] Gary Day's observations concerning the contradictory nature of such 'detail' are most appropriate; it was both a necessary feature of detective work *and* an encumbrance to Hammett's terse minimalist narrative. See Day, 'Investigating the Investigator' in Docherty (ed.), *American Crime Fiction*, p.48. Ironically the Op also narrates by concealing key details from the reader.

A pattern is emerging; objective form - or 'camera-eye' style - reinforces an amoral content and vice versa. Moreover, the wage labour/capital relationship, the Op's employment and the elites against whom and on behalf of whom his energies are directed, is revealed as a relationship predicated upon violence. This conforms to a significant feature of 1930s writing, namely a refusal to demarcate work and brute force. Compare the *Dain Curse* extract cited above to the following passage in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*:

> Swish! The hiss of the whip cut off his words; the long, stiff thong curled over his shoulder, whacked!
> 'Owoo!' he howled with pain and fury. 'Yuh Jew bastard! You hit me! He flung himself at David's father, arms thrashing.
> 'Hanh!' Again that mad cry of mirth. One long, rigid arm shot out, thrust his kicking, flailing adversary back like a ram - while the whip lashed out in the other. Again! Again it fell! It sickened David watching it. He screamed. Suddenly with a sharp crack the whip snapped. His father flung it aside. And as the other, howling with rage, charged in to tackle, he drew up his fist, clenched it like a sledge, and grunting with the effort, crashed it down on his neck.
> 'Uh!' A small, almost infantile groan broke from the man's open mouth. Then he crumpled, slid down David's father's legs and fell sideways to the ground. Once more he stirred, the cap slipping from his head. The vague, sparse strands of his hair sank leisurely to one side as if on a hinge, revealing the splotched yellow scalp. He lay still.[95]

The perpetrator of the beating is Albert Schearl, a Jewish-American milkman and father to David, Roth's central character. The shift from the 'I' of Hammett's Continental Op to Roth's use of narration in the third person should not distract us from essential similarities, both in the tight, minimalist style in which little emotive or decorative investment is made, and in the peculiarly instrumental qualities of each author's victorious combatants. David and the Op may differ in the extent to which each can shape the unfolding narrative, suggesting a counterposition of passive acquiescence to 'stirring things up',[96] but they are united in their 'camera-eye' status.

Herein lies a problem of methodological limitations. Both figures, David Schearl and the Continental Op, are conspicuously minimalist narrators, given their respective anonymity and immaturity. Such factors root character development in the concrete events of the plot; there is no *a priori* history that we can assume each character has brought to the text. Yet the passage of such figures through their respective narratives forces them to acquire human subjectivity,[97] undermining the possibility of a purely objective presentation. The trajectory which develops is weighed down with uncertainties; an author's preferred approach may demand a documentary mode of presentation, but simultaneously this undermines the scope to present events as if cinematically recorded. If the pure objectivity of photography is a chimera,[98] then why should we expect it from the self-conscious 'camera-eye' narrator? Even the best known use of this technique in 1930s literature - that sprinkled throughout Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy - acquired a personality.[99] One could conclude from this that those employing the technique more casually were unable to sustain a 'purely' photographic realism in fiction.

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[95] Roth, *Call it Sleep* (1977 ed.), p.278.

[96] See Steven Marcus's introduction to Hammett, *The Continental Op* (London: Picador, 1984), p.17.

[97] While this observation appears somewhat banal, at least one 1930s novelist used non-human characters. A proletarian novel with birds as its central figures was Shirley Hopkins (pseud. Polly Bowden), *The Pink Egg* (1942). See Wixson, *Worker Writer in America*, p.564*n*.

[98] John Tagg, *Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Eduardo Cadava, 'Word of Light: Theses on the Photography of History', *Diacritics* Vol. 22, No. 3-4, Fall/Winter 1992.

Our brief excursus into the 'proletarian moment' suggests that it had many characteristics in common with hard-boiled writing, both at the level of form and, to a lesser extent, of content. Likewise, we would contend that the themes associated with state patronage - discursive anti-elitism, responses to the slump, the 'national-popular' - also pervaded commercially produced narratives. Once again, 'culture and the crisis' alludes to real relationships, expressed in the mediations between the couplet's two components. Hence the following summary; the city occupied a strange position in the popular imagination. Prior to the First World War, it was both the target of urban reformers and the place where one could escape from the conformity of the small town. Prohibition and boom further intensified this contradiction; the cities were cast as dens of iniquity by government policy, yet they were the US economy's most productive locations. Even the moral opprobrium attached to the city by the cultural conservatism ascendant in the 1920s was not enough to shift the ambivalent relationship to law and order which many citizens found themselves in owing to the Volstead Act. Then, the slump and the New Deal forced a reconsideration of these normative exclusionary politics, and the city enjoyed a fleeting respectability, in social policy, if not in national culture. This was curtailed by suburbanisation during the post-war boom, (itself connected intimately to the Cold War[100]), which consigned the city to further marginality.

In assessing hard-boiled writing as response to crisis, we noted the variety of factors which shaped its development, exploring how this distinctive approach was able to mediate some of the most unsettling features of its epoch. It was also argued that a successful engagement with this process would require a careful demarcation between critical accounts of the genre and the more general process of it becoming a vehicle for more recent ideological controversies. Numerous accounts written in the tropes of 'the Thirties' attach negative associations to hard-boiled writing almost automatically, for reasons external to specific texts. Hard-boiled writers' organisational and political responses to the slump also contributed to these stereotypes, as certain activities - widespread in the 1930s - were subsequently vilified and even criminalised.

One aspect of this hostility was directed at mass culture. At one level, we could consider this as the timeless response of an elite to popular pursuits and leisure interests. Noting the widespread *public* consumption of genres which seldom conformed to notions of literary propriety, the critics lambasted hard-boiled fiction, excluding it from respectable literary life. Paperback representations of underworld life began serving as a focus for anxieties concerning the moral health of their readership. This revealed a faultline between those idioms preferred by the arbiters of taste and those of the public. At one extreme, the detective fiction of the inter-war years was remembered as a relative

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[99] See Leo Gurko, 'John Dos Passos's *USA*', in Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties*, p.61. John P. Diggins, 'Visions of Chaos and Visions of Order: Dos Passos as Historian', *American Literature*, Vol. XLVI No.3, November 1974.

[100] See Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanisation of the United States* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

'golden age'; even Frohock claimed that 'the violence that is epidemic in such fiction today is no longer the slam - bitter bloodshed of twenty years ago; it is cruel and, more often than not, perverse - the violence of the comic books made more explicit and convincing for the consumption of adults'.[101] One is also here reminded here of Richard Hoggart's perception of 'an undifferentiated cultural commodity, read ... for its sexual content above all'.[102] Such sentiments telescoped fear of crime with the critiques of 'mass society' which accompanied the Cold War. Fifties dismissals of violent pulp fiction of the Mickey Spillane variety implicitly tarnished its hard-boiled antecedent.[103] Given this hegemonic and homogenising critical legacy, it becomes imperative that we 'do not assume a single literature of the thirties, but focus instead on kinds of writing without which ... a national literature and the standards of the literary [could not be] constructed'.[104] Taken together, elitist liberal anti-communism and populist red-baiting can be seen as the twin pillars of the Cold War's domestic political armature.

Hard-boiled fiction's externally induced crisis of style in the 1950s was predicated upon a peculiar constellation of historical influences. It was assumed to be indistinguishable from the garish crime novels of the period; as such it became a scapegoat in panics concerning crime and delinquency, and subject to caricature in the growing debate over mass culture. At best hard-boiled narratives are treated as an unfortunate excrescence of a literary renaissance, the 'ultimate exploitation of the climate of sensibility which also produced the best novels of Faulkner, Hemingway, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Farrell and Dos Passos'.[105] Treating hard-boiled writing as a 'necessary evil' in this way accentuates the perceived negative features of mass communication. Regardless of what transpired in lending libraries and the market for books, mass culture theorists were largely pessimistic regarding new developments (thus, few would acknowledge that the rise of the popular paperback also confirmed extensive literacy in America).

One aspect of the critical reception of such writing in the 1930s and beyond hinges upon the relationship of form and content. Hard-boiled reportage, like its proletarian, half-acknowledged sibling, often codified urban corruption and the invidious nature of local elites. Its documentary overtones, its emphasis upon realism and its basis in experience enabled the style to embody the effects of the legitimacy crisis which engulfed America in the inter-war period. While a mediation of such trends, rather than a direct reflection thereof, it serves as a reminder of the moral collapse of traditional authority, throughout the inter-war years. In the accelerated process of historical amnesia which followed, hard-boiled fiction suffered a change of fortunes, a prime target of the theories of mass culture which became prominent in the 1950s. More often than not, when pulp fiction was characterised as a social problem, the discussion encoded a number of elitist sentiments about its readership. Likewise, the detective novel was deemed culturally suspect, yet in a manner which retrieved the camera-eye technique as an acceptable device in high literature.[106]

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[101] Gelfant, *Novel of Violence*, p.204.

[102] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957); cited in Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives*, p.34.

[103] See Woody Haut, *Pulp Culture: American Fiction in the Cold War* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995).

[104] English Studies Group, 'Thinking "the Thirties"', in Francis Barker *et al* (eds.) *1936: The Sociology of Literature Vol.2: Practices of Literature and Politics* (Essex: University of Essex, 1979), p.2.

[105] Frohock, *Novel of Violence*, pp. 21-22.

[106] Humm, 'Camera Eye/Private Eye', *passim*.

In reconsidering the 1930s, 'Red Decade' accounts returned continually to one theme: *the betrayal of the intellectuals.* This scenario turned reality on its head. It led to a narrow definition of the intelligentsia, focusing primarily upon cultural practitioners rather than professionals *per se*, reminding us of Mike Davis's distinction between 'fabricators of spectacle' and 'practical intellectuals'. Furthermore, the Communist proclivities of a number of writers were presented as characteristic of intellectuals as a social group. Conflating the Stalinist apparatchik with the New Deal administrator, this interpretation became pivotal to such high profile 'espionage' cases as those of Alger Hiss and Owen Lattimore. Such stereotypes also assumed an increasingly outlandish form in the post-1945 thriller.

Purges in Washington were mirrored in the West Coast-based campaign against 'Hollywood Reds'. Given the triadic relationship between Popular Front politics, film *noir* and hard-boiled writing for print and screen, some sort of conflict was almost inevitable. It began circa 1941, when one of the first professional red-baiting tracts named Hammett as part of the 'last loony scene', a 'prime window dresser of the Red Decade'.[107] His activities, like those of his contemporaries, could be presented as a bigger problem than the militarism and economic stagnation which became synonymous with the 1930s. Only in the relative 'thaw' of the 1960s did Hammett's critics regret endorsing his imprisonment, although a feud between Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman continued until the latter's death in 1984.[108]

Once again, such developments bear out hard-boiled fiction's capacity to articulate crisis. The genre was becoming more integrated into national identity, given its *de facto* national character based on its place within mass circulation publishing. This process entailed much more than the middle class midwestern literary idiom or 'class style' being updated by Hammett and Chandler to 'something more urban and fast paced',[109] perhaps in line with historical development. It entailed the cross fertilisation of Hollywood and New York as cultural centres, both of which were incorporated into the new style. Even as the 1950s campaign against crime fiction and the 'menace of the paperback' commenced, the spatial metaphors for hard-boiled writing maintained their currency, however inaccurately. Thus, despite the style's historic links with the West Coast, critics derided the supposed spread of the Bronx accent 'halfway across the country' as a mass culture marketing gimmick.[110]

Once this national language had become fixated with decay and decline, it also suggested a real process of national decline. This was further compounded by the flirtation of detective writers and their Hollywood counterparts with the Soviet experiment, climaxing in a new, unsettling form, film *noir*. In effect, the 1930s was an era when the language of detection become coterminous with a language of *defection*, of growing disenchantment with American society. Hard-boiled writing, a national idiom which implied disdain for British restraint, could be equally mocking of established

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[107] Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), p.349.

[108] Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p.215; Michiko Kakutani, 'Hellman-McCarthy Libel Suit Stirs Old Antagonisms', *New York Times* (Section C), March 19, 1980, p.21.

[109] Porter, 'Language of Detection', p.84.

[110] See Frohock, *Novel of Violence*, p.202.

American values. It distinguished itself from existing notions of 'good reading' through a combination of low-life realism and contempt for the status quo.

To conclude this survey, we would note that hard-boiled writing occupied a peculiar location within the crisis of legitimation characterising the inter-war period. Although the development of detective fiction pre-dated the political cycle that commenced in 1918, the two interacted in unprecedented ways. Shifting from the penny press to mass circulation magazines, especially those of Mencken, they gained a popular readership, albeit one considered deviant by mainstream society. Moreover, they came to articulate the fears and aspirations of the dispossessed in an appropriate popular idiom. Thus, the New Deal politics that brought the masses a formal and temporary rehabilitation found an analogue in the publications which, to paraphrase Chandler, took murder out of the drawing room and into the streets. Given this, it is conceivable that the disdain for elites expressed in such works as *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* mediated the ambivalence abroad in a society confronted by Prohibition and the Hoover administration.

Hard-boiled fiction's populist and irreverent tone also appeared in proletarian writing, which was different from detective fiction on the basis of plot and character development grounded directly in labour history and the slump. We have suggested that the distinction between the hard-boiled and proletarian schools of realist writing was primarily a political one, revolving around Communist party cultivation and endorsement; it became less salient with the end of American 'Proletcult' and the development of a Popular Front that included established writers who supported a broad-based anti-fascist platform.

This impacted upon hard-boiled writers of Spillane and Jim Thompson's generation. Whereas the former created Mike Hammer, a red-baiting killing machine, Thompson's distaste for the new order was encoded in numerous novels, for instance by focusing on police sadism in *Pop. 1280.* In this respect, hard-boiled iconoclasm lived on, reflecting Hammett's novel tendency to represent the city in a way that made hard-boiled writing into a vehicle of democratisation. Increasingly, this was overshadowed by its use as a repository of social anxiety, but there was never a complete unity of interest between 'anticommunist *noir*' and anti-communism. In a post-Cold War world, the uses of hard-boiled have continued to shift dramatically, spiralling out of control into increasingly amoral representations of urban life (a trend exemplified by James Ellroy).[111]

Conclusion

Hard-boiled fiction, whether of the 'detective' or 'crime' genre, was *not* a response in cultural production to the slump, and it prefigured the latter by several years. However, as both a realist form of representation *and* a literary approximation of the language of the working class it anticipated 1930s culture in a number of significant ways. It expressed an egalitarian spirit (albeit rather limited on 'racial' issues), and contempt for social elites. By way of a social critique, it blurred the distinctions between crime and business. Sympathies with the private eye as a wage labourer were reinforced by the participation of a number of hard-boiled writers in left-wing politics. In short, in terms of the themes addressed in hard-boiled writing *and* its mass readership, it occupied a space which served as something of a model for aspring writers.

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[111] Luc Sante, 'Low Lifes', *New York Review of Books* May 11, 1995, p.35; John Ashbrook, 'Hard Boiled Cities', *Crime Time* 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 47-48.

Hence the core argument in this chapter: hard-boiled writing established a point of opportunity for an alternative worldview, mediated in fiction, to be presented through commercial channels. This would suggest that patronage was *not* a precondition for socially-conscious cultural production, but that extant forms of such production could *potentially* exercise a constitutive influence upon responses in the arts to the Depression. A key feature of this process was the rehabilitation of the city population, commencing in hard-boiled writing and later extended to the proletarian novel in the 1930s. Shorn of this progressive, democratic outlook, the trajectory of the style shifted elsewhere, explaining the current role of hard-boiled writing in *denigrating* urban space and its inhabitants.

Chapter 6 - The Proletarian Periphery

In introducing Section Two of this study we discussed the issue of 'prolecult', the short-lived literary movement aligned to the CPUSA. We argued that later critics alleged the emergence of a 'party line in literature', constructing a largely imaginary 'patronage' out of the experiences of a handful of writers and critics and their relationships with their peers. This contrasted sharply with the debates of the 1930s which James T. Farrell, among others, characterised as concerning whether proletarian literature was written by the workers, for the workers, or about the working class.[1] Whichever it was, we should note that association with the CP brought temporary benefits (and imposed political discipline on those who were party members or full time workers), such as the opportunities brought about when new writers were encouraged through forums such as the John Reed Clubs. As we have also argued through a comparison with hard-boiled writing, no 'Berlin Wall' separated the supposed 'party line literature' from a significant strand in popular culture.

In this chapter we further develop this argument. There is little truth in the allegation, widespread in the Cold War, that the CP attempted a mass infiltration of American culture based on a doomed attempts to construct working class culture from scratch. In contrast, we would argue that substantial strands of popular culture were already amenable to cultural forms and genres that had been adopted by writers and artists who were committed to social change. One example of this relationship is the large readership and international circulation of the novels of B. Traven, and the incorporation of 'proletarian' themes into the key novels of a number of 1930s writers, including Nelson Algren, John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck. In the following pages, we consider this wider 'proletarian periphery' at length. The first half of the chapter deals with writers going 'on the bum', the picaresque journeys around America that sided with the underdog in a manner commensurate with the officially-sanctioned 'documentary impulse'. In the second half, we assess the representation of the dance marathon in 1930s fiction, which formed a significant point of terminus for Depression-era narratives. We argue that both trends represent an attempt to construct a 'national-popular' discourse in fiction.

As readers will recall, Chapter Five analysed the presentation of violence, noting that there was little aside from political controversy and commitment, to differentiate the formal aspects of selected proletarian fiction from the hard-boiled idiom, principally the West Coast's so-called *Black Mask* school. Aspects of this idiom also intersected with the sensibilities of Midwestern worker-correspondents, who wrote about the industrial and agricultural struggles of their region. The subject matter for such material included reportage, realist representation of the labour process, and the history of the US labour movement prior to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, notably that of the International Workers of the World (Wobblies). Subjectively, vernacular speech was imitated without condescension, perhaps in keeping with the broader 'documentary impulse' prevalent in

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[1] Cited in Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in US Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1993), p.86. See also Dan Georgakas and Ernie Brill, 'Proletarian and Radical Writers - 1930s and 1940s', in Mari Jo Buhle *et al* (eds.) *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), pp. 601-606.

1930s writing. Despite the varied contributions of writers based in the regions, New York City came to occupy a hegemonic position in the development of a cultural critique appropriate to the new conditions of the Depression; it also housed significant publications like the *Nation* and *New Masses*. Taken collectively, the emergence of new patterns of realist writing across varied geographical locations and regional identities suggests that an oppositional subculture was emerging in response to the slump.

When John Dos Passos summarised his *USA* trilogy (1938) as mostly 'the speech of the people', his comments - uneven development permitting - were broadly applicable to the movement with which he was associated at the time. Taken together, the drama, art, and writing which emphasised social concerns and presented them in a broadly realist or documentary fashion can also be seen as a synthesis of society's experiences during the interwar period, notably its ultimate descent into slump and war. Given the anxiety and opprobrium attached to this 'aspirin age' even today, its cultural production sits uneasily within a canon formed by a nineteenth century elite and adapted subsequently to the consensus developed under the influence of the postwar period. If the experience of consensus breaking down and the old order losing its moral authority is an unsettling one, then so too is the body of theory, aesthetics, and cultural forms which sought to criticise, ridicule and ultimately transform the prevailing institutions.

It was argued previously that the cultural practice designated 'proletarian' was trapped in a pincer movement of history. Entering the 1930s while perceived as an integral component of US Communism (hence the slogan 'art is a weapon'), it was was officially abandoned at the onset of Popular Front politics. Yet the category was vilified and ridiculed well into the 1960s, held up as a sign of Communist totalitarianism and the duplicity of intellectuals. In both formulations the content of 'proletarian culture' was seen as primarily political; it served as a general category denoting identification with the working class movement, preferably under the leadership of the CPUSA. However, if we took this *cultural* movement's claims - and those of its anticommunist critics - at face value, we would lose sight of the diversity which actually existed under this umbrella. Moreover, the complex array of influences which shaped such developments, such as hard-boiled detective fiction in literature and urban regionalism in the visual arts, are too often concealed by the political thrust behind many an historical assessment.

One peculiarity of this debate is that a substantial component of the radical writing of the 1930s also contributed to the decade's distinctive 'look'. Internal migration by whites, such as the movement West to escape the ravages of the slump, was the basis for dozens of novels, paintings, movies and poems. In the photography of Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein and others, often organised under state auspices, we find haunting reminders of the failure of agriculture amidst a stagnant economy. Such images were most famously codified in John Steinbeck's epic *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel which itself embodies many of the contradictions of 1930s cultural politics. Today this popular novel, the second best selling US paperback ever (over 15 million copies),[2] exercises an almost normative influence upon the historical remembrance of the Depression by generations too young to have experienced it. On this basis, it could be read as the acceptable face of suffering, of human endurance removed from the historically specific conditions which informed its initial moral critique.

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[2] Cited in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, '"One or Two Things I Know About Us": "Okie" in American Culture', *Radical History Review* 59, Spring 1994, p.21.

If *The Grapes of Wrath* is widely accepted today as typifying the experience of the 1930s, this was not always the case. In sharp contrast to its modern prestige, initial interpretations of the novel were far from uniformly warm. On one hand it was derided as naturalism 'gone berserk ... beyond the pale of rational and realistic thinking'.[3] On the other, it had come, within two decades of publication, to epitomise 'Mid-cult', a term used to suggest that mass culture was disguising itself as intellectually challenging and respectable. Thus, according to Robert Warshow, Steinbeck's famous novel amounted to nothing less than the 'disastrous vulgarisation of intellectual life'.[4] Furthermore, in Warshow's view, such 'middlebrow' cultural production was an appendage of Stalinism, with its fixed value system and its voyeuristic substitution of spectacle for direct experience.[5]

With hindsight, it would appear that the first of these responses prefigured McCarthyism, in that any observations of suffering provoked the allegation of radical bias; humanitarian sentiments were conflated with domestic subversion. Moreover, given the centrality of material abundance to America's self-image, there was a heightened sensitivity to complaints about poverty. Conversely, Warshow's subsequent dismissiveness typifies the Cold War intellectual in his 'end of ideology' mode, who saw prosperity as subsidising mediocrity and endangering high culture, through the construction of a mindless mass society.[6] This apparent contradiction is best explained in terms of economic growth legitimating *mainstream* political discourse, at a time when *intellectuals* feared its *cultural* consequences. On this basis, 'Mid-cult' was seen as posing a more subtle threat from within this constellation of sinister arrangements. Hence Dwight Macdonald's summary of the menace of middlebrow:

> This intermediate form - let us call it Mid cult - has the essential qualities of mass cult -the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity - but decently covers them with a cultural figleaf.[7]

As an analytical device, 'Mid-Cult' became a hallmark of the group known in later years as the New York Intellectuals. Moreover, the cultural analysis that developed as part of a broader intellectual response to the slump, was anticipated in the double-edged reaction to *The Grapes of Wrath.* Condemned as a vindictive, deranged documentary and as the exemplar of 'middlebrow', it also achieved popularity as the archetypal novel of the Depression.[8] The first of these concerns was expressed within the intelligentsia; the second through book purchases and Steinbeck's later acquisition of canonical significance. He even received the endorsement of the President and First Lady.[9] To better understand this controversy, we need to return to the factors which shaped such a novel. It becomes clear that the concern in hand is not simply Steinbeck, important as his contribution was, but the interaction between literature and society which made going 'on the bum' - becoming mobile to escape economic ruin - into a central feature of the Great Depression's cultural production.

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[3] George Thomas Miron, *The Truth About John Steinbeck and the Migrants* (Los Angeles: privately published, 1939). Cited by Peter Lisca, '*The Grapes of Wrath*', in Robert Murray Davis (ed.) *Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 1972), p.79.

[4] Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (1962; New York: The Athenaeum, 1971), p.33.

[5] Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society Since the 1930s* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.61.

[6] One of the clearest indications of this process at work is the intellectual trajectory of Daniel Bell himself, from 1930s Socialist Party membership and *Marxisant* sociology to the outlook espoused in *The End of Ideology* (1961). This work suggests the resolution of class-based political tensions had been resolved in America, hence the title. Bell later adopted an *anti*-individualist tone in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976). See Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Nick Heffernan, 'Culture and Modernity's End: Daniel Bell and Frederic Jameson', in David Murray (ed.), *American Cultural Critics* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), pp. 272-281.

[7] Cited in Brookeman, *American Culture and Society Since the 1930s*, p.51.

One example of the tensions within this proletarian periphery is the way in which it coexisted uneasily with documentary techniques of design even as it struggled to incorporate them. For instance, a number of proletarian novels used a variety of typefaces to convey changing circumstances. Clara Weatherwax's *Marching, Marching* (1935) contrasted the positions of employers and strikers by displaying bourgeois press coverage of a strike alongside a strike leaflet, seemingly reproduced verbatim as part of the text.[10] Likewise, William Rollins Jr. used enlarged fonts to signal the accelerating tempo of events in *The Shadow Before* (1934). Both of these techniques appeared in ostensibly apolitical texts at around the same time; whilst pulp magazines like *Operator No. 5* included bogus government reports to 'authenticate' the lurid plots, Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935) featured gradually expanding typeface in the scenes not told in flashback, to emphasise the build-up to a courtroom verdict. The appearance of analogous practices across proletarian and 'pulp' narratives (and the broader application of documentary in conditions of federal sponsorship) suggests, once again, the general role of documentary technique during the Depression. Many of the qualities, real or imagined, said to be inherent features of the proletarian novel - simplicity, didacticism, moral critiques of capitalist crisis - also appear in the decade's 'middlebrow' and 'pulp' fiction.

However, other techniques tended to cut against this pattern. For instance, the 'camera-eye' promised objectivity, but its most famous application - in Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy - was devoted to passages that were primarily autobiographical. Richard Pells goes so far as to say that it provided a mechanism for allowing an author to retreat from collectivism.[11] It was not the camera eye that Dos Passos used to develop a composite portrait of the nation, but *protagonists* who formed part of a distinctly national milieu. In turn, this technique proved conducive to documenting national trends, especially the social divisions that have accompanied the 'American Century'. In writing *USA*, the 'great roadmaster of American fiction' travelled hundreds of fictitious miles, especially via the railroad, where he gave tycoon J. Ward Moorehouse a private compartment and left roving agitator Mac to walk the rails.[12] Whereas *The Grapes of Wrath* and, to a lesser extent, *Somebody in Boots* combined going west, geographical mobility and rural poverty,[13] *USA* attempted to portray the nation as a whole. Steinbeck and Algren used travel to initiate a process whereby the different factors that constituted the nation were revealed by accident, whereas Dos Passos organised his nation around characters based on symbolic national types.

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[8] Perhaps controversially, it did not appear in Georg Lukacs and Fischer's 'international pantheon' of realist fiction. See David Roskies, 'The Proletarian Novel: Tressell/Gibbon/Sillitoe', *Ph.D Thesis*, University of Sussex, 1977/78, p.71.

[9] David Wyatt (ed.), *New Essays on* The Grapes of Wrath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.3.

[10] Weatherwax, *Marching, Marching*, p.213; reproduced in Foley, *Radical Representations*, pp. 422-423.

[11] Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p.238.

The 'picaresque' tradition in American fiction pre-dates the proletarian novel, incorporating a wide range of influences, ranging from the adventure stories of Horatio Alger, via the Western, to the widely read, seminal proletarian fiction of B. Traven (itself a pseudonym). A common theme in all three genres was changing one's material circumstances, a possibility opened up by relocation. In the Alger stories and in tales of Westward expansion, 'rags to riches' signified a work ethic in which luck and endeavour surpassed thrift and persistence as the key to success. On this basis, such tales meshed with public aspirations; these popular genres, coupled with the overarching role accorded to the individual as a basic unit of political culture,[14] provided a framework receptive to tales of life on the road. What happened when economic decline put paid to the opportunities which endowed the genre with a kernel of plausibility? This problem was posed most sharply by an octogenerian from California who told his State Unemployment Commission that Horace Greeley, if a pundit of the 1930s, would adopt the maxim 'Go West, young man, and drown yourself in the Pacific Ocean'.[15] Nevertheless, internal migration remained one of a handful of survival strategies for helping individuals through the Depression.

Mobility was not simply a question of geographical relocation, however. It could also initiate a break with tradition and stifling conformity, an aspiration clearly visible in the fiction of James M. Cain and B. Traven, significant writers of the inter-war period who lacked the naive faith in prosperity of earlier picaresque works and were primarily concerned with 'proletarians and with ideas which apply to their condition and destiny'.[16] Traven's characters were simple proletarians and manual labourers, while Cain's became petty criminals as a result of forces beyond their control, stripping them of the status they desired. Traven and Cain eschewed the habits of older authors, who presented travel as a facilitator of adventures. According to formula, characters were rewarded with greater control of their futures, in the form of wealth, security, or a stable personal relationship. Even early Traven works sometimes bear the hallmarks of this approach, such as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1927), albeit distinguished by a focus on plebian lives, which we consider below. Overall, the hallmark of Depression-era travel narratives was one of increasing desperation.

An actor and German exile who also used the pseudonym Ret Marut, Traven settled in Tampico, Mexico in 1924. During this period he produced five novels, a volume of stories and a travel book, establishing in the process a record for near total anonymity. Although based in the Americas, his work made a limited impact on the United States. For instance, whereas 100,000 copies of the German edition of *The Death Ship* (1926) were in circulation by 1931, relations with US publishers proved less rewarding. *Publishers Weekly* reported that by 1938 only 3,288 copies had been sold.[17] *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* fared less well, until released as a movie in 1948. By this time, Traven had been reduced to selling *The Death Ship* by mail order from a Mexico City post office box, in an attempt to generate more publicity. On balance, his dealings with publishers Doubleday and, to a lesser extent, with Knopf, failed to extend his worldwide success to a US market, even at a time when proletarian fiction appeared to be in demand.

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[12] Leo Gurko, 'John Dos Passos's *USA*: A 1930's Spectacular', in David Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), pp. 50-51.

[13] See Marcus Klein, 'The Roots of Radicals: Experience in the Thirties', in Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers*.

[14] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), provided something of a normative framework for post-war accounts of liberal individualism.

[15] Cited in Eric Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1955), p.249.

[16] Charles H. Miller, 'B. Traven: Pure Proletarian Writer', in Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers*, p.118.

Paradoxically, by the onset of the slump, Traven was firmly established on the international literary scene, but a virtual unknown in the US. In contrast to the myth of proletarian fiction, this would suggest an international demand for narratives of plebian struggle and intrigue *irrespective* of the patronage of the CP or the Comintern. If not for his limited US success, those claiming that proletarian literature was an artificial imposition based on political expediency would have been under greater pressure to account for Traven's international popularity. Regardless of his position in the US fiction market, we can situate Traven on the proletarian periphery on two counts: first, on the basis of his reception among proletarian critics; secondly, because of his capacity to embed a moral critique of society in realist adventure stories.

As for Traven's profile among 1930s literary radicals, he was treated as one of the growing number of proletarian authors. Although his European reputation counted for little in New York, he was well reviewed in the October 1934 edition of *Saturday Review of Literature*. He also found a keen defender in Granville Hicks of the *New Masses*, who rather speculatively suggested that Traven's working class background conferred authenticity on *The Death Ship*.[18] Such adulation was repeated with the publication of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which Hicks found 'so thoroughly revolutionary in all its implications that slogans are unnecessary'.[19] However, Foley has criticised Hicks's stance, by suggesting that his reading privileges experience over political clarity, in the process passing over Traven's anti-Communist, anarchist outlook. Moreover, she takes issue with Hicks for advocating a narratological strategy that emphasises 'story' over 'discourse'. Thus, rather than 'tell' the readership about the domination of capital over sailors or Mexico, Hicks and, by implication, Traven are merely content to 'show' them.[20]

Our study argues that this process of 'showing', of embedding in fiction *real* relations of exploitation, allows for his inclusion in the broader 'pantheon' of documentary writing in the 1930s. Although documentary does entail discourse, since the documentarist/documentary apparatus is forced to seek out 'the people', it was largely conceived - at least by Traven - as a process of 'showing'. Whereas Foley correctly questions the political utility of such didacticism, she perhaps underestimates the persuasive power of 'stories' which lay bare social conditions without offering a formal programmatic critique. To restate this chapter's core argument: depression-era realism constructed a moral critique of capitalism by depicting the consequences of its shortcomings. This echoed and was reinforced by state cultural policy, which itself entailed a turn to documentary in the context of a broader package of socially traumatic (i.e. necessary yet repellent) measures of state intervention. In later years, this 'proletarian periphery' formed part of a larger body of cultural artefacts serving as permanent reminders of the slump. As such, their existence demanded explanation in a manner that evaded the legitimation crisis of the inter-war years. As the previous chapter argued, this tension encouraged numerous post-war apologists to stress the existence of a 'party line in literature'. Hicks's warm reviews of *The Death Ship* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* suggests the relative incoherence of such a 'line'.

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[17] *Publishers Weekly*, July 9, 1938; cited in Karl S. Guthke, *B. Traven: The Life Behind the Legends* (trans. Robert C. Sprung) (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1991), p.313.

[18] Hicks, 'Revolutionary Literature of 1934', *New Masses* 14, January 1, 1935, p.38.

[19] Hicks, 'Proletarian Mastery', *New Masses* 16, September 10, 1935, p.23. Cited in Foley, *Radical Representations*, p.136.

[20] Foley, *Radical Representations*, pp. 277-278.

This conundrum was further reinforced by the attitude of the Communist Party toward Traven's work. Derided by Foley on political grounds, Hicks's refusal to confront Traven's anarchism in the *New Masses* could be viewed as an individual idiosyncrasy. The same cannot be said of the embrace of Traven by the official party press, where *The Death Ship* was serialised in the *Daily Worker* in early 1936. Traven even recycled the accompanying biographical notes provided by *New Masses* contributor Edwin Seaver, sending them to his Swedish publisher for future use.[21] Party tolerance of Traven can be further illustrated by the lack of a response from the US literary left to long-established rumours that he was in fact Jack London (b. 1876) who, it was claimed, faked his suicide in 1916.[22] What makes this surprising is that London was something of an idol among proletarian writers, who saw him as their founding father. Politically, London sympathised with Debsian socialism and was respected by the Wobblies; he was also the most widely-read English language writer in Soviet Russia.[23] As such, CP sympathisers liked to claim him as one of their own, but they did nothing when it was claimed that he had become the anarchist Traven.[24] This suggests both a wider constituency for proletarian writing than just the CP *and* a less pragamatic or doctrinaire approach to non-party writers than is often suggested.

The rumour sank into obscurity when Bernard Smith, the Knopf editor who first secured US publishing rights to *The Death Ship*, began replying to readers' enquiries about Traven's identity by saying that nothing was known about the author. Although wrongly identifying Smith as initiating the mystery of Traven's anonymity, Stoddard Martin usefully summarises its place in 1930s popular culture, appealing 'to a generation preoccupied with social injustice but also having a taste for hoax and hidden identity'.[25] As readers will recall from Chapter Five, a similar combination stalked the pages of hard-boiled writing. This suggests the extent of inter-penetration between the three categories of writing - hard-boiled, proletarian, the 'proletarian periphery' - presented in this study as *mediating* the legitimation crisis of the inter-war years. In terms of method and style, each of these was underpinned by a loosely documentary approach; their impact is discussed below, where we consider Traven's strategy for representing politics in the novel.

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[21] Needless to say, this information was wildly misleading, replacing Traven's personal history with that of Gales, the ficticious narrator in *The Death Ship*. See Guthke, *B. Traven*, p.27.

[22] Stoddard Martin, *California Writers: Jack London, John Steinbeck, The Tough Guys* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.144.

[23] Chuck Portz, 'Jack London', *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, pp. 432-433.

[24] As numerous 'Travenologists' have pointed out, this particularly far-fetched rumour - which Traven himself encouraged - could not account for the existence of Marut's (Traven's) *Brickburner* magazine in Weimar Germany nor for the appearance of his novels in German *prior* to English language editions.

[25] *California Writers*, p.145.

Although a clear generic trope for discussing the national in terms of aspirations for social mobility was emerging in the 1930s, Traven seldom lapsed into formulaic writing. Thus, *The Carreta* (1930), his respected tale of revolution in Mexico, shows its central figure Andres Ugalde propelled away from a parochial existence by events beyond his control. The episodes which ensue broaden his horizons, highlight the grinding poverty of rural Mexico and draw the reader's attention to the contingent nature of the relations of domination which immiserate the peons. Hence the altruistic doctor's wife who is snubbed by the local elite to which she once belonged, for paying 'excessive' wages and making it difficult 'for the worthy ladies of the town to get servants on proper terms - for they were used to treating them as slaves'.[26] It is clear from these descriptions of the power relations in the town that Traven was not content to write merely as an observer but also to editorialise.

Likewise, his representation of journeys assumes a form which is critical of elites and hierarchies; rather than simply push his subjects through inert surroundings, their explorations of Mexico furnish the author's critique of that society. As Miller argues, 'Traven stood for a while in the forum of a region while he addressed and judged the universe'.[27] This critical stance was not the whole-hearted commitment to socialism which accompanied, say, the short stories of the archetypal proletarian critic, Michael Gold.[28] Instead, Traven attempts to reconcile individualism and social dissatisfaction, hence *The Carreta*'s Ugalde and his philosophy of 'make the best of your own life first, before you bother about anything else'.[29] On balance, Traven could be seen as 'speaking for the subaltern,' championing the peons without romanticising their lives.[30]

In summary, any assessment in which Traven is presented as a mere antecedent of the 1930s proletarian novelist would tell only half the story. For one reason, 'he straddles that decade and others. Half his work was ... published before the Thirties, but his six related Revolution novels appeared during the Thirties, and paradoxically, our readers have yet to "discover" them'.[31] In the various debates over 1930s culture, total neglect of this author is more common than cursory treatment. One seeking to unearth him from the 'condescension of posterity' can make a compelling case, notably with reference to novels like *The Death Ship* and *Rosa Blanca* (1929), which were met with far more popular acclaim in Europe than America.

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[26] Traven, *The Carreta* (London: Allison and Busby, 1981 ed.), p.236.

[27] Miller, 'B. Traven', p.118.

[28] For example, see his short story 'Mussolini's Nightmare' which appeared in *The Anvil*, October-November 1935 (reprinted in Jack Conroy and Curt Johnson, *Writers in Revolt: The Anvil Anthology 1933-1940* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1973), pp. 74-77. Interestingly, this ludicrous tale bridges the politics of the Comintern's 'Third Period' and the Popular Front, undermining Gold's reputation for ultra-leftism.

[29] Traven, *The Carreta*, p.199.

[30] See Alan Wald's interesting application of this contemporary debate to Guy Endore, a 1930s proletarian writer in *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 178-186.

[31] Miller, 'B. Traven', p.132.

In terms of an American audience, it is perhaps *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* that has made the greatest impression. As we saw previously, this hinged largely upon John Huston's 1948 film version; prior to this, *The Death Ship* was his best known work in the United States. In the novel, three Americans attempt to escape the drudgery of the oil trade by prospecting for gold. They successfully extract a small fortune, defending themselves from bandits in the process, but personal rivalries erupt, leading to attempted murder. Most of the gold is then lost to a gang of desperados who, like the nihilistic prospector Dobbs that they decapitate, also meet a violent end. They have already lost the looted gold dust, which they dispose of in the jungle, thinking it is sand. On reaching Tampico, Curtin and Howard, the surviving prospectors, reconcile themselves to a new life as medicine men in a nearby Indian village.

In conveying the tense atmosphere created by 'gold fever', Traven might appear to be little more than an exceptional writer of adventure stories. However, this tale is riddled with numerous expositions of Traven's outlook on life. For instance, the trio realise they will need a government licence to dig for gold. In turn, this gives way to a discussion conducted by the omniscient narrator concerning the corruption of government inspectors (and governments in general), and the capacity of mining companies to put small prospectors 'out of the way', in the manner of bandits. Traven concludes this chapter by stating 'as long as you have nothing, you are the slave of an empty belly and of any who can fill it. But when you have anything, you are the slave of your possessions'.[32] In a similar vein, the novel echoes Marxist notions of commodity fetishism, presenting relations between men and women as essentially being conducted between things. Gold becomes an instrument of domination, rather than the neutral source of wealth which its pursuers anticipate. The novel is shot through with such barbed remarks, continually questioning the exploitative nature of an economic order that makes men risk their lives for minimal rewards.

Philosophically, Traven was said to echo the 19th Century individualist Max Stirner, who believed that 'personal indignation was the most powerful agent for change'.[33] That such indignation was so clearly directed at the social order suggests the ambivalent place of Traven in the post-war consensus when, perhaps surprisingly, his American readership was at its largest. Few made an all-out attack on Traven's legitimacy as a writer, which was the fate endured by a number of his US counterparts in the Cold War years.[34] His seclusion in Mexico allowed for this, in contrast to US writers on the 'proletarian periphery' like the literary agent Maxim Lieber, who spent part of the

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[32] Traven, *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (London: Mayflower-Dell, 1966 ed.), pp. 64-65.

[33] Martin, *California Writers*, p.145. This view is contested in Guthke, *B. Traven*, p.134. Guthke's work is the most comprehensive Traven biography to date.

[34] For instance, Howard Fast remained a CP traveller until the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, to which he responded by denouncing Communism in *The Naked God*. Throughout this period (and beyond) he was roundly condemned, even in Daniel Aaron's remarkably generous *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 ed.) pp. 311*n*; 386. See also Alan Wald, *The Responsibility of Intellectuals: Selected Essays on Marxist Traditions in Cultural Commitment* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 92-101; Wald, 'Howard Fast', *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, pp. 219-220.

McCarthy era there.[35] Moreover, the themes that informed *Treasure* were reoriented in the screenplay for Huston's movie version, shifting from a satirical history of capitalism to a more apolitical dismissal of materialist values.[36] It was marketed as a Western, and Humphrey Bogart's character was distanced from the novel's amoral portrayal of Dobbs. Traven himself appeared on set as an advisor, in the guise of 'Hal Croves', allegedly Traven's representative. Filming led to tensions with Huston, who later received a letter from Croves stating 'never again will Mr. John Huston have an opportunity to direct a picture based on any other of Traven's books'.[37]

The 1948 Hollywood production blunted the novel's objections to capitalism, by moving from its political terrain into the realm of personal morality. In terms of a 'message', Huston's film restates old homilies; there is no honour among thieves, while the worth of a fool's treasure is dubious at best. Fortunately, other aspects of this narrative attest to the continued existence of a proletarian periphery in post-war America. Behind Huston's Hollywood years was a period spent 'on the bum', a vagabond lifestyle akin to that of Nelson Algren, author of *Somebody in Boots*. Like James M. Cain, Jack Conroy and countless other hard-boiled and proletarian writers, Huston made a living selling short-stories to the *American Mercury*. Like the *Maltese Falcon* he so successfully brought to the silver screen, Huston presented the chase for treasures as an exercise in self-deception. In James Navermore's words:

> By selecting Dashiell Hammett and B. Traven as the basis of his first two films, Huston was indirectly declaring his sympathy with the ethos of Popular Front literature in the 1930s; hence the special appeal of his pictures lay not merely in his gritty, anti-Hollywood 'realism' and in the cleverness of their acting ensembles, but in the slightly muffled, allegorical criticism of social life in America that they described from their sources.[38]

Public interest was renewed in the late 1960s, when Hill and Wang began reprinting Traven's collected works. More in keeping with Traven's outlook was the radical San Francisco magazine *Ramparts*, which promoted *The Death Ship* as 'a devastating attack on bureaucracy and the state'. (Chapters from Judy Stone's Traven biography were also published there in 1967).[39] Just as his obsessive insistence on anonymity seemed to be declining, Traven died in Mexico in 1969.

The lessons of Traven and his US career are threefold. Firstly, despite the myths, patronage - whether state or party - was unnecessary to produce narratives in which a damning expose of legitimacy crisis and exploitation was embedded. Secondly, many of the rigid distinctions made between 'propaganda', 'mass culture' and 'middlebrow' appear somewhat arbitrary when applied to actual texts upholding a critical realism and plebian subject matter. Thirdly, his anticipation and specific inflections of proletarian writing and the 'documentary impulse' has permeated other spheres of cultural production - especially film - suggesting a capacity to unsettle an audience, reminding subsequent generations of the despair that afflicted their predecessors. In this spirit, we would also concur with Ernest Hemingway's warning that 'you should not read *Somebody in Boots* if you cannot take a punch'.[40] This is not to repeat the claims that 'art is a weapon' widespread in publications like *New Masses*, but to restate a central theme of this study: *cultural production has the capacity to articulate unease in any given social order.* This observation would apply equally to texts like Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, both of which were filmed.

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[35] See Lieber, 'Postscript', *The American Century* (Berlin: Seven Seas, 1960).
[36] See James Navemore (ed.), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (screenplay), (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), p.18.
[37] Will Wyatt, *The Man Who Was B. Traven* (London: Cape, 1980), p.123. It has been reported that this followed Huston's attempts to paint Croves's testicles silver!
[38] Navemore (ed.), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (screenplay), p.13.
[39] *Ramparts* commentary reproduced on the cover of *The Death Ship* (New York: Collier, 1976 printing); Guthke, *B. Traven*, p.396.

It is important not to lose sight of the literary techniques from which various documentary and 'national-popular' texts were first crafted. For instance, the method employed by Traven, based on participant observation, realism, and semi-autobiographical reportage, prefigured the tropes characteristic of interwar US literature. Moreover, this documentary trend became the subject of much controversy, especially with authors moving such representations north of the Mexican border. One contrast between Traven and his American counterparts was that internal migration was acceptable as the exotica of adventure stories set outside the United States - even when its author expressed class-based concepts of social justice - but a different matter when narrated in the imperialist heartland. Once characters were shown forsaking the semi-colonial 'periphery' in order to go 'on the bum' in the United States itself, it laid bare the prevailing social conditions. Moreover, for the 'lost generation' of writers rejoining the US intelligentsia after their spell in 1920s Paris, the shift to documentary entailed a turn outwards away from the 'modernist' preoccupation with the self to a concern for wider socio-economic issues.

Secondly, it involved a more national orientation of sources, with Shreveport and Seattle replacing Paris and Prague, albeit couched in the language of internationalist politics. An important factor in this was the world recession, which wiped out the easy money which sustained such luminaries as Ernest Hemingway, Malcolm Cowley, John Dos Passos, and Nathanael West; it led also to the instability in Bonn which drove Lillian Hellman back to the USA.[41] Disaffected by the experiences of war and the nativist, puritanical backlash which occurred in its wake, the slump prompted a virtual who's who of cultural practitioners to re-enter their homeland, expressing contempt for the authorities as they went.

Between 1918 and 1929, the priority accorded to the personal, the national and the international spheres was reorganised dramatically, not least by some of those with the talents or reputation to do so. For the newer writers, whose employment or aspirations revolved mainly around the publishing industry, going 'on the bum' was not just a research method for a forthcoming novel, but a survival strategy brought on by the slump itself, in sharp contrast to the options available to the Paris set. Thus Algren, Josephine Herbst, Mary Heaton Vorse, and others took to the road, often taking menial jobs or assisting strikers and acquiring material for their stories in the process.

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[40] Cited dust jacket, Flamingo edition, op. cit.

[41] Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 46-47. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) is important in this respect, a bridge between Europe and America, documentary and biography.

Punching cattle, mining, working as a busboy or stevedore: such activities were *de rigeur* in the credentials of radical writers. From 1929 to the inception of the WPA Federal Writers Project, they were fortunate to find any employment. One such author, Edward Newhouse, observed that this was not the fate of the 'lost generation' but the 'crisis generation', as troubled and guilty as Hemingway and Faulkner's peer group, whilst conscious they could be condemned to a life of economic inactivity.[42]

Bottom Dogs

This burden found expression in stories which catalogued the lives of society's 'bottom dogs', recording the degradation and violence meted out to them daily. Such characters' sole resource is their tremendous mobility, fostered by a lack of binding arrangements in the present and developed by hitchhiking, riding in 'Hoovermobiles', or sneaking on to freight trains. From this evolved a constant menace, that of the intervention of 'somebody in boots', restricting an individual's freedom of movement. By depicting such circumstances, Algren, Dos Passos, and others working in this genre codified the experiences of the social groups with which they identified (regardless of whether they considered such sections of society to be the proletariat, the workers, or the people). This method was external to a given text; the writer became immersed in the struggles conducted within a locality, and assimilated these encounters into subsequent novels and journalism.

The 'bottom dog' novel allowed authors to portray the nation in crisis, by describing their creations' encounters in a variety of states and cities. A handful of characters - Tom Joad, Fainy McCreary, Erskine Caldwell's Will Thompson - became class-conscious activists, usually on behalf of 'the people' rather than 'the party'. Likewise, when Joe Bonham of Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939) discovers the extent of his wartime mutilation, he demands that the authorities turn him into a touring exhibit, to deter others from joining the army. Others joined an anti-social *lumpenproletariat*, such as Cass McKay and Dobbs of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, lacking even in elementary solidarities to bind them to their associates. Even on the fringes of the proletarian periphery, such figures seldom shared the political perspectives of their creators. Instead, their fictitious activities and experiences, occurring across most of North America, served to highlight society's vicious underbelly. In effect, this represented a highly critical deployment of the *bildungsroman.*

As we see below, similar trends emerged in narratives based on the 1920s fad of marathon dancing, which degenerated into a gruesome scam during the Depression. In the representation of such events, we find an interrogation of the American dream in a manner analogous to the widespread use of the picaresque to criticise society in the slump. The dance floor provides both a point of terminus, where a drifter's life 'on the bum' will crash to a halt, and a melting pot, in which citizens of different backgrounds are dragged down to the same level by unscrupulous promoters. Taken as a whole, the proletarian periphery - our term for that body of fiction which displayed the attributes associated with proletarian literature but was organisationally more distant from

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[42] Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p.152.

'official', CP-sponsored publications and groups - presents the USA as a society so stagnant as to degrade people on a daily basis.

In turn, this established a contrast with Roosevelt's attempts to institute a 'national-popular' cultural policy. The President sought to cohere support for the state formation by reforging national identity, stressing the struggle of 'the people' against the slump; he also held the 'economic royalists' responsible for the latter. In this official narrative, 'the people' and the nation were treated as synonymous. On the proletarian periphery, this identification became increasingly qualified, suggesting instead a pattern of resistance - either manifest or objectively necessary - of the people against the state. In some instances such as *Grapes of Wrath* and *USA*, this meant reclaiming the nation from the elite; in others (*Johnny Got His Gun*) it meant a rejection of nations and nationalism altogether. In part, these differing political perspectives reflected the contradictory turn to folk culture and documentary that was widespread among Depression-era cultural practitioners. On one hand they were ostensibly more *internationalist* than ever before; on the other, their literary and artistic concerns took on an increasingly *national* orientation. This is not to suggest that these elements are incompatible, but that the 'proletarian periphery' failed to achieve a satisfactory synthesis.

Even under the influence of the Popular Front this emphasis remained. For instance, proletarian writing has been interpreted as an alien, Soviet-imposed influence. However, Michael Gold, its primary supporter, presented an indigenous, almost nativist orientation as a bulwark against fascism, claiming that 'the chief battleground in the defence against fascist barbarism is in this question of the national tradition'.[43] Whereas the national tradition had once been condemned, to varying degrees, as irredeemably 'bourgeois' in the early 1930s, cultural workers sympathetic to the CP adopted a position that was almost the reverse of their initial stance. By the 1940s, this approach was part of mainstream anti-fascism, as expressed in Donald Ogden-Stewart's *Fighting Words* (1940), published at a time when Stewart was fronting the League of American Writers. Fascism, he argued, was an international problem for all *writers,* and 'all came to bear witness to the fact that the defence of American culture is synonymous with the defence of all culture'.[44] At one time, proletarian literature provoked the complaints of the non-Communist cultural left that it lacked any organic connection to American society. Now, as war in Europe approached, the Popular Front's uncritical embrace of all things American increased dramatically. The realist methods that once furnished a moral critique of capitalism could also help to construct numerous versions of 'the national'.

With exponents including Algren, Hemingway, Herbst, Dos Passos, Steinbeck and Traven, this reportage-oriented 'mode of production' echoed the turn towards documentary initiated by the state, as discussed in Chapter Four. Literary modernism was temporarily sidelined. This development was also noted by Philip Rahv, who argued that

> Though the crisis of the nineteen-thirties arrested somewhat the progress of the experiential mode, it nevertheless managed to put its stamp on the entire

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[43] Gold, *Daily Worker*, October 17, 1935, p.5; cited in James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy Over 'Leftism' in Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.134.
[44] *Fighting Words*, p.167. Cited in Lawrence Schwartz, *Marxism and Culture: The CPUSA and Aesthetics in the 1930s* (Port Washington, NY.: Kennikat Press, 1980), p.67.

> social-revolutionary literature of the decade. A comparison of European and American left-wing writing of the same period will at once show that whereas Europeans like Malraux and Silone enter deeply into the meaning of political ideas and beliefs, Americans touch only superficially on such matters, as actually their interest is fixed almost exclusively on the class war as an experience which, to them at least, is new and exciting'.[45]

In short, whereas proletarian fiction often lacked political acuity, it emphasised reportage based representations of the Depression itself. Given the social interaction such writing entailed, it was inevitable that such fictions on the 'proletarian periphery' chronicled the immiseration characteristic of the inter-war period. Perhaps this explains some of the discomfiture that they caused the consensus-seekers of the post-1945 settlement. Building upon an existing reputation for realism and writing from experience, such publications could not fail but add insult to the injury of the slump. An emphasis on 'history as it happened' made the realist fiction of the 1930s into a prime target for emasculation or liquidation under the new orthodoxy of Cold War liberalism.

The Eschatology of the Closed Frontier[46]

One of Hollywood's enduring representations of the 1930s slump is that of a dazed Jane Fonda lurching in aimless circles in order to sustain her dreams of securing cash prizes or a movie bit-part. Sidney Pollack's adaptation of Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) provides a stark contrast to Fonda's father in his portrayal of noble suffering and lost innocence in the John Ford version of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). Taken together, both images personify the Great Depression, although they also run the risk of dehistoricising it. Underlying each cinematic representation, in this instance, is a 'human interest' story framework, albeit on an epic scale, interpellating the viewer through an appeal to society's fascinations with degradation and family life. Such movies made little attempt to sanitise the events portrayed against a backdrop of economic depression, suggesting the extent to which its effects traumatised American life; only in the 'Golden Age' of the 1950s was the slump effectively 'forgotten' (i.e. banished) from popular entertainment.

In short, the position of Depression-era popular entertainment in the cultural production of later years suggests, like other aspects of the slump, multiple sites of selective historical amnesia. By way of contrast, the remainder of this chapter examines literary representations of the impoverished individuals whose survival strategies led to their exploitation in one of the murkier corners of the entertainment industry. Earlier scholarship dealing with similar themes has tended to focus on attempts to 'make it big' in Hollywood; at issue here is the Marathon Dance.

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[45] Philip Rahv, 'The Cult of Experience in American Writing', *Partisan Review*, November-December 1940; reprinted in Rahv (ed.) *Literature in America* (1957) (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973 ed.), p.368.

[46] Subtitle taken from Philip H. Melling's essay 'Samples of horizon: picaresque patterns in the thirties', in Stephen Baskerville and Ralph Willett (eds.), *Nothing Else to Fear: New Perspectives on America in the Thirties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985). The author wishes to thank the anonymous readers at *Over Here* for their comments on earlier versions of the Marathon Dance section of this chapter.

Economic instability dramatically altered a large number of the practices which constitute popular culture. Marathon dancing, 'which had originated in the twenties as another zany fad, became in the thirties a vicious racket'.[47] Previously, such dances were a surprisingly carefree symbol of the Prohibition Era, allowing young people extended periods of dancing, away from the prying eyes of chaperones (a function that was facing extinction even faster than the Puritanism that had held sway in earlier decades). During the Depression, the contests changed for the worst; paying audiences were valued mainly for their alcohol purchases during competitions, while a big money prize, often more imagined than real, continued to attract competition entrants. Contestants were literally worked until they dropped, at which point they faced disqualification. New gimmicks were constantly added in order to sustain audience interest. Food, shelter and a peculiar form of companionship were all that participants could expect by way of compensation. Whereas a dance partner had previously served as a hallmark of social mobility,[48] dancing in order to survive transformed these long-established practices beyond recognition.

However, these negative features of marathon dancing were virtually obliterated at the level of popular perceptions. When ordinary people came into contact with this activity, it was largely as spectators, rather than participants. More noticeably, the public became familiar with the practice through mass media coverage, both in the local press which made celebrities out of the contestants and through Hollywood's episodic portrayal of such events. Indeed, the cinema was instrumental in creating a national awareness of the phenomenon, given the residual puritan influence which often prevented such dances from taking place in smaller towns.[49]

On film, marathon dancing was portrayed affectionately, in keeping with its fun image. In Mervyn LeRoy's *Hard to Handle* (1933) Lefty Merrill (James Cagney) is a frustrated hall manager whose partner absconds with the takings and prize money. Merrill's attempts to repair the situation, mixed with an element of romance, form the basis of this comedy. Such frivolity conceals an underlying process which transformed marathon dancing from a leisure pursuit into a strenuous and insecure occupation, ranking 'among the more grisly symptoms of the early years of the depression'.[50] Darker accounts of this 'symptom' emerged when the subject was tackled by writers of the so-called crisis generation. In an early piece of reportage by socialist novelist Meridel Le Sueur, *New Republic* readers were informed of the 'Walkathon', a thinly disguised dance marathon in which contestants repeated a circuitous route around an auditorium until unable to continue.

Le Sueur's sympathies are firmly with these unfortunates; she is scathing about the 'racketeers of the old school' and 'the mob's excitement, feeding on the tiny bedraggled figures in the arena ... something that at first makes one very sick'.[51] Although her descriptive language sometimes anticipates the charge of 'bread and circuses' that informed post-war mass culture theories, her perspectives are firmly anti-elitist. In defending the maltreated competitors, she recognises 'parallels in daily life', from 'the American spirit, expressing boredom interrupted by shiftless buffoonery' to the 'complete dislocation of the young on American streets'. As writers of Le Sueur's generation began to develop these themes in fiction, winning marathon dance competitions was presented as no more of a solution to collective immiseration than going 'on the bum' in the style of John Steinbeck's Joad family or Nelson Algren's Cass McKay. As we see below, the dance hall was in effect the point of terminus for the picaresque hero.

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[47] Thomas Sturak, 'Horace McCoy's Objective Lyricism', in David Madden (ed.), *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p.147.

[48] This is a recurrent motif in one of the major *buildungsromans* of the 1930s, where Cass McKay lavishes much of his meagre income on taxi dancers. See Nelson Algren, *Somebody In Boots* (1935) (London: Flamingo, 1993), p.187.

[49] This is also illustrated by the confrontation between Gloria Beatty and the Mother's League for Good Morals in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970 ed.), pp. 88-92.

[50] Sturak, 'Horace McCoy's Objective Lyricism', p.145.

Among the first to explore this theme in fiction was James T. Farrell (1904-1979). A member of the 'middle generation' of writers whose literary careers commenced prior to the slump but too late to join the ranks of 'lost' authors who opted for exile in Paris, Farrell was shaken and radicalised by the Sacco-Vanzetti executions, becoming a supporter of the Communist presidential slate in 1932.[52] His career history often contradicts the key stereotype of 1930s literary life - primarily a cyclical transition from bohemianism to social conscience to disillusionment. Farrell's Irish Catholic origins, his colloquial style, and his affiliations with Trotskyism all point to the limitations of a generic model of writers' behaviour during the slump.[53]

Even in 1933, at the height of his co-operation with the Communist party, his literary efforts had little in common with the stereotypes subsequently attached to such associations. Thus, although his short story 'The Benefits of American Life'[54] appeared in *Partisan Review* at a time when it was firmly in the Stalinist camp - it was the official organ of the New York John Reed Club[55] - Farrell's narrative seldom conforms to the agitational orthodoxies allegedly prevalent in Party circles.

In 'The Benefits of American Life', Takiss Fillios leaves the Arcadian valley of his childhood to work in a Chicago shop. Often rejected by American women, he buys the taxi dances and the clothes that he thinks will make a movie star of him. A dance marathon contest on his doorstep provides the opportunity to combine these ambitions. After a week of gritted teeth, aching muscles, and body odour, magnified by excruciating phases of sexual arousal, Fillios yearns for his homeland. His life becomes increasingly gruesome, as 'constipation, diarrhoea, sudden inabilities to control their kidneys' all take their toll on the contestants around him, one of whom also enlivens proceedings with a razor-blade chewing party piece.[56] Takiss Fillios finishes in second place, and enters fifteen subsequent dance marathon contests. Becoming a celebrity within the Greek community, he returns to his native land, dying from the tuberculosis he has contracted while dancing.

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[51] Meridel Le Sueur, 'The Sleepwalkers', *New Republic*, August 2, 1933, pp. 313-314.

[52] Alan M. Wald, *James T. Farrell: The Revolutionary Socialist Years* (New York: NYU Press, 1978), pp. 15, 19.

[53] *Ibid.*, p.152*n*. For more on George Novack, the Trotskyist intellectual whose friendship was an important influence on Farrell's views, see pp. 47-49.

[54] Farrell, 'The Benefits of American Life', *Partisan Review*, 1934. Reprinted in *The Short Stories of James T. Farrell*, Vol. 2. (New York Universal Library 1962), pp. 215-230.

[55] *Partisan* editor William Phillips skirts around the full extent of the journal's Communist status, suggesting an opposition between 'a bohemian and a more freewheeling literary tradition' and the 'sectarian' and 'vulgar' *New Masses* (Phillips, 'On Partisan Review', *TriQuarterly* 43, Fall 1973, p.133). More recent studies suggest both a more heterogeneous 'party line' in literature and, conversely, a *Partisan Review* which was far closer to the CPUSA than its editors have admitted, as we discussed when introducing Section Two of this study.

Farrell's short story prefigures *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* in a number of important respects. Both portray the contests as unrivalled degradation, as painful monotony interrupted by everyday transactions in a bastardised form. The dance floor becomes a registry office, a dental surgery, and the place where competitors open bank accounts to safeguard their meagre, *ad hoc* earnings. Among McCoy's more disturbing creations is Ruby Bates, a tottering namesake of a prosecution witness against the 'Scottsboro Boys'[57] (whose infamous trial and defence campaign was a *cause celebre* on the literary left), who appears ready to give birth at any moment.

Both authors depict a world of stupor and repetition, perhaps a metaphorical reference to Henry Ford's assembly lines, but more clearly a condemnation of the petty spectacle pursued by the entertainments industry. Importantly, Farrell's fictitious immigrant aspires to American citizenship built on aggressive material acquisition. From the ironic title to the protagonist's tragic demise, the American way is itself on trial. Conventional rags to riches scenarios are rendered bitter, as the transition from poor immigrant to public figure is shown to contain the seeds of one's destruction. When dancing resurfaces as a backdrop to sequences in the final part of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, it indicates decay. Lonigan, revealed earlier as being physically exhausted, visits a 'shimmy contest', in which belly dancers are ogled by an audience, filling him with self-disgust. Later, as Studs is attacked by the illnesses that ultimately combine to claim his life, he is haunted by figures from his past and from national political life, 'like drunken Indians in a war dance'.[58] Unlike Fillios, the mature Lonigan's experiences with dancing do not even offer a flickering fame, further reinforcing the perception that the latter's self-obsessed and anti-social character causes his destruction.[59]

As was suggested previously, Horace McCoy (1897-1955) presented a similar scenario to Farrell's 'The Benefits of an American Life', albeit in more harrowing form. *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* concerns two young drifters and their attempts to escape poverty by winning cash prizes for endurance. Although they regard this as a stepping stone to becoming famous, their prospects are bleak. Indeed, one commentator goes so far as to suggest that 'the marathon dance hall on Ocean Pier became virtually a death camp for the Depression's lost souls'.[60] Readers first encounter the couple when it is clear that Robert Syverton is in trouble for the murder of his friend Gloria Beatty. As with James M. Cain's contemporaneous work, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*,[61] the narrative ends in the male protagonist being sentenced to death under California's harsh legal system.

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[56] Farrell, 'Benefits of American Life', p. 227.

[57] See Robin D.G. Kelley, 'Scottsboro Case', *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, pp. 684-686. Bates repudiated the rape charge one month before the second trial commenced in 1933, but the defence campaign won only a partial victory: the last defendant was not freed until 1950.

[58] Farrell, *Studs Lonigan* (1935) (London: Panther, 1979), pp.720, 758, 764-765.

[59] A reading of *Lonigan* developed in Foley, *Radical Representations*, p.328. See also Ann Douglas, 'Studs Lonigan and the Failure of History in Mass Society', *American* Quarterly, Vol. 29, 1977, pp. 487-505.

[60] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 38.

However, in Cain's novel, the protagonist's dramatic reversal of fortune concludes with a priest administering Frank Chambers the last rites. (Ironically, Frank's stay on death row stems from the accident which killed his lover Corah Papadakis; both avoided charges arising from the premeditated murder of Corah's Greek businessman husband.) The impending death penalty comes as something of a twist-in-the-tale ending. While early *noir*'s grim sensibility would demand such retribution, the exact nature of this finale is concealed until the closing paragraphs. Unlike the *Postman*, McCoy's *They Shoot Horses* reveals the outcome of narrative almost immediately. By reversing a linear narrative structure, we are informed of the outcome of *Horses* immediately; Robert Syverton recalls shooting Gloria Beatty in the head, thus clarifying events in his own mind, before explaining himself to the authorities. For defendant and reader alike, the task is one of piecing together the factors which brought about this killing, and Syverton's explanation reveals in all its excruciating detail, the *danse macabre*[62] into which the duo were plunged.

McCoy breaks down the judge's summation into its component parts, each phrase prefiguring a new chapter. As with the print-industry techniques described above, this break up of linear chronology is reinforced by incremental enlargements of typeface with every phrase, reminding us that hard-boiled writers were as closely linked to periodical publishing as to traditional notions of the author as an individual craft producer. Perhaps this reflects the way that McCoy's background in newspaper journalism informed his approach; after serving in the air force, he was sports editor of the Dallas, Texas *Journal* between 1919 and 1930. A founder of Dallas Little Theatre and an associate of *transition* magazine's expatriate milieu, he worked as a Hollywood screenwriter from 1931, where *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* was written. His journalistic career provided the basis of *No Pockets in a Shroud* (1937), a *roman a clef* in the proletarian tradition.[63] Although hostile to exploitation and official hypocrisy, McCoy was not one of the mythical Stalinist cultural apparatchiks that Cold War accounts of 'the Thirties' invented. Instead he drew upon his existing skills and experiences to highlight his sympathies with the victims of the Depression.

In contrast to Takiss Fillios, Robert and Gloria already enjoy 'the benefits of American life'; hailing from Arkansas and Texas respectively, their status as US citizens is not an issue. If anything, the grim competition unfolding on the dance floor can be read as a bastardised melting pot. Where the experiences of Farrell and McCoy's creations do coincide, is at the level of survival strategies. They intend to escape from grinding poverty through geographical mobility. The difference is that, whereas Fillios moves from the Old World to the new, finding fame in dance marathon contests, Robert and Gloria move West,[64] finding death. As Gloria dies smiling at the edge of the Pacific, it suggests that the American dream is exhausted. Repositories of traditional values, notably the 'Mother's League for Good Morals', are presented as compounding the misery of young people seeking to escape the depression. Gloria humiliates the League's representatives with an outburst of Texan twang, suggesting the shift from puritan centres of authority to popular ones which characterised culture in the 1930s.

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[61] Although drafted in November 1933, *Horses* was seen as derivative of Cain's *Postman.* Edmund Wilson classified it as a combination of Cain and a studio screenplay, assuming McCoy was a 'wayward member of Joseph T. Shaw's boys in the *Black Mask* school'. His last story for *Black Mask* appeared in 1934. See Sturak, 'Objective Lyricism', pp. 146, 134.

[62] Melling, 'Samples of horizon', p. 121.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 138. For more on McCoy's post-war career and his relationship to a broader *noir* sensibility, see Woody Haut, *Pulp Culture: American Fiction and the Cold War* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), esp. Chapter Two.

Whereas Fillios's aspirations are defined in relation to the economic contrast between Greece and America, the normative aspirations of American youth are in a state of flux. Neither Robert nor Gloria is content with life in their hometown; their desired Hollywood careers would combine escape with fame. Robert, in keeping with the 'documentary impetus' abroad in 1930s popular culture, wants to make

> a two-or three-minute short. What a junkman does all day, or the life of an ordinary man ... who makes thirty dollars a week and has to raise kids and buy a home and a radio - the kind of a guy bill collectors are always after. Something different, with camera angles to help tell the story.

Gloria's decision to turn up in Hollywood has come from reading movie magazines after a suicide attempt.[65]

Potential fame in the film industry is little more than an illusion; going West can no longer fulfil the American dream. Even prior to the slump, Tinseltown had undermined its own rags-to-riches mythology among those seeking to realise their ambitions within its confines. Gloria's tabloid-driven hopes of being 'discovered' outweigh vastly the genuine opportunities available; her hard-boiled cynicism becomes a necessary defence against the Hollywood environment.[66] Individual strategies for surviving the slump are shown to be destructive, especially when centred upon the exploitative dance marathon and its parasitic relationship to the film industry.

In conclusion, James T. Farrell and especially Horace McCoy transformed the happy-go-lucky image of the dance marathon contest. In contrast to Mervyn LeRoy's upbeat cinematic representation, both authors brought image into line with the changing character of the activity itself. In their treatment of marathon dancing, they indicted the situation into which young people, deprived of opportunities, had been propelled. In fiction, such contests came to symbolise a broader decay of the American dream, repeatedly culminating in a contestant's physical breakdown.

Numerous American writers made the footloose, transient nature of their characters into the basis for depicting *national* life as influenced by the Depression. Farrell and McCoy presented the dance contest, and implicitly the cities which housed it, as a point of terminus for such vagabondage. This is literally the case with Gloria, whose prospects are so bleak she arranges her own fatal shooting, a request too horrific for California

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[64] As we saw above, McCoy himself had trekked from Dallas to California in 1931 seeking a Hollywood career after 10 years as a newspaper journalist and actor in little theatres. It is probable that he witnessed marathon dances during this time.

[65] McCoy, *They Shoot Horses*, pp. 110, 19.

[66] Melling, 'Samples of horizon', pp. 129, 122.

State to countenance as legal defence. If going 'on the bum' offered no solution, then the same could be said of remaining at the same location in a state of perpetual motion, in the vain hope of walking away with the prize money.[67]

By targeting the Depression *and* the entertainments industry, both writers document an unsavoury aspect of the 1930s in a manner suggestive of hostility to society's core values. Moreover, the representation in popular narrative of the dance marathon suggests the limited extent to which ethnic assimilation, let alone rags to riches prosperity, was a realistic possibility. Like the Frontier, the melting pot could no longer be treated as a key to social mobility, a point underlined by the varied ethnic backgrounds of the participants. At best, competition entrants find themselves sharing the social ladder's bottom rung.

Although not written for explicitly political purposes, these were important radical texts. One critic even reads in *Horses* 'a condemnation of American civilisation severe enough to satisfy the standard of the Third International'.[68] While this condemnation had much in common with the 1930s socialist proclivities of Farrell and McCoy,[69] it would also suggest a basic humanism, in which the defence of dignity is an underlying priority throughout each story. Such narratives serve as a grim reminder of the dehumanising consequences of economic collapse.

Conclusion

In summary, we are arguing that the 'documentary turn' in 1930s writing can be located within a discursive totality operating at three relatively autonomous levels. There is the broader push to 'discover America', motivated by an end to introspection and based in part on the state's mobilisation of extant, realist representational strategies. Secondly, there is the 'internal' logic of combining reportage and fiction as a means for apprehending reality. Thirdly, there exists a variety of subsequent paradigms and concerns through which 1930s writing and its specific emphasis on the experiential is re-explained; this final interpretative framework was constructed primarily through the prism of the Cold War, although the critical stance associated with *Partisan Review* provided some of the raw material for such arguments, constitutive of the myth of the 'the Thirties'. All three levels warrant consideration as, taken collectively, they embedded the experience of the Depression in popular culture, where it formed a permanent, moral critique of the ineffectiveness of the market system.

This chapter attempted to demonstrate that the growth of a documentary aesthetic and mode of production occurred independently of patronage, whether that of the state, or more controversially, that of the organised left. Despite the absence of formal links to public institutions, common themes emerged *across* different sites of cultural engagement in the 1930s. In the next chapter, we consider an individual who attempted to play a central role in such developments. We now turn to V.F. Calverton , for whom the question of patronage was a major concern. Moreover the question of patronage shaped subsequent perceptions of this significant figure.

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[67] In Pollak's version of *They Shoot Horses*, the prize money itself proves illusory, as the contest organisers have arranged in advance to reclaim 'expenses' from the winning couple. This is symptomatic of the differences between book and film; in the latter, even the most elementary solidarities between the promoters and contestants are shown to have broken down.

[68] Sturak, 'Objective Lyricism', p.148.

[69] Farrell's politics are discussed extensively in Wald, *James T. Farrell, passim.* Sturak describes McCoy's 'latent reformist tendencies' in 'Objective Lyricism', p. 148. In later years both would repudiate the Third International, although in Farrell's case he initially moved further to the left.

Chapter 7 - 'Bronze Inkwells at Dawn':[1] V.F. Calverton's Synthesis of the 'Culture Critique'

Of all the chapters in this thesis, the following pages would perhaps seem most out of place in a study of patronage as a response to legitimation crisis. However, we turn to the life and work of V.F. Calverton in order to interrogate this topic from a different perspective. We make no claims to provide an extensive biography of Calverton, and have drawn extensively on three such substantial works in order to develop our argument. Instead, this chapter considers Calverton's capacity to navigate many of the key trends explored elsewhere in this thesis. Secondly, we acknowledge that much of the posthumous discussion of Calverton also pertains to the question of patronage. Thus, in the post-war period, he has been discussed in terms of his 'independence' from the CPUSA, a paradigm largely reflective of liberal anti-communism. In other words, the predominant approach to this editor, author and activist was through the distorting historical lens of 'the Thirties'. In contrast, the emphasis of our study will consider Calverton's attempts to develop a cultural critique that embraced practical politics, adequately theorised proletarian literature, and developed a methodology for producing politicised novels.

Before attempting to chart this uneven process we would concede that Calverton was politically eclectic, undisciplined and often an unoriginal thinker and tedious writer, prone to self-destructive behaviour. However, his emphasis on the importance of propaganda - a 'battle of ideas' - and his anti-war orientation (as late as 1940) demonstrated what was *necessary* for the survival and even expansion of the 1930s cultural critique. It is speculative whether this process could have continued, given his premature death, and it is unlikely that his 'Calvertonian Marxism' could have survived unchanged in conditions of post-war US hegemony. Calverton's importance is two-fold: he serves as a reminder of the missed opportunities of the 1930s cultural left, while leaving a legacy with which to interrogate myths about 'the Thirties'.

Like a number of 1930s literary figures, *Modern Quarterly* editor Victor Francis Calverton has been subject to a process of historical revision, of exhuming the man and his reputation and drawing him into contemporary political conflicts. Such acrobatics began, in Calverton's case, almost immediately after his death. For instance, the rightward-drifting labour journalist Benjamin Stolberg wrote an appreciation of Calverton to appear in the *Modern Quarterly*, which cast them both as having trod an essentially similar path over the years - brief delusions in the Soviet experiment and a decade of anticommunist struggle, until final disagreements over US entry into war. This is reinforced by a less disingenuous recollection of Calverton's personal qualities, his attempts to sustain open, radical forums of discussion, and even his capacity to personify the experiences of his generation.[2] Stolberg's piece appeared as one of many in a special 'Calverton memorial issue' of the *Quarterly*, featuring the recollections of former friends and collaborators, several of whom claim an aspect of Calverton as a vindication of their outlook at the time of writing. The issue ends with 'Pond, Stars, Having You', a piece by socialist poet Eli Siegel, who appeared in the magazine's first issue, back in 1924.[3]

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[1] Eliot Cohen to V.F. Calverton, May 5, 1934, Calverton Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (hereafter VFC).

[2] Benjamin Stolberg, 'V.F. Calverton - An Appreciation', 'C' Folder, Stolberg papers, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York (hereafter Stolberg papers).

Others, such as Alfred Kazin, would later scapegoat Calverton for the 'totalitarian' literary politics of his era.[4] Conversely, he would become a premature Cold Warrior, praised by Sidney Hook and condemned in the pages of *Science and Society*.[5] All such attempts are notable for their monofocal approach; by interpreting Calverton through a heightened sense of a singular aspect of his career, they omit the contradictory character of his place in cultural politics. In this respect, he can be incorporated into the mythology of 'the Thirties' as much as any of his contemporaries; despite Hook's warning that 'political autobiography has become a species of historical fiction', his subsequent comments suggest that this also applies to biography. Calverton's profile in the cultural controversies of the period, coupled with brief spells of posthumous use and abuse, suggests that he was more than the sum of his parts; he was, in the words of a later reviewer, 'a phenomenon'.[6]

More recent accounts are prone to using Calverton's personal history as a resource for present-day debates. *Partisan Review*'s William Phillips, characteristically engaged still in the 'literary wars' of 1930s, attacks current scholarship in this field, including a Calverton biography. The problem with such work is, according to Phillips, its 'piety towards the radical past'. While Calverton's alleged theory of 'American exceptionalism' is mocked, the real targets of the attack are the former Soviet Union and contemporary radicals, 'hungry for ideology'.[7] Similarly, Christopher Lasch, himself no stranger to Phillips' preoccupations,[8] explained the shortcomings of gender studies as an academic discipline, with reference to a project that Calverton abandoned. Despite praising *The Bankruptcy of Marriage* (1929),[9] Havelock Ellis deterred its author from writing a history of women in several volumes, on the grounds that the breadth and complexity of the subject would defy genuine understanding. To Lasch this advice serves as a warning to contemporary investigators of the social construction of masculinity.[10]

Calverton has also emerged as an unlikely hero in contemporary discussions of black writers. In the 1960s, Harold Cruse counterposed the CP to Calverton on account of the latter's disputes with Michael Gold and the *Daily Worker*, as part of a broader polemic against left-wing economism on the question of racial equality. More recent accounts sympathise with the minority opinion, expressed in Calverton's introduction to his *Anthology of American Negro Literature*, in which he suggests that jazz, folklore and spirituals 'constitute America's chief claim to originality in its cultural history'.[11] He is praised for his refusal to see American literature solely in terms of white authors imitating their European counterparts.[12]

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[3] *Modern Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No. 7. Later correspondence suggests that Calverton's widow, Nina Melville, wished to continue the journal in some form, but her plans were unrealised.

[4] Cited in Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA: From 1870 to Present Day* (London: Verso, 1987), p.162.

[5] Sidney Hook, *Modern Quarterly* Vol.1 (Westport, CN.: Greenwood Press reprint ed., 1968); Michael Nash, 'Schism on the Left: The Anti-Communism of *V.F.* Calverton and his *Modern Quarterly*', *Science and Society*, Winter 1981-82, pp.437-452. Hook citation from p.244.

[6] SL Solon, '*V.F.* Calverton's Quest for Utopia', *American Mercury*, May 1941, p.625.

[7] William Phillips, "Histories of the Left', *Partisan Review*, Vol. LX: 3, 1993, pp. 387-340.

[8] See Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

[9] Leonard Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton: Radical in the American Grain* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p.76.

[10] Lasch, 'The Mismeasure of Man', *The New Republic*, April 19, 1993, pp.30-38. The present author is indebted to Sara Hinchliffe for helping to clarify this discussion.

Arguments of this nature make the life of a hitherto forgotten editor into a resource in the disputes of the present. The process reveals the extent to which Calverton has become part of 'history with a capital "H"', or political capital from the past through which modern anxieties can be articulated. Throughout this study reference has been made to the construction of 'the Thirties' as a 'common sense' signifier of intellectual folly and cultural bankruptcy, eschewing the complex developments of the inter-war period. As the brief survey above would suggest, certain individuals - themselves often in no position to reply - can be subjected to a similar process.

Approaching the issue from a different angle is a generation of historians influenced by the New Left and the student-based upheavals of the 1960s. Some of the specific problems of transforming American society, notably the paradox of a shared popular culture *and* intense social fragmentation, logically demand interventions in the cultural sphere, and this turn prompts a search for worthwhile antecedents, even a 'usable past'. Calverton's 'revolutionary culturalism' was an attempt to create a science of culture. Sympathetic accounts tend to approach the results of his endeavours in terms of whether he completed this ambitious task.[13] Moreover, the extent to which an author treats this as a successful engagement can be itself conditioned by whether there exists some *a priori* agreement with the overall validity of Calverton's project(s). While more sympathetic to this approach than to that of 'Thirties' mythology, the following chapter suggests that, on balance, the task of arriving at a developed appreciation of Calverton forces one beyond these conventions. We attempt to locate his contribution to cultural theory within the experiences of his generation, while paying close attention to the specificities of that contribution.

VF Calverton (1900-1940) was born George Goetz in Baltimore.[14] In 1923, working with a circle of close associates, he established the *Modern Quarterly*. Among the contributors was his first wife Helen Letzer, using the pen-name Eileen Hood.[15] Resplendent in words like 'complete', 'scientific' and 'modern', often used interchangeably,[16] the first issue promoted the liberated spirit of the urban scene and protested the conformity attendant upon national life. At this point Goetz adopted the protective pseudonym that was to stick with him for the rest of his life, although his many friends and acquaintances would continue to call him George.[17] Whereas

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[11] V.F. Calverton (ed.), *Anthology of American Negro Literature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), p.3.

[12] Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual;: from its origins to the present* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), pp. 154-158 ; Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Bellknap, 1993), p.478.

[13] Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, p.182.

[14] Further biographical details appear in Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton,* pp. 12-27.

[15] Calverton's marriage to Letzer lasted from 1921 to 1927, ending in divorce.

[16] *Ibid.*, p.31. A proposed title for the journal - the 'Radical Quarterly' - was dropped to evade the authorities' interference.

[17] Thus, the title of Stolberg's draft appreciation, *op. cit.*, shows 'George' as an obliterated typing error, replaced with 'V.F.'. The effectiveness of the pseudonym was undermined much earlier than this, largely by articles in a number of other publications which referred to 'George Calverton'.

Calverton was derived from George Calvert (c.1580-1632), the founder of Baltimore, his forenames were reputedly made up after the initials, in order to satisfy the needs of *Who's Who.*[18] His move from Baltimore to New York - brought about, in part, by pressures of teaching, commuting and divorce - assembled the components for his place as a footnote in US literary history, a position underwritten by the growth of *The Modern Quarterly.*

Throughout the second half of the decade, the journal grew in stature, often thanks to its numerous contributions from individuals who were widely respected among the US intelligentsia. This was despite continuing financial crises, brought about partly by amateurish organisation, and the departure of almost every literary celebrity on the editorial board. Such problems were offset by Calverton's other skills, the development of which were pivotal to the *Quarterly*'s success, namely a non-partisan approach to potential collaborators and financial backers,[19] and his talent as a host of parties and other social gatherings. Such functions saw his reputation as the 'literary rotary' translate itself into commissioned articles, public appearances and sexual liaisons. Likewise, Calverton himself became a regular feature at lectures and other public events. His journal had a considerable reputation on the East Coast, notably in New York City, which was itself pivotal to the cultural politics which unfolded at a national level. This was reinforced by his speaking tours, and his reputation for debates and giving talks, which he performed in Texas, Louisiana, Michigan and Missouri.[20] One debating opponent died within days of an appearance in Boston, prompting the New York *World Telegraph* to introduce Calverton as the man who 'killed John Roach Stanton'.[21]

An immediate problem facing historians who wish to reconsider Calverton is the sheer quantity of material that constitutes his legacy. Spanning scores of publications and a period of almost 20 years, and characterised above all by its eclectic enthusiasm, Calverton's works hardly suggest a self-enclosed methodological armature. Not only do we find his ideas developing over time, leading to the refinement and abandonment of positions he once fiercely defended, but we also find a incredibly broad sweep, taking in hypnosis, theology and sex, in addition to the socio-economic and literary interests more characteristic of the 1930s intellectual. Given this lack of homology, the task of the cultural historian is to explore the approach of a figure who is, in many respects, a precursor of the interdisciplinary thrust of the 'cultural studies' tendency in contemporary critical theory. However, in contrast to a number of the latter's exponents today, Calverton was also a compelling advocate of social transformation. As the title of his 1932 pamphlet suggests, he was *For Revolution*[22].

Calverton's development suggests that theoretical alternatives to Stalinism were possible, thus undermining the damaging orthodox readings of 'the Thirties'. As the backdrop to a consideration of his fiction, we focus on two central concerns: his changing conception of the relationship between art and politics, and his desire to 'Americanise Marxism'. While this leads us away from an analysis of his writings on sexuality, anthropology, and science, such topics did not impinge as directly upon Calverton's capacity to interpret and resist the concerns of his generation – crisis, Stalinism, fascism and war. As a public intellectual, Calverton's conduct was exemplary. Furthermore, both editor and journal had emerged as commentators on social issues *prior* to the Great Depression, hence its libertarian combativity on anti-militarist and sexual issues. This reveals both a striving for a universal social science, and an appreciation of the divisive controversies of the 1920s. Although this made for an often eclectic publication, with an eclectic range of contributors, such diversity was rooted in what came to be seen as the magazine's organising principle, its intellectual independence.

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[18] Philip Abbott, *Leftward Ho! V.F. Calverton and American Radicalism* (Westport, CN.: Greenwood, 1993), p.6. It was also taken as standing for 'very foolish', and one colleague demanded 'you have got decide either to be Vincent Flonzaney or George'! See Harry Hansen to Calverton, June 23, 1930 (VFC).

[19] See also author interview with Corliss Lamont, October 1993. Prior to an acrimonious split, Lamont was one of the *Quarterly*'s 'angels', providing covert financial support.

[20] Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, p.224.

[21] Calverton to 'Joe' [John] Chamberlain, February 10, 1936 (VFC).

[22] V.F. Calverton, *For Revolution* (New York: John Day, 1932).

In addition to his writings on a plethora of issues, he lectured extensively, promoted newer writers through his work 'scouting' for publishers, created debate and discussion through a number of symposia and anthologies which he arranged and edited. He was also a political activist well before such activities became a fad among sections of the intelligentsia; upon leaving the Socialist Labor Party's orbit he juggled his editorial work alongside running the Baltimore branch of the Anti–Imperialist League.[23] He corresponded widely and taught in community colleges; in contrast to his peers in Parisian 'exile', he established a literary reputation *prior* to going abroad, at which point the invitations to speak began trickling in, taking him as far afield as Soviet Russia and England. A trip to Japan, where *Three Strange Loves* (1930) made him the second most popular foreign author, was cancelled due to war. In contrast to the exiles in Paris, Calverton attempted to engage fully his era, relegating introspection and depoliticisation to a place among his private doubts. By the mid–1920s it was clear that his youthful ambition to be a Lutheran minister and a semi–professional baseball player was replaced by one of becoming the 'radical impresario' whose mention is almost obligatory - but seldom extensive - in contemporary accounts of 1930s literary life.

Calverton's peculiarly ubiquitous place in 1930s literary history relates to his 'mode of production'. By hosting parties and accumulating favours, he could develop the networks necessary to sustain his project. For instance, he approached Huntingdon Cairns, his friend and the lawyer who administered Calverton's divorce, to review *Sex in Civilisation* under a pseudonym.[24] Favours could be given as well as received; thus, Baltimore associate and future *Partisan Review* editor Alan Calmer wrote in for advice about what books to read on 'radical men of letters' and on becoming a full-time writer.[25] Previous chapters suggested that such networking helped to give shape to anti-fascist revulsion during the heyday of the Popular Front; what was distinctive about the *Modern Quarterly* was the centrality of informal links to its success. Moreover, Calverton's circle intersected with a number of others, sustaining a precarious balancing act between various hostile tendencies. From an historical vantage point, this mediating role allows for a cross section of the questions at stake in the 1930s.

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[23] According to Abbott, Calverton's May 1927 'Hands Off China' picket of the British embassy in Baltimore was instrumental in his break with the Socialist Party there. *Leftward Ho!*, pp.109-113.

[24] Calverton to Cairns, April 18, 1929 (VFC).

[25] Calmer to Calverton, July 7, 1930; 23 March 1931 (VFC).

By themselves, successful social gatherings were insufficient to sustain the magazine. Financial concerns plagued it, even more than its problematic reliance on established writers; few attempts were made to cultivate a stable of new talent. On one occasion Calverton reduced his companion Nina Melville to tears, later confiding that 'the *Quarterly* means so much to me, darling, and is so hard to get out, that even the loss of a $15 cheque is upsetting'.[26] Covert backers, or 'angels', were at a premium, often with a price attached. When a correspondent claimed to be priming a Washington hostess associate of Diego Rivera to donate - 'she'll believe anything' - he also advised that the *Modern Monthly* eliminate mudslinging with the CPUSA from its pages.[27] Particularly significant was the House of Morgan millionaire Corliss Lamont, who opposed the magazine's anti-Soviet stance but donated for two years despite these disagreements.[28] Begging for support was a perennial accompaniment to Calverton's editorial responsibilities. Regardless of such difficulties, the magazine made - and in some ways broke - his radical reputation for leading by example within the intelligentsia.

Like the committed 'intellectual as social type', discussed by Lasch and others, Calverton personified a mismatch of stated aims and political practice. In this respect he had much in common with the aims of the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford. Both sought to generate a left-wing literary milieu, which broadly agreed with the goals of creating a working class culture and a finding a specific revolutionary role for professionals as a distinctive social layer. Calverton's eclectic attempt to construct a universal outlook relevant to all manner of social issues was shaped by his role as a public figure. From this vantage point, he compiled the ideas of different contributors, fostering an indigenous radicalism via the communications industry technique of magazine editorship.

A picture of Calverton as the personification of optimal intellectual practice emerges from the two 'paradigmatic' accounts of his life, namely Daniel Aaron's 'Radical Impresario' chapter in *Writers on the Left*, and Haim Genizi's influential dissertation, 'VF Calverton: Independent Radical'.[29] Both accounts present Calverton's role as one making the *Modern Quarterly* into 'a kind of intellectual brokerage house for revolution,'[30] through catholicity of taste and, less successfully, scrupulous non-partisanship. Thus, Genizi notes his ability to take the ideas of one faction and discuss them with another, informally playing this role by facilitating the exchange of ideas.[31] These methods allowed Calverton to become an important reference point within left-wing literary subculture through his practice as well as his publishing, hence his reputation as an embodiment of the spirit of the times in which he lived.

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[26] Calverton to Melville, April 10 (p.m.), 1932 (VFC). 'Nina Melville' (Hortense Goodsitt) was a student and actress who met Calverton at a New York lecture in 1928. The following year the couple entered a common-law marriage, and Melville became the *Quarterly*'s theatre critic (Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, pp. 92-93).

[27] Haakon Chevalier to Calverton, July 7, 1934 (VFC).

[28] See Lamont to Calverton, July 7, 1934; May 26, 1936; Calverton's tactics to ensure continued funding included inviting Lamont to join the *Monthly*'s editorial board, and revealing that the magazine was nearly bankrupt. Calverton to Lamont, November 6, 1935; December 12, 1936 (VFC). See also author interview with Corliss Lamont, October 1993.

[29] Haim G[e]nizi, 'V.F. Calverton: Independent Radical', *Ph.D. Dissertation*, City University of New York, 1968.

[30] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961: New York: Morningside Books edition, 1992), p.322; G[e]nizi, 'V.F. Calverton', p.182.

[31] See also Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p.152.

Calverton's periodic cameos in literary history also remind us of the question of 'historical amnesia'. Whereas a strand of contemporary scholarship tends to idolise Calverton - perhaps in search of a 'pure' radicalism untainted by Stalinism or a post–Moscow Trials drift to the right - a more balanced assessment is necessary.[32] Despite numerous shortcomings, the *Modern Monthly* attempted to clarify and suggest alternatives to the preoccupations of its audience, in stark contrast to the postmodern abstention of today. In the analysis which follows, we demonstrate that the collapse of the cultural radicalism occasioned by the slump was by no means an inevitability. Although the forces arrayed against it were substantial, the potential to develop a critique of contemporary society was far from exhausted.

'One Man Party'

Passing references to Calverton often revolve around his increasingly fraught relationship with the Communists, resulting in his virtual excommunication by the Party and those on its intellectual periphery. Aaron details the protracted degeneration of this brief phase of mutual benefit; between 1929 and 1934 the *Modern Quarterly* went from having the status of respected, fellow-travelling publication to a being a 'social-fascist' mouthpiece.[33] Whereas the twenties, for Calverton, could be characterised by the swings and roundabouts of mixed reviews in the radical press, such as those given over to *The Newer Spirit*,[34] the following decade saw the substitution of organised character assassination for literary criticism. Somewhat notoriously, the *Daily Worker* called Calverton a 'literary racketeer'.[35] Although Joshua Kunitz wrote to reassure him that recent Party attacks were in no way personal,[36] Calverton was pained by the severance of numerous personal friendships. As editorial contacts were broken, his Saturday soirees acquired increasing significance.[37]

With these battles behind him, Calverton's literary associations expanded to include larger sections of the anti–Stalinist opposition. Lovestoneites, Trotskyists and left–leaning liberals were solicited as allies and *Modern Quarterly* contributors. The latter increased the prestige of the journal and the profile of Calverton. Despite the precarious editorial involvement of Max Eastman, Sidney Hook and Edmund Wilson, it remained the highly personal project which has fuelled contemporary praise for Calverton's political independence. This aspect of his career features continually in discussions of his contribution to the broader radical republic,[38] to a degree characterised as 'cadrephobia' by a less sympathetic critic.[39] Despite its advantages, the emphasis on

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[32] This can act not simply as a corrective to unduly sympathetic research, but also as an illustration of the possibilities of a praxis applicable to the 1990s.

[33] Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, pp. 326-333.

[34] See Mike Gold's piece in the *Daily Worker*, May 30, 1925. Cited Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p. 436*n*.

[35] Jorge [pseudonym], 'Red Sparks', *Daily Worker*, October 8, 1931.

[36] Kunitz to Calverton, April 11, 1934 (VFC).

[37] One expression of this is a memo of Calverton's to Melville, suggesting they invite Max Nomad to test his hostility (n.d., November 1932 [VFC]).

[38] A key category in Abbott's *Leftward Ho!*.

[39] Christopher Phelps, 'Impresario of American Radicalism', *New Politics*, Winter 1994, pp.167-171.

Calverton as a diplomatic impresario above political factions risks conflating his organisational autonomy with his critique. Despite his interdisciplinary energy, Calverton was not a greatly original thinker. As has been widely documented, he would often amalgamate diverse and uncredited sources to produce a *Marxisant* account of the social phenomena concerning American radicals.

In a noted satire, Joseph Freeman depicted one 'Vincent Chatterton' as a critic who claimed to have mastered Bulgarian literature by reading sections of an encyclopaedia and sending a girlfriend to the library for references. There was a kernel of truth in this parody of Calverton's literary technique. Likewise, Calverton regarded his theory of 'cultural consumptives' and a proposed merger of Marxism with Edward Buckle's historical research as his central Marxian innovations, but these approaches reveal little original thinking. However, they show instead a skilful editor working with a broader range of sources than the analysis popularised in the *New Masses*. Moreover, Calverton's crudity in matters of theory was not unique and many of his contemporaries - such as the New York Intellectuals briefly sympathetic to Trotskyism - displayed numerous theoretical shortcomings, if not in their cultural critique then in relation to the key social questions of the day. Given the false choices of acquiescence with Stalinism or integration into mainstream New Deal thought (usually on the terms of the latter), any alternative was desirable.

Calverton's place in this broader problematic warrants further investigation, as synthesising his partial insights into a coherent critique helps to clarify the position of radicals of his generation. Whereas cultural responses to the slump have been largely consigned to a Cold War *cul de sac*, reconstructing a theoretical route out of this can enhance our broader understanding of crisis tendencies today. This becomes clear in Calverton's assessments of the central political controversies of his age: the state, the intelligentsia, and the strategic problems of the American revolution.

The forms of the Party's attack varied, from a special anti-Calverton edition of the *New Masses* (January, 1933) to a series of contrived 'paper shortages' in Russia, sinking plans for a volume of American literary criticism, that was previously scheduled to appear there. The Moscow-based journal *International Literature* chastised the *New Masses* for its softness towards Calverton's 'social fascism', while Stalin himself found time to denounce *Modern Quarterly* editorial board member Max Eastman.[40] Communist fellow travellers made numerous attempts to undermine Calverton's work, from social ostracisation to allegations of plagiarism. There was some truth in the latter, not through design, but because of a slapdash element in Calverton's editing, brought on by a mixture of wild enthusiasm and impossible workload. Given the spread of such tactics across the literary left, a body of unpopular writers was pushed towards the *Modern Quarterly*, making the journal increasingly heterodox in outlook. In terms of developing a critique of society, such isolation promised potential benefits, as it severed the institutional connections which imposed orthodoxy on theoretical development. On balance, Calverton's opening skirmishes with the Party eroded the coalition he had built around his magazine, while building the basis for an alliance of anti-Stalinist cultural practitioners.[41] Adrift from its party connections, theoretical arguments in the journal were not subject to the sudden tactical changes demands by the Communist party.

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[40] Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, p.178.

This is not to fetishise 'independence', or suggest that distance from practical politics in all circumstances will facilitate new understandings. Indeed, Calverton's experiences and activities suggest the opposite. An open forum for debate does not necessarily lead to theoretical clarity, hence the often eclectic character of the *Modern Quarterly*. Mediating between an often hostile cross-section of the New York intelligentsia, as a salon host and as an editor, Calverton engendered an atmosphere in which there could be an exchange of ideas, but this could at best be a prerequisite to theoretical development, and not its guarantor. As for political independence, Calverton was twice a participant in ostensibly Marxist parties, the SLP in 1922 and the American Workers Party (AWP) in 1934. (The latter was based on a fusion between radicals led by A.J. Muste, and the major US Trotskyist organisation, the Communist League of America.) Far from being the independent radical portrayed by his major biographers, Calverton repeatedly co-operated with revolutionary groups. This in turn opened him up to some of the latter's theoretical gains, notably the Trotskyist analysis of Nazism.[42] Although privately he complained that Trotsky's prophecies were 'cocksure',[43] he nevertheless declared: 'If standing with Trotsky in his analysis of the German situation and in merciless condemnations of the tactics which exiled him from Russia means being a counter revolutionary, than [sic] again I am and continue to want to be'.[44] Calverton was attempting to develop Marxism in opposition to the CPUSA, even if this led to a temporary occupation of the same territory as Trotsky. To assess Calverton's political differentiation from the far left, we turn to 'Leftward Ho!', one of several attempts at codifying a programme of action appropriate to American institutions.[45]

Calverton's arguments suggested the need for a new party, necessarily based upon an American idiom, and illustrating its arguments with domestic references by working according to the particular logic of a given situation. Such concerns informed his membership of the AWP and provided a counterpoint to what he saw as the naturalised fascism of Huey Long.[46] His two major 'manifestos', 'Leftward Ho!' and *For Revolution* insisted that intellectuals had to respond to the slump in an organised fashion, despite a growing distaste for the organisations on offer. In short, this served as a reminder of the importance of Marxist theory to critics of Calverton's generation.

Theory presented no immediate practical solutions to the problems of the 1930s, but at least it could potentially provide a clear basis upon which to interpret new difficulties. Political realities unsettled the far left: thus the state had not collapsed, despite the predictions contained in *Culture and the Crisis* and elsewhere, and the New Deal offered the authorities a hegemonic strategy to ward off this possibility. Simultaneously, Stalinism in its various manifestations was proving far more influential than its opponents on the left anticipated. A political alternative could only emerge by navigating between these 'rivals' and understanding the support built around their contending versions of the national-popular. However, there are no *a priori,* ahistorical preconditions which would ensure this, only rigorous study and political struggle. During the evolution of *Modern Quarterly*, some of the elements were in place for this, others sadly absent.

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[41] Kyle Crichton was among those who resigned at this stage (Crichton to Calverton, February 28, 1933 [VFC]).
[42] Phelps, 'Impresario of American Radicalism', pp. 169-170.
[43] Calverton to Nine Melville (p.m.), March 25, 1932 (VFC).
[44] Calverton to Haakon Chevalier, September 9, 1933 (VFC).
[45] V.F. Calverton, 'Leftward Ho!', *Modern Quarterly*, Summer 1932, pp.26-32; see also Calverton's *For Revolution* (1932). Commitments of a more specific, organisational nature, declaring the intention to establish a party devoted to this goal, appeared in the unpublished 'Statement of Policy of *the Modern Monthly*', (VFC), cited in Haim Genizi, 'Edmund Wilson and *The Modern Monthly*, 1934-5: A Phase in Wilson's Radicalism', *Journal of American Studies*, December 1973, p.310.
[46] See Genizi, 'V.F. Calverton', pp.246, 260.

Given the moral authority of the Soviet Union during the slump, left-wing anti-Stalinism was a scarce commodity and, following Calverton's break with the Communist party in 1933-34, was to cost him dearly. In light of the subordination of theory to impressionism or tactical positions elsewhere on the left, 'independence' clearly had a role to play in the development of an alternative. However, elevating it to the role of a central organising principle is ahistorical, lending it virtues it doesn't possess. Revolutionary anti-Stalinism was limited in influence, making the construction of adequate theoretical capital a logical precursor to evolving appropriate organisational forms. In this context, the question of national culture is an important one. Only a critique grounded in the concrete problems facing US revolutionaries and the specific forms of class consciousness would suffice. As we see below, one of the areas that Calverton prioritised in response to this problem was that of literary criticism. This he combined with an attempt to argue for revolutionary perspectives about how to transform society.

In terms of the perennial debate over his political 'independence', Calverton was not an exceptionally original thinker at the level of political strategy. Whereas maintaining his publications required immense planning and struggle, his prescriptions for radical intellectuals were often vague and sketchy. On the surface, there was little to differentiate Calverton's approach from that of the League of Professional Groups, in that he anticipated their characterisations of the educated middle class as published in the *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto. Thus he argued that teachers, lawyers, doctors and engineers were facing at best reduced opportunities, at worst pauperisation. Elsewhere in 'Leftward Ho!', the 1929 crash was portrayed as heralding a qualitatively different stage in American history. Likewise, the posited solution, 'a renewed faith in the masses', suggests a tendency to replace strategy with wishful thinking. In contrast to the sentimental views of working class life often propounded by *New Masses*, Calverton recognised that subjectively revolutionary sentiments held greater sway in a significant section of the intelligentsia than in many working class communities: 'In a word [sic], while the masses in America still sleep intellectually and starve physically, the intellectuals are beginning to protest against the entire structure of our civilisation.'[47] Unlike his Communist contemporaries, he was willing to admit that the slump had radicalised the 'petit bourgeoisie', used here to mean professionals, while pushing workers towards an alliance with the Democratic party.

The central argument in 'Leftward Ho!', in which Calverton endows the radical intelligentsia with an historical mission akin to that which others envisaged for the proletariat, illuminates his approach to theorising social and cultural trends. His attempts to hypothesise an appropriate role for intellectuals reveal two themes which were to become more significant throughout the 1930s: a class-based analysis of the state which suggested the impossibility of lasting reform, and a search for a 'usable past', with which to make the project of social change seem viable to American workers. Implicitly, writers could bridge the gap between the general populace and their radical antecedents, not least by articulating some of the despair which accompanied the slump. This argument is analogous, albeit less developed, to that of Gramsci, who recast 'organic intellectuals' as potential working class organisers. We stress the similarities not because of Calverton's theoretically profound character, but because his episodic commentary on such questions offer glimpses of the outlook that would prefigure radical intellectuals becoming a substantial force in their own right, let alone transforming Roosevelt's America.

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[47] Calverton, 'Leftward Ho!', p.27.

On the question of the state, 'Leftward Ho!' restates the classical Marxist understanding, namely its role as a 'special body of armed men'.[48] Moreover, he asserts the specificity of state forms, contrasting the reliance of aristocracies upon open force to the appearance of choice within capitalist democracies.[49] As an explanation of why class rule does not take the form of direct subjugation, he points to the use of ideology to dupe the masses and the intelligentsia.[50] Such analysis mixes insights and flaws; on one hand limiting what can be expected out of the state *despite* its role in relief provision, on the other incorrectly suggesting that rights are conferred in order to generate false consciousness. Rather than locate the forms of the state in the material process of social reproduction,[51] Calverton treated them as entirely ideological, instruments of elite power, sustained by myth and deception. Logically, this would prevent sections of society from increasing their rights; it is an argument reminiscent of 'Third Period' Communist politics, which held fascism and democracy to be indistinguishable.

Paradoxically, Calverton's analysis of the state also made into more than a simple instrument of policy, a monopoly on force inextricably bound to the interests of capital.[52] He presented it as susceptible to pressures of political legitimacy, constantly renegotiating its relationship to the majority, securing mass support and hegemony. Nevertheless, the state was seen as ultimately accountable to big business alone. With this insight as the backbone of its general editorial stance, *The Modern Monthly* had a logical basis from which to resist the impulse towards revisionism which accompanied the Communist Party's support for Roosevelt, following the Comintern's adoption of the Popular Front. Calverton's formulations were somewhat simplistic, but they reveal an importance principle underpinning his approach, that of distrusting central authority. This provides a daring counterpoint to the subordination of theory to tactics which was dominant in Communist circles.[53] Moreover, his editorship cohered a heterodox body of views on the state[54] within a single journal.[55] In the final analysis, Calverton's stress upon the state's unaccountable nature made him into something of a conscience of his generation's orthodoxies, rather than a significant theoretician in his own right.

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[48] VI Lenin, *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917; London: Junius, 1994), p.9.

[49] Calverton, 'Leftward Ho!', pp.29-30.

[50] 'Utilising the democratic idea [the ruling class] succeeded in making the masses believe that they had as much to say in the choice of government as the financier and industrialist.' *Ibid.*, p.31.

[51] Evgeny Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism: A General Theory* (1924) (London: Ink Links, 1978).

[52] For further exposition of such analysis, see Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Merlin, 1978).

[53] For an analysis of CP philistinism on the question of the state, see Anders Stephanson, 'The CPUSA Conception of the Rooseveltian State, 1933-1939', *Radical History Review* 24, Fall 1980, pp.161-176.

This approach also informed the magazine's approach to the Presidential elections, the consecutive results of which had consolidated Roosevelt's base of support. 'The issue in this campaign was *not* democracy versus fascism. The election was as much of a fight between the capitalist "twins" as every previous election had been', he declared,[56] while the CPUSA supported the Democrats, as a lesser evil to Republican Alfred Landon and the Lemke-Coughlin-Townsend coalition. The Party press, notably the *New Masses*, labelled these movements as latent American fascism. In addition to its confusions as to the actual nature of fascism, this narrow approach muted objections to the austerity measures adopted by FDR's second administration. In contrast, Calverton presented the departure of Rexford Tugwell from Washington and cutbacks on various WPA programmes[57] as evidence of the Communists' allegedly misguided approach. He anticipated further cuts from Washington, and the reorganisation of the CPUSA should the Executive Committee of the Communist International abandon the Popular Front.[58]

In its analysis of the 1936 elections, *The Modern Monthly* recognised that the returned administration would rule through consensus rather than force. Indeed, spiralling working class support for the New Deal[59] dramatised the urgency of radicals waging a battle of ideas. The majority of the population was largely behind Roosevelt, defying the left's expectations of the early 1930s, which anticipated a substantially swing towards the Communists.[60] Calverton suggested that this situation was far more dangerous than a GOP victory:

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[54] For instance, left communist Paul Mattick, in an otherwise critical attack on both Lenin and the American Workers Party, presents 'the instruments of state power' as 'the permanent dictatorship of the ruling class'. Despite this and other disagreements between Mattick and Calverton, their co-operative publishing helped to ensure that the official Communist press did not monopolise political debate on the left. See Mattick, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward', *The Modern Monthly*, December 1934, pp.626, 631.

[55] On one of Calverton's best-known collaborators, see Genizi, 'Edmund Wilson and *The Modern Monthly*, 1934-5', *passim.*

[56] Editorial, 'Roosevelt Wins - So What?', *The Modern Monthly*, December 1936, p.3; emphasis in the original.

[57] During an informal discussion with campaign advisors, Roosevelt admitted to WPA inefficiency. Following Roosevelt's 1936 victory, the anticipated WPA redundancies became public knowledge. The following year Federal One was ordered to cut its annual per capita costs to $1000. An early casualty of the ensuing austerity among cultural practitioners was instruction classes in costume design. See Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working With Roosevelt* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p.131; Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp.131, 87, 133.

[58] 'When it is definitely known in Moscow that Russia had little or nothing to gain by the re- election of Roosevelt there will be a drastic reorganisation of the American Communist leadership' (Editorial, 'The Radicals and the Election', *The Modern Monthly*, December 1936, p.4). The predicted purge occurred in 1945, when William Z. Foster replaced Earl Browder (Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* [1960] [New York: Vintage, 1986], p.432).

[59] 'The realignment of the Democratic party during the 1930s, particularly the 1936 Democratic landslide, brought about a political recomposition of the party with a strong working class base.' Rhonda F. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: industrial labor, industrial capital and the state* (Lawrence KS.: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p.148.

[60] Interestingly, Calverton was more questioning of this euphoria. In response to the 1933 Presidential elections, which ushered in the New Deal coalition, he noted that 'only the religious issue in the preceding election could in any way shake the strength of this union'. See 'Backward March: The Liberal Command

> Where Landon, facing an active left opposition, would have been afraid to be too openly reactionary for fear of farther exciting the opposition, Roosevelt the Progressive can go the whole hog towards cutting relief, reducing the WPA and forcing strike settlements without raising much of a furore'.[61]

Political consensus would ensure popular support for counter-crisis measures, he argued; the priority for the radical intelligentsia was to develop a comprehensive critique of the unfolding situation:

> What was fundamental, for the present as well as the future, was the development and solidification, on no matter how limited a plane, of a revolutionary revaluation of the American scene, preparatory to the development of a radical movement which should aim to reshape the direction of economic and political thought in this country.[62]

In part, Calverton's rejection of the New Deal and the Popular Front stemmed from a conviction that both the state and the Democratic Party existed to further the interests of big business. However, this was an almost instinctive response on his part; he was more hard-pressed to explain specific state forms, such as the peculiar separation of the state from civil society,[63] positing instead a crude functionalism, where the state was a purely coercive instrument accompanied by duplicitous ideology. Likewise, he acknowledged, but could not explain, the growth of working class support for the Democratic Party. On balance, his theoretical and programmatic endeavours were significant in that they suggested an alternative to the predominant viewpoint in Popular Front milieus. In suggesting that a revolutionary programme already was the central priority for Marxists, Calverton questioned an assumption prevailing on the left, namely that such a programme already existed, accompanied by a social layer committed to its implementation. Despite its limited resources, *The Modern Monthly* periodically stumbled across the theoretical pre-requisites for developing an intellectual alternative, both to Stalinism in its various forms and the hegemony of the New Deal.

Critic

The publication of his series 'The Sociological Criticism of Literature' in book form as *The Newer Spirit* (1925), was an important reference point in the development of a Marxist aesthetic in the United States.[64] Glowing assessments of *The Newer Spirit* included the epithets 'epochal', 'delicious' and 'scientific'.[65] Moreover, the book bolstered

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(An Examination of the Retrograde Role of American Liberalism)', *The Modern Monthly*, February 1933. Reprinted in Loren Baritz (ed.), *The American Left: Radical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p.240.

[61] 'Radicals and the Election', op. cit., p.4.

[62] 'Roosevelt Wins - So What?', op. cit., p.3.

[63] The work of the 'state derivation theorists', and its relevance to the present study's assessment of the relationship between legitimation crisis and cultural production, is discussed in Chapter One.

[64] Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, pp. 38-45.

[65] Arthur Calhoun to Calverton, October 8, 1925 (VFC); Mike Gold, 'A Marxian Critic of Art and Science', *Daily Worker*, 30 May 1925; Kenneth Burke, 'The Scientific Critic', *New York Herald Tribune*, May 10, 1925. One reviewer compared *The Newer Spirit* with Calverton's *Sex Expression in Literature*, noting his sympathy with the underdog; see Huntley Carter, '"Sociology" in the New Literature', *Sociological Review*, July 1928.

Calverton's reputation as a man of letters; this, coupled with his exploratory discussions of sexuality, consolidated his image as model intellectual, comfortable across a range of disciplines, discussing all manner of subjects while never losing touch with society and its workings. Communist Party courtship of this public persona followed, resulting in Calverton's ambivalent status as a fellow traveller. In penning *The Newer Spirit*, an eclectic range of essays asserting that social class was the central determinant in American literature, he established himself as the foremost proponent of what he called 'sociological criticism' in America. The advantage of this approach was that it codified the possibility of developing a sociology of the novel, as opposed to being a literary critic. In turn, this suggested that being an activist–scholar was a possibility, as opposed to the binary of irreconcilable opposites which many of his contemporaries saw it as.

In linking literature and social change, Calverton suggested a dynamic interaction between the two, rendering irrelevant 'art for art's sake' and articulating an alignment of cultural production to social change. Unfortunately, *The Newer Spirit* was dogged by a mechanical materialism which opened it up to allegations of economic reductionism. A minority of hostile reviews appeared which made precisely this point, prefiguring the impending controversy over proletarian literature by five years. In addition to the valid criticism that Calverton was often sloppy and dependent on assertion over explanation, he was accused of mysticism, of assuming that intangible forces would express themselves through the author – and of ignoring American focus traditions through an excessive emphasis on economics.[66] Frank and Calverton went on to collaborate despite their vitriolic first encounter in the pages of the *New Republic*, which ran the latter's reply on 15 July. Mencken was unusually middlebrow, advising his dwindling audience to read Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* instead.[67]

While the *Newer Spirit*'s working assumption that literature was a direct reflection of the class position of its author was unsatisfactory, few of its case studies adhered rigidly to this general thesis. Moreover, it tended to present formulaic definitions which could be empirically refuted with ease; when punishment is presented as a characteristic feature of the bourgeois novel, for example, some critics pointed out that this also applied to the Bible. Despite its inattention to the specific forms of cultural production, it gained mixed reviews in the radical press. On one hand, Michael Gold predicted that Calverton would become the premier Marxist critic. On the other, *The Newer Spirit* was castigated for believing in a proletarian culture. According to an assailant's interpretation of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, this was an impossibility, as the proletariat could only have bourgeois culture until it seized state power, at which point it would abolish itself as a class, robbing all culture of its class character.[68] Calverton continued to argue against this position well after the *Daily Worker* had abandoned it.[69]

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[66] Kenneth Burke, 'On Re and Dis', *The Dial*, 25 August 1925; MH Hedges, 'Books - More or Less Relevant', *The World Tomorrow*, July 25, 1925; Waldo Frank, 'No Spirit At All', *New Republic*, 24 June 1925 (see also Scrapbook 2, VFC).

[67] *American Mercury*, 25 June 1925.

[68] Mike Gold, 'A Marxian Critic of Art and Science', *Daily Worker*, 30 May1925; HM Wicks, 'Another Professor Discovers Marx', *Daily Worker*, September 1925.

[69] See Calverton, 'Can We Have A Proletarian Literature?', *Modern Quarterly*, Winter 1931, pp.46–48, in which he sides against Trotsky with Lunacharsky and Bukharin, who both argued that a proletarian culture could emerge in the transition period between socialism and communism.

The appearance of both comments in the same publication suggests ambivalence over the 'party line in literature' alleged to have emerged in the 1930s. Moreover, Gold's remarks reveal a genuine admiration for Calverton, suggesting the political expediency behind the duo's subsequent conflict. While Calverton blazed a trail for Marxist criticism in America, it is important to arrive at a balanced appraisal of his contribution. His continuing engagement in the debate over proletarian culture is important not for its originality, but because he acted as a conduit for the general aesthetic commentary of a number of Russian revolutionaries. In taking their language and concepts and making them accessible to a non-specialist portion of the intelligentsia, he simultaneously enhanced a dialogue to which indigenous critics contributed. As contributions to theory, his most general *Modern Quarterly* pieces tended to paraphrase Marxist thinking elsewhere, often in cruder form. However, his capacity to synthesise ideas and make them accessible to a wider audience should not be underestimated. This was also reinforced by references drawn from Calverton's own reading, and subjecting specific texts to sociological criticism. Calverton was one of a number of writers who, like Gold, wished to move 'Toward Proletarian Art' in America.[70] On balance, *The Newer Spirit* ensured that Calverton entered the 1930s strongly placed to develop a cultural and political critique.

So far we have attempted to address three key issues that intersected as the basis for Calverton's reputation in subsequent accounts; namely, his public persona, the *Modern Quarterly*'s underlying 'mode of production', and its editor's anti-Stalinism. On the latter, we would seek to qualify the familiar concern with his political independence by presenting him as a *bricoleur* of numerous political and cultural tendencies. These three themes are interlaced with what, in less concrete terms, we shall treat as Calverton's central intellectual preoccupation, that of 'Americanising Marxism'. We locate this endeavour within a triadic structure of practical relationships, in order to assess the extent to which his cultural production - primarily a body of critical theory but also fiction - developed as a mediation of the twin pressures of slump and legitimation crisis so central to this study. More broadly, we concur with Alan Wald, when he states that 'one might be more inclined to believe that the "Age" set Calverton's agenda, rather than vice versa'.[71] However, this should not be seen as obliterating some of the specific aspects of Calverton's approach, and the extent to which these same aspects shed new light on the moral impasse facing public authority in Western societies during the inter-war period.

At this level, his aesthetic commentary was assembled from a range of sources and honed in such a fashion as to culminate in a call for a literary revolution, combining criticism and propaganda. However, upon establishing the principle that literature corresponded to class relations, Calverton and his competing proletarian critics explored numerous themes and issues through their fiction and criticism. Gold emphasised social conditions, often represented in a realist manner, at other times in forms which stressed collectivity, such as the processional or chorus. In contrast, Calverton's aesthetic principles accentuated their interdisciplinary origins, before being applied to a particular text or controversy. By freewheeling between examples from US history and recent fiction, he attempted to develop an outlook from which to attempt a critique of contemporary culture, largely through the construction of analogies accessible to an American audience.

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[70] See Gold's article of the same name, reprinted in Michael Folsom (ed.), *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International, 1972).

[71] Alan Wald, *Writing From The Left: New Essays in Radical Culture and Politics* (London: Verso, 1994), p.60.

Interestingly, Calverton did not incorporate the consequences of the debates about a 'radical' or 'proletarian' aesthetic when it came to producing novels. His latent standards from which to judge 'good' art made little impact on his fiction writing, which largely resembled Victorian melodrama. When writing a novel he reversed his procedure of reading sociological patterns in other writers' work, by giving individual characters the task of articulating their dilemmas, reworking all manner of psycho–social issues in the process. Unlike the stereotypes of radical style - strike narratives and so forth - the novels *Three Strange Loves* (1930) and the unpublished 'Know Not Thyself' are closer to gothic melodramas than proletarian realism. To these we now turn.

The Man Inside

The lines dividing Horace McCoy, James M. Cain and John Steinbeck as writers are by no means as concrete as their status today – 'lost', *noir*, and 'classic' – would suggest. All three wrote in a manner that was were informed by a broader sensibility stressing natural–realist representation of individuals amid economic change. Moreover, the government itself informed this outlook, through the tasks it assigned the Federal Writers Project. In both government and Communist circles, documentary representation was valued as both relevant and accessible (as we saw in Chapters Four and Six). Such qualities suggested the possibility of communicating to a mass constituency: to Federal One, this meant educating the public in the newly discovered America. The literary left rarely agreed upon any precise meanings but, in general, aligning cultural production with a political project became a widely accepted possibility and goal. It was precisely this didactic approach that informed the fiction that dotted the pages of the *Modern Monthly.*

Despite his political differences with both the New Deal and Stalinism, Calverton shared many of their attendant aesthetic assumptions. He valued realism and the capacity of characters to convey class experiences, as was apparent in his critical approach, from *The Newer Spirit*'s embrace of vigorous proletarian writing to *Liberation*'s emphasis on the sociological origins of literature. Likewise his novels, except perhaps the unpublished 'This Thing of Darkness' (1938), were conceived and executed with a propagandistic purpose. Such trends were expressed most sharply in *The Man Inside* (1936), Calverton's final published novel. Unlike those of many of his contemporaries, all these novels avoided the conventional subject matter of proletarian fiction - strikes, the representation of poverty and so forth. Instead they were melodramatic in both form and content.

Calverton's work as a novelist was among the most frustrating aspects of his career. Although *Three Strange Loves* won critical praise, it did so through its grasp of social psychology. Elsewhere his short stories were rejected, often to be recycled in the *Modern Monthly* under the pseudonym Mark Rodson. One such tale, 'The Undertaker', led the Post Office to suppress the November-February 1926-27 issue of the magazine, as its depiction of necrophilia was deemed obscene.[72] Scribners applied similar criteria to the chapters in 'This Thing of Darkness' involving masturbation.[73] The sexual puritanism he ridiculed in the twenties frustrated his aspirations in the following decade, when the radical imagination was concentrated elsewhere. Such conflicts should not distract us from Calverton's limitations as an author; as fiction, 'Know Not Thyself' and the shorter pieces derived from it are deeply unsatisfactory. Their real significance rests elsewhere, in that the emphasis which informed Calverton's fiction reflected the widespread impetus to discover America and engage in work of a documentary and propagandistic nature. Such novels made no attempt to provide a documentary account of working class life, instead they centred upon the often pathological conduct of an alienated middle class. In so far as a coalescence of the author's politics and authorship exists, it manifested itself in the role which he carved out for individual stories. Thus, they became laboratories in which his ideas could be explored and popularised. (In passing, we should note that they also provide further refutation of the Cold War stereotype of left letters in the 1930s, born of a preoccupation with Stalinism's literary fringe.)

None of Calverton's novels acquired the later status of a *USA*, thanks to such shortcomings as their laboured 'stream of consciousness' sections, a proclivity for character soliloquies - often followed by suicide - and the inclusion of 'authentic' documents in the main text (e.g. verbatim quotations from theoretical psychiatry). Their exact place in his broader worldview is also problematic. Nina Melville saw them as the most intimate expression of his personal feelings, but it is also clear that plots and characters are seldom an unmediated reflection of Calverton's personal development. Thus, the dark violence of *Know Not Thyself* preceded Calverton's alcohol problems and fixation with death by almost a decade. Likewise, the unfinished autobiographical novel 'This Thing of Darkness' has a jaunty, upbeat feel, with only the plot outline for the unwritten chapters hinting at a disturbed mind: the possible death of his fictitious father, protagonist George undergoing a personality change for the worse, 'abortion, then the sex problem again, with an attempt at a *menage a trois*, not that he believes that will solve it either'.[74] While this might have appeared both racy and unsettling to an audience of the 1930s, it is tame compared to Avram Graf in 'Know Not Thyself', the syphilitic war veteran roaming the city castrating dogs and cats. This gruesome creation was devised at the height of Calverton's prestige.

Unlike the texts Walter Rideout categorised as 'conversion' novels, about heroic workers who had 'Communist epiphanies',[75] Calverton placed his own creations in situations where they conversed about his pet preoccupations – sex, religion, and death. This was a development on a non-fiction format that he used frequently to illuminate the controversies of the age in his magazine. In addition to the well–known symposia in *Modern Quarterly*, an exchange between one-time *New Democracy* editor Gorham Munson and Calverton took the form of a one-act play set in the latter's apartment, where the gregarious host is presented exposing Munson as a Nietzschean bourbon who distorted Marxism and could not see the links between social and literary decadence.[76] In the script, Calverton defeats Munson without resorting to bluster or character assassination. A clash of opinions is prepared for a wider readership in a fashion that is both entertaining and informative. Deploying this pattern allowed Calverton to combine eclectic speculation with cultural production.

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[72] Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, p.107. Minor episodes of this nature confirm that coercion and social control were not abandoned despite the democratising tendencies in state cultural policy.

[73] See Abbott, *Leftward Ho!*, p.197; Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, p.259*n*.

[74] Calverton, 'This Thing of Darkness', unpublished MSS., p.467, VFC.

[75] A phrase taken from Judy Kutulas, *The Long War: The Intellectual People's Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p.37.

His reliance on formats structured as dialogues paved the way for *The Man Inside*,[77] Calverton's final published novel which won acclaim as a thriller in the tradition of Verne and Wells and as a mediation on social hypnosis and its relationship to the individual. With less justification, it was also praised in sections of the black press as a realistic depiction of Africa and its 'Zulu' tribesmen. The novel's capacity to illustrate its author's theoretical trajectory is considered at length below; however, it should not be wrenched out of its broader political context, namely Calverton's experiences with Stalinism. Dedicated to literary agent Maxwell Perkins, himself providing something of a clearing house for radical novelists,[78] *The Man Inside* combines Calverton's greatest triumphs and failures. According to Calverton, *The Man Inside* embodied the influence of social hypnosis. He claimed that his intentions were promoting awareness of the menace of 'scientific spell-binders'; the success of the totalitarian state was rooted in the capacity of dictators to manipulate the masses.[79]

The novel takes the form of Alan Steele's diary, with a preface and mock press clipping lending it an 'authentic' (i.e. pseudo-documentary) appearance, in the style of pulp or *True Confessions* type magazines.[80] It opens with a note from Thomas Tyndall, a minor character who introduces the novel with his suspicions that his missing brother John is also Joli Coeur, the central figure in the diary. John Tyndall, a friend of Houdini, believes hypnotism to be a science and operates on his wife Martha without anaesthetic, an experiment to which she consents. When Martha dies from a subsequent infection Tyndall flees. The frontispiece is a sensationalised account of these events, ostensibly clipped from the pages of the yellow press. To his brother Thomas, Tyndall is a misunderstood genius, with ideas that are too advanced for society to tolerate.[81] Steele and Coeur establish a working relationship in the jungle, where the latter's hypnotic experiments turn the duo into a power to be reckoned with.

The narrator, Alan Steele is thoroughly disillusioned with Western society, preferring the Xulus to the people of Chicago, Baltimore and New York. He considers America to be philistine, and Europe dead. A political journalist during the First World War and, like Calverton, an admirer of the English historian Edward Buckle, his optimism collapses once his wife leaves him for a Nazi.[82] Steele's encounter with Joli Coeur at the latter's 'Oeudraeth' encampment presents an opportunity to develop an alternative to the crisis afflicting the West. The ensuing dialogues between the duo are reproduced verbatim in Steele's journal. At this point it appears that the 'jungle adventure' a reader may have anticipated is in part a foil for its two central figures to discuss and debate the key issues of the day. Given the novel's place in Calverton's overall political development, one can assume that some of the dilemmas facing the author were also articulated in Steele's fictitious recollections of discussion with Coeur.

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[76] 'Life and Letters in the Thirties: A Dialogue of Predictions, Hopes and Ideals', MSS. (VFC).

[77] *The Man Inside: Being the Record of the Strange Adventures of Allen Steele Among the Xulus* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1936).

[78] See A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979). Perkins confided to Calverton that the election of FDR would make Eleanor Roosevelt into the first woman President (Berg, 1981 ed., p.269).

[79] *Man Inside*, p.242. On this basis Abbott's *Leftward Ho!* presents *The Man Inside* as Calverton's momentary break with Marxism (p.205).

[80] This tends to confirm the arguments in Chapter Five concerning the common features of hard-boiled and proletarian fiction, although Calverton's decidedly middlebrow tastes are perhaps reflected in his love of melodramatic fiction.

[81] *The Man Inside*, p.*xi*.

The opening section of *The Man Inside* exhibits a number of the formal innovations co-opted across the literary left. Like Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy, Calverton reassembles the style of the print media within the novel to convey a particular meaning. But whereas Dos Passos's 'Newsreel' combinations of headlines and popular song lead cumulatively to a reconstruction of the 'zeitgeist', Calverton's approach is closer to that of the pulps, in using 'authentic' sources to convey background information efficiently. Combined with Thomas Tyndall's preface, the implication is one that we are dealing with 'history as it happened'. However, in opening the narrative by requiring we 'suspend disbelief', Calverton does not establish a fixed relationship with the reader. Although commencing from the impression that we have 'stumbled across' a true life account of personal catastrophe, it also becomes clear that this unconventional adventure yarn was written with ulterior motives.

As Wilcox notes, in *The Passing of the Gods* (1934), Calverton described humanity as in permanent flight from its own fear of death.[83] This observation is the foundation of *The Man Inside*; through a series of didactic passages, the novel suggests that the cornerstone of a new society is one in which the fear of death can be removed. With cavalier regard for his earlier commitment to human agency, Calverton presents mass hypnosis as the means to achieving such a world. In an obvious paraphrase of Marx, Coeur tells Steele: 'Those who control the means of suggestion control the community'.[84] Such incessant didacticism undermines both the novel's formal dynamics as a thriller and its presentation as a pseudo-historical document. It reflects Calverton's preference for gothic melodrama, coupled with a tendentiousness of the sort which was falsely associated with the proletarian novel in later years.

Likewise, several familiar features of Calverton's writing reappear. There is the eclectic range of convenient reference sources, from a description of Dr. Vassily Zdravosmilov's painless childbirth technique, to revolvers, undertakers, animal mutilation, and debates as to the nature of the Soviet Union. Steele also articulates grievances similar to those of Calverton concerning his career, when he complains:

> My anthropologist colleagues ... resented the fact that I, an anthropologist, should write for a sociological journal.[85]

This reads as a thinly-veiled reference to some of the personal squabbles and jealousies which repeatedly undermined co-operation at the *Modern Quarterly*. Ironically, it also reveals one of the novel's most astonishing aspects; namely Calverton's jettisoning of his experience with anthropology, resulting in a comic-book vision of Africa. Despite praise in the African-American press for its 'realism', and the haunting illustrations of the black WPA artist Charles Alston, *The Man Inside* establishes its blueprint for a new society based on Joli Coeur appointing himself Xulu chieftain through hypnosis. Like Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, Coeur personifies both colonial domination and the breakdown of Enlightenment reason. Unlike Conrad's memorable creation, however, the Doctor's invidious social position is presented as offering social improvement.

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[82] *Ibid.*, pp.42, 3-4, 105.
[83] Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton*, p.202.
[84] *The Man Inside*, p. 112.
[85] *Ibid.*, p.164.

The Man Inside's central message was that the power of suggestion offered a way out of the wider political exasperation that Calverton felt. Whereas the proletarian writers with whom he was in contact in the early 1930s expressed a sense of possibility about social change, by the mid-1930s such opportunities seemed exhausted. This perception was consolidated by the ascendancy of Franco, Stalin and Hitler, extinguishing the last embers of wave of militancy that peaked in the years between 1917 and 1921. In place of the absent agencies of change associated with this period, Calverton's novel substituted Coeur's hypnotic skills. It implied that control of pliable minds could be the basis for a new society. Hypnotic suggestion was necessary to unlock 'the man inside', as it could suppress animal instincts in humans, including fear of death, upon which the success of fascism was predicated. In short, Calverton's experimental prescriptions for a new society *in fiction* assumed an increasingly irrational form, presenting the false choices of a Huxleyan social engineering or bleak pessimism. As the novel closes, Steele flees as Coeur's encampment falls to advancing tribesmen, perhaps demonstrating the impossibility of resolving any of the problems supposedly inherent in human nature.

At the end of October that year, he felt that *The Man Inside* was finding a worthwhile readership, despite disappointing distribution. However, as 1936 drew to a close, he consoled Melville about 'the flop of the novel in which we had banked so much'.[86] Perhaps Calverton's limitations as a novelist account for him becoming a 'lost' writer, although the same can be said of the New York Intellectuals, of whom only Mary McCarthy and Saul Bellow produced outstanding works of fiction.[87] The 'memoir warfare' of later years kept such concerns in the public eye, as did their institutionalisation in the academy. Hypothetically, Calverton's political outlook - if unchanged - would have denied him the opportunity to become a prominent social critic in Cold War America. Sadly this question was settled by premature death, however.

Conclusion

Organisational independence, American exceptionalism and premature anticommunism are all qualities which denoted virtue in the confessional memoirs written during the 1950s, and in the cultural wars that have raged ever since. Calverton's personal history as a public intellectual expressed each of these attributes, although revolutionary anti–Stalinism describes the latter attribute more accurately. As our inspection becomes more detailed, the *Modern Quarterly* editor conforms less and less to the 'Thirties' stereotypes. Membership in the AWP and possibly the SLP, adapting the American experience to fit revolutionary goals, and a refusal to abandon the socialist project despite heavily revising Marxism; these are all qualities which the 'Radical Impresario' sustained throughout the decade. Although the probability of Calverton drifting toward liberal anticommunism with his fellow Committee for Cultural Freedom members cannot be discounted, his opposition to the Second World War as an imperialist adventure precluded his posthumous reintegration into the intellectual mainstream. This stance offered a basis from which to maintain critical distance from the war effort, despite the admonitions of former friends. (For instance, Lewis Mumford slated Calverton for maintaining an anti-war stance, comparing him to 'a person who insists on going ahead with his plans for a picnic after an earthquake has taken place'. US entry into war was a lesser evil to the alternative of slavery, as outlined in *Mein Kampf*, according to Mumford.[88]) As the next chapter suggests, the question of the war had a deleterious effect on the literary left as a whole; therefore, a more critical position would logically prefigure upholding the 'culture critique' amid such conditions.

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[86] Calverton, 'This Thing of Darkness', unpublished MSS., p.467, (VFC).

[87] Although they faced a mixed response as critics, by the 1950s they had moved close to endorsing state policy, overtly on questions of foreign policy, and covertly - or unconsciously - through such government fronts as the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, in receipt of CIA funding.

More significantly, some of Calverton's fragmentary positions provided a useful foundation for sustaining the remaining momentum of the radical intelligentsia. Given the influence of Stalinism, in which a dominant theoretical trend was the subordination of theory to tactics, Calverton's attempts to 'Americanise Marx' reveal a positive impulse. The contrast between his *Awakening of America* and Third Period propaganda is striking. Whereas the Communists often dismissed pre–IWW advocates of social change, even calling Upton Sinclair a social–fascist, Calverton attempted both to promote the democratic kernels in Lincoln and Jefferson and develop a 'history from below' sympathetic to popular movements. Under the Popular Front, Third Period catastrophism gave way to a patriotic fervour that, in Earl Browder's slogan, made Communism into Twentieth Century Americanism. In the official Stalinist analysis, the world was no longer divided between capitalism and socialism but dictatorship and democracy. Formally, Calverton rejected these false binaries, although he proved unable to elaborate a comprehensive alternative.

Calverton's attempts to rediscover American history were rooted in the belief that the wider population was predisposed to radicalism provided it could be addressed in sufficiently indigenous terms. He shared with the Trotskyists and Lovestoneites a desire to intervene in politics from an internationalist perspective in a manner attuned to particular national conditions. Organisationally, Calverton already occupied something of a third camp between the two wings of the opposition to Stalinism. His attempts to Americanise Marx further consolidated this position, leading to contradictions in his orientation that were never fully resolved. When the *Modern Quarterly* grappled with this problem it tended to straddle the various approaches of its competitors.

Whilst the Lovestone group initially combined a belief in the fundamental soundness of the Soviet Union with a social–democratic orientation based on 'American exceptionalism', Trotsky exhorted his followers to develop a materialist understanding of America. Calverton was repelled by the imposition of European schemas on the revolutionary movement's analysis, but subjectively loyal to the perspective of social upheaval which this entailed. Unable to transcend this binary in a systematic fashion, he subsequently foundered on a tension between particularism and historical specificity. Under the first perspective, the United States is a unique formation explicable solely in terms of its own experience. In contrast, the latter suggests an analysis based on understanding social forms in terms of their contingent relationships to universal trends. Rather than working between the general and local levels of analysis implicit in this second method, Calverton often assessed problems with an *a priori* assumption of American difference.

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[88] Mumford to Calverton October 29, 1940 (VFC).

Given the emphasis on the 'captive mind' in Cold War accounts of 1930s culture, those whose histories have included discomfort with the CPUSA's hegemony on the left received a positive reappraisal. Even today, the *New Masses* and its circle are presented as extensions of Moscow, the Kremlin serving as the primary influence upon the Marxist analysis of culture, hence a key myth of 'the Thirties'. Not only does Calverton's dabbling in the specific problems facing US revolutionaries refuse this unmediated patronage model of intellectual activity, it also reminds us of the importance of historical specificity as an analytical principle. It was axiomatic in 1930s cultural politics that theoretical conclusions led to organisational consequences, at least in the charged atmosphere of New York. Thus, when *Proletcult* bodies like the John Reed Clubs were abolished by decree, they were replaced with the League of American Writers, intended for authors of some standing. This was related to the Comintern's changing priorities, based in turn upon Moscow's needs, but filtered through a number of cultural practices and local interpretations of the 'line'. Calverton himself was excluded from the Communist Party and its circle, as it viewed him as objectively fascist, irrespective of his political orientation. As we saw previously, the often bruising experience of New York literary factionalism, combined with Michael Gold's clumsy attempts at a Marxist aesthetic, have informed the standard myths about this period. Logically, Calverton's conflict with both made his reputation ideal for a Cold War makeover, but this did not occur. We locate the barriers to such revisionism in the last years of his life.

In conclusion, the career of VF Calverton provides a useful rejoinder to the dominant tropes for discussing the 1930s. In the language of liberal anticommunism, the historical experience of the Great Depression was reorganised into a series of formulaic narratives. At the base of this process are those intellectuals who threw in their lot with Stalin when 'New York went to Soviet Russia'. Cold War stereotypes alleged that these intellectuals wreaked havoc by casting aspersions on US foreign policy and praising mediocrity in the arts. Likewise, it has been claimed that the 1960s (i.e. 'the Sixties') saw a rerun of such treason, when intellectuals implanted a generation of political zealots in the universities and the media. In turn, goes the argument, such figures imposed a reign of Politically Correct terror to this day every bit as vicious as proletarian literature, if not Stalin's purges. Consequently, modern 'culture wars' feature an underlying caricature of the 1930s, in which the decade's most salient features appear as mere conjectural detail. Mass unemployment, military barbarism and white supremacy cast a long shadow over civilisation; state intervention, welfare compromises and appeasement provided other significant embarrassments. In eliding these elements in an account stressing intellectual duplicity, Cold War liberalism produced a perverse assessment of the inter-war years.

It is an irony of history that some of the most lucid critics of a crisis-ridden system came to reconstruct a self–serving historical narrative that omitted key social developments and emphasised the more transitory ones. By way of contrast, Calverton's writings offer, in fragmentary form, a perspective of opposition to a deteriorating world situation. He recognised the real isolation of US Marxists, who needed to abandon the pretence of mass agitation in order to conduct propaganda work. He realised that such propaganda would need to be grounded in a genuine appraisal of actual conditions, rejecting *a priori* blueprints for action as inapplicable. Like a minority of his contemporaries, he identified the counter–revolutionary character of Stalinism, and distinguished between the various forms of public authority, declaring that the New Deal was not fascism, while criticising it nevertheless. Although unsuccessful as a novelist, he attempted to develop new combinations of literature and politics, a process climaxing with *The Man Inside*. Under enormous personal pressure, he struggled throughout the entire period to maintain the *Modern Quarterly Monthly*, despite recurrent financial crisis. The journal served as a clearing house for a range of radical views, enshrining Calverton's reputation for independence. In the last year of his life, he dedicated himself to an anti–war position, at considerable personal cost.

Calverton's writing was often crude, eclectic and impressionistic. He never elaborated a theoretical armature from his fragmented responses to the crises of the inter–war period, and seldom attempted to organise in such a way as to breathe life into his ideas. This is suggested in his equivocation about breaking with Stalinism despite numerous misgivings; hounded out of Party circles, his vaunted independence and coalition building became a necessary part of his continuing opposition to the social order *including* the Soviet elite. That a prominent Johns Hopkins graduate and favourite son of Baltimore should dedicate his adult life to criticism of American society suggests that the latter's reputation was in tatters after 1918.

However, the limits of this critique informed much of the despair of later years. In the 1920s intellectuals had looked to what they quaintly termed 'the Russian experiment' with approval. After the crash of 1929, they assumed that Soviet Russia offered a formula for America's salvation from itself. However, as fascism and Stalinism grew in power and stature, radical hopes were dashed. The tragedy that Victor Serge characterised as 'Midnight in the Century' was comprehended unevenly; growing horror at hardship and fascism increased Soviet prestige, until the Spanish civil war frayed this equation. Likewise, hopes that a cultural renaissance would accompany the growing intellectual unrest were frustrated. *At no point did the radical milieu seriously engage with the central process occurring around them, namely the reorientation of society under the New Deal.* By the eve of US entry into war Marxism as an independent critical voice had been virtually liquidated. The peripheral aspirations for a cultural critique also fell victim to this process.

Calverton was not immune to this process. In private he became obsessed with his own mortality, fretting about his health[89] and threatening to use the cyanide capsule ring that he wore, as if a participant in his own melodramatic novels. The often dubious proposals for social engineering concealed in his writings on hypnosis, notably *The Man Inside*, also reflect his increasing despair. This unravelling of his perspectives owed much to an increasingly desperate world situation, that was itself resolved temporarily on terms which few could have foreseen in 1927, when the Sacco–Vanzetti case forced a generation of cultural practitioners to consider sweeping social change. Indirectly, reaction at home and abroad contributed to his personal collapse in later years. However, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, he never embraced a conservative position, a stance codified when he placed a largely autobiographical article in the *Call* of June 1940, entitled 'What Socialism Means to Me'.

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[89] This was not a new problem for Calverton, whose love letters betray a certain hypochondria. Even at the height of his prestige, before his acrimonious break with the Party, he was 'worried to death about this anal difficulty ... throbbing with all the acute symptoms of neuralgia'. Later in the same note he suspects that the pain is the less serious one of 'roids'. Calverton to Melville July 7, 1932 (VFC).

Long before thinking in terms of totality had become synonymous with totalitarianism, Calverton attempted to express, in his own phrase, 'The Pulse of Modernity'. Although this approach often substituted enthusiasm for coherence, it attempted to analyse the issues of the day in a manner accessible to a popular audience. Propagandising for progress, Calverton's efforts pulled together the central problems of the age and suggested that through human intervention they could be challenged. Despite the limitations of this critique, he illuminated the possibility of subjective alternatives to the inequitable suspension of the twentieth century's crises tendencies. This embattled career - spanning a period 'between two wars' - sets a daring example, suggesting that a negative outcome to the inter-war period was not necessarily a foregone conclusion.

Chapter 8 - Into the Forties: The Breakdown of Patronage

The following chapter attempts to account for the decline of cultural patronage in the late 1940s and following US entry into the Second World War. More specifically, we address the way that the links between 'culture and the crisis' became broken. Counter-crisis strategies based on cultural production lost their appeal and impetus, both for the state and the literary left (especially that in the orbit of the Communist Party). By 1941, patronage - the relationship between cultural practitioners and public institutions - had been transformed, losing the prestige it had acquired less than a decade previously. There was to be no going back to the exhilaration that surrounded the First Hundred Days and the *Culture in the Crisis* manifesto.

Both the state and the left intelligentsia continued to be involved in cultural production in a variety of ways, but the place in these formations of art and writing was downgraded considerably. Their usage became increasingly instrumental; everything from cartoons to the official duties of the Librarian of Congress could be subordinated to political objectives, primarily the war effort. Gone too was the perception, shared by Federal One administrators and *New Masses* contributors alike, that cultural production alone could transform society; instead it was reduced to an appendage of broader political objectives. If anything, the 1930s slogan 'art is a weapon' became more of a reality under the exigiencies of wartime mobilisation than it ever was on the literary fringes of the CPUSA. Indeed, on surveying the state of cultural politics at the close of the 1930s, one is struck by a sense of collective terminus. Given influential political trends, especially among the radical intelligentsia, this shift could be characterised as one away from the project of social transformation, a retreat from change, or a closure of the historical mind. Political priorities were in disarray, most notably those concerning war in Europe and the fluctuating prestige of Stalinism. From these conditions, we argue, came the raw material (largely in the form of anecdotal evidence) from which the discursive construct of 'the Thirties' was assembled. Likewise, anti-communist hostility to Federal One foreshadowed the criticisms of 'big government' that accompanied the Cold War.

Such considerations warrant book-length studies in their own right; here we concern ourselves with their impact on that which, in previous chapters, has been characterised as cultural patronage.

The tentative conclusions that follow also force us to revisit our opening controversy, that of the binary opposition between the 1930s and 'the Thirties', our shorthand for the tensions between an historical analysis of a particular 'moment' and the teleological reconstruction of it around contemporary priorities. In previous chapters we attempted to reassemble an appropriate genealogy of both tendencies, interrogating key determinants in the patterns of patronage that emerged in the 1930s and isolating those latent features that the narrators of 'the Thirties' have privileged. For instance, we noted the fashion amongst the former literary left for (re)writing autobiographies in terms that accentuated past political differences with the Communist Party so as to present the author as a figure whose sensibilities were compatible with Cold War ideology.[1] Numerous writers and artists were well placed to argue that cultural patronage had sometimes occasioned political struggles over the form and content of art, although perhaps not to the extent claimed in subsequent decades. Their experiences with politics served as a warning about the dangers to 'cultural freedom', itself a loaded concept. In short, while 'the Thirties' suggests narrative closure, the central question is that of the relationship between continuity and change. Cultural history is not a sequence of consecutive *tabula rasa*, onto which new generations inscribe a record of their existence. Neither is it the indefinite extension of the past into the future, as some accounts suggest, through such ahistorical themes as 'rebellious youth', 'human nature' and 'the treason of the intellectuals'. The preponderance of such trends in Cold War historiography can obstruct a more rounded reconstruction of the period.

As the preceding chapters suggest, between 1939 and 1941 the experience of giving cultural production an organised expression proved increasingly frustrating. Thus, Federal One was subject to substantial reductions in the resources it was allocated, coupled with a protracted campaign of red-baiting that undermined the position of the Federal Theatre Project. What remained of the once-prestigious cultural arm of the New Deal was subordinated to the war effort. A parallel process of disintegration affected the Communist cultural milieu in which the *New Masses* magazine had played a central role. To an extent more severe than during the transition from the 'Third Period' to the Popular Front, cultural practitioners associated with Communism became increasingly disoriented by changes in party perspectives. Most famously, this precipitated disillusion with 'the God that failed'; more concretely, the CPUSA spent the war years abandoning the anti-imperialism, to which it was once committed, giving instead almost uncritical support to the Roosevelt administration's war effort. In terms of the key themes of patronage, the overall effect was the downfall of any attempt to marshal cultural production against the consequences of the slump.

In this penultimate chapter we also attempt to account for the processes which led to the collapse of an earlier optimism into Cold War conformity. Such excavation is not simply a means of accounting for the past; it also allows an insight into the contemporary landscape of cultural politics. (Likewise, the conclusion to this study includes the preliminary stage of a critique of current scholarship, encompassing both a growing number of loosely 'postmodern' interpretations of the 1930s *and* a broader corpus of social theory that occupies a space broadly similar to that once held by 'Red Decade' veterans as diverse as Daniel Bell and James Burnham.) In considering the bearing of this earlier impasse on contemporary events, we seek to rescue the sense of agency and human possibility that has been largely absent from cultural analysis in both periods. This chapter is loosely organised around three themes: the backlash against patronage, the shift to wartime mobilisation, and the consequences of the war for cultural politics.

An important dimension in the shifting relationship between the New Deal and the Popular Front was the growing backlash against radicals working on Federal One.

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[1] Thus, the complaint that Stalin 'betrayed the revolution' could be transformed into the moral superiority of having been 'right all along' about Soviet 'totalitarianism'. See Alan Wald, *Writing from the Left: NewEssays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London: Verso, 1994), p.10*n*.

Moderate Republicans felt that federal art was unduly partisan in its support of Roosevelt, while others - such as Texas Democrat Martin Dies - detected subversive influences. Dies faced a number of difficulties in pursuing his political agenda across society as a whole because of the 'relative weakness of the anti-communist reaction [that] owed a great deal to the deflation of confidence in American institutions'.[2] However, the more narrow allegation that government resources were being used for 'UnAmerican activities' in the arts found a wider resonance. Although we would echo the argument that 'a distinction must be drawn between the ideology and actual performance of most Communists on the FWP'[3], a number of well-publicised episodes helped to create the impression that it was a 'red nest'. Likewise, Hallie Flanagan recalled the Communists on her Federal Theatre Project as a minor irritant: 'it was scarcely necessary to tear the house down to get at a mouse in the cellar'.[4] This liberal paradigm resembles that of Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left*, where the dubious character of communism is self-evident, but to be kept in context and demarcated from worthwhile cultural production. An appropriate response is one which is restrained when necessary. The problem with realist, state-sponsored cultural production is that its results often resembled Soviet-style, state-organised socialist realism, (a point that conservatives were not slow to emphasise). Moreover, hostilities to government arts patronage were expressed in a language that anticipated debates over 'totalitarianism', 'big government' and so forth, albeit in a crude and often illogical form.

As an indication of this trajectory in cultural politics, we turn to Franklin D. Roosevelt's dealings with the League of American Writers. The changing relationship between the most prestigious Popular Front organisation and the White House indicates the extent to which C.P. intellectuals had briefly served almost as informal ‘Brains Trust’ in the sphere of cultural policy. It also reveals the Party’s organisational audacity, it that it bracketed Roosevelt with other writers in order to recruit it to one of its fraternal organisations. In general, the president had a policy of not accepting honorary memberships in organisations, as this would set a precedent. When Van Wyck Brooks wrote praising Roosevelt's 'unique contribution to the body of American letters', the President gratefully accepted his status as an honorary member. However, within a week White House press secretary Stephen Early wrote to League organiser Franklin Folsom restating Roosevelt's gratitude while stipulating that this act of acceptance should not be publicised.[5]

For a year, relations between FDR and the League remained on this polite footing, characterised by the former's minimal commitment to the organisation. Thus when Dashiell Hammett approached FDR with the proposed themes for the third American Writer's Congress, 'Writers for Democracy' and 'American Cultural Security', Early declined the invitation to speak on the President's behalf. Likewise, a number of requests for manuscripts to be sold in fund-raising auctions were turned down.[6] Overall, there appeared to be no contradiction between the League's acquisition of its most prominent celebrity member and the latter's friendly indifference to the association, although a recent account suggests that he 'knew the League's reputation was questionable enough to ask that it be kept quiet, in the process undercutting the whole point of offering the membership in the first place'.[7] No doubt this limited acceptance was facilitated by the League's Popular Front politics. (Not only was it top-heavy with literary celebrities, it also omitted proletarian literature luminaries like Michael Gold and Jack Conroy from its public membership lists.) Despite a certain amount of intrigue, one can also presume that Roosevelt's exception to the policy on honorary memberships expressed his continuing fascination with cultural production. Dashiell Hammett also demonstrated the reciprocal character of this relationship, when he claimed a majority of New Deal democrats on the League's roster.

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[2] M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), p.103.

[3] Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p.186

[4] See Hallie Flanagan, *Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre* (1949) (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1965), p. 348

[5] Letter, Van Wyck Brooks to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 15, 1938; Roosevelt to Brooks, April 23, 1938; Stephen Early to Franklin Folsom, April 27, 1938; PPF 5259, FDRL.

Unpopular Fronts

As the terms of the New Deal itself began to shift, so to did the possibilities of a Popular Front. As was indicated throughout this study, conservatives were ill-placed to fragment this new political sensibility, one legacy of the First World War and the slump was that the scope for traditionalism and laissez faire economics was greatly reduced. Despite a strong isolationist current in the polity, there could be no return to the nativism of the 1920s. This vacuum consolidated an audience for sweeping social change, while marginalising conventional arguments against it. The slump undermined the authority of traditionalist social commentators and supporters of the free market, while bolstering that of the 'Soviet Experiment' which won respect for its apparent avoidance of economic difficulties. Given this, a demand arose for a body of apologetics capable of limiting the intellectual havoc wreaked by the slump. A novel mechanism for restored order rested on the incorporation of left-wing criticisms of Stalinism into the mainstream. Erstwhile radical critics and their theories of 'totalitarianism' and 'cultural freedom' provided the cutting edge of an ideological 'return to normalcy' after the 1930s.

Sidney Hook was one such commentator. Hook was a prominent figure in the Committee for Cultural Freedom, initially a rallying point for anti-Stalinist leftists, albeit one that was moving to the right in the guise of a non-partisan campaign for intellectual freedom. He wrote to the President, alleging a Communist Party plot to 'smear' FDR as sympathetic to 'red totalitarianism'. His complaints fell on deaf ears; only by submitting an annotated copy of the League's *Bulletin*, pointing out its unofficial use of Roosevelt's name did he catalyse the President's rejection of honorary League membership. Especially contentious was a major report by League President and Hollywood screenwriter Donald Ogden Stewart, who celebrated the organisation's alliance with the Soviet Writers' Leagues, while pointing to FDR's membership to demonstrate the Americanism. Hook alleged that Communists dominated its national board, naming Langston Hughes, Genevieve Taggard, Albert Maltz and Richard

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[6] Letter, Dashiell Hammett to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 27, 1939; Roosevelt to Brooks, April 23, 1938; Stephen Early to Hammett, April 4, 1939; Early to Hammett, October 30, 1939, PPF 5259, FDRL.
[7] Judy Kutulas, *The Long War:The Intellectual People's Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930-1940* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 104.

Wright.[8] Perhaps unconsciously, Hook destroyed the League's presidential connection by default, as he drew attention to Stewart's breach of the informal ban on publicising FDR's honorary membership.

At this point, the relationship between the LAW and the White House became increasingly acrimonious. Acting on FDR's orders, Early despatched Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish to Brooks, in order to prevent the use of Roosevelt's name. MacLeish informed Early of his recent resignation from the League, along with that of 'most' of its non-Communist members. Although denying as 'ridiculous' Hook's innuendo that Malcolm Cowley, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck were Communists, he advised Early to keep the President out of this 'factional quarrel'. Early then contacted Stewart to request the removal of Roosevelt from the list of honorary members.[9]

This episode is revealing, in that it suggests a certain defensiveness on the part of the executive branch in dealing with Popular Front politics. Initially Roosevelt was drawn to the League of American Writers, albeit cautiously. When the time came to end his formal affiliation to it, he did so due to Hook's wrecking tactics, rather than through an upfront confrontation with Stalinism. This was later explained to the League - via press secretary Early - on the technical grounds of a breach of protocol. It was only when Government Secretary to the Virgin Islands Robert Morss Lovett was reprimanded for supporting the fourth LAW Congress that the League faced official disapproval.[10] At this point, according to Franklin Folsom, state surveillance of the League (and its subsequent, smaller incarnations) increased dramatically.[11] Given FDR's initial delight at being asked to join the organisation, this also suggests the abandonment of an earlier interest in craft-based cultural production; the administration now had other priorities more appropriate to America's emergence as a global power.

Ironically, Roosevelt's disavowal of the key Popular Front organisation in the literary sphere also coexisted with the desire to emulate its *modus operandi*. The central concern was that of war preparations. Once again, the relationship between culture and the state suggests the dual crisis that characterised the late 1930s. While the left's post-Crash vibrancy among intellectuals and sections of the working class was in decline, neither New Deal liberalism nor traditional conservatism could take advantage of this. This impasse was expressed in the mismatch between the necessity of defending US interests overseas and the relative apathy of the American public. Debates concerning the establishment of a national propaganda agency, in which Roosevelt and Early played a prominent role, displayed a sensitivity to crisis in the manner of earlier discussions of federal arts funding. However, whereas the latter were troubled by whether the state was an appropriate cultural patron, the discussion of propaganda located its problems elsewhere. Not only was there a growing consensus that 'propaganda' was the domain of the dictatorships; more substantially, the public blamed both the carnage and the bitter aftermath of the 1914-1918 war on its encouragement by demagogues.[12] Even as the New Deal's cultural institutions were subordinated to the war effort, the alienation and distrust engendered by barbarism in Europe resurfaced as a barrier to mobilisation. Models derived from the international scene, such as the Nazi propaganda ministry, were obviously unacceptable; moreover, 'no one seemed to know exactly what Roosevelt's foreign policy was, and this posed considerable difficulties for those promoting the administration's position'.[13] One survey of the attempts to establish a propaganda agency concludes by suggesting that the outcome of this process, the establishment of the Office of Facts and Figures under MacLeish, was designed to placate interventionist critics. Instead, public opinion was galvanised by gradual escalation of military involvement.[14] With this in place, cultural patronage and the war effort proved increasingly simple to combine.

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[8] According to Franklin Folsom, 'only when we protested government raids on homes where volunteers had been recruited to fight against fascism in Spain did [FDR] resign'. Folsom, 'Notes on Writergate', *Monthly Review*, May 1995, p.27.

[9] Sidney Hook to FD Roosevelt, October 30, 1939; Hook to Early, February 1, 1940. The issue of the *Bulletin* in question is Vol. 6, No.1; pp.11-12 of the copy Hook sent FDR is heavily annotated (PPF 5259, FDRL).

[10] Memo, Early to MacLeish, February 20, 1940; MacLeish to Early, March 16, 1940; MacLeish to Early, February 19, 1940; Early to Donald Ogden Stewart, March 19, 1940, PPF 5259, FDRL.

[11] Folsom, 'Notes on Writergate', *Monthly Review*, May 1995.

Before considering this phenomenon at length, and the 'turn' to mass culture it entailed, we would recall the administration's growing emphasis on cultural freedom. As we observed in Chapter Four, Roosevelt's 1939 MOMA radio dedication presented art and democracy as inseparable. While the Committee on Cultural Freedom promoted its eponymous crusade, the president incorporated this into his dealings with the art world, despite the earlier snubbing of Hook over the issue of LAW membership. Indeed, even prior to this address Early's secretary, PL Shannon, estimated that Roosevelt had participated in a dozen speeches on the theme of cultural freedom.[15] The president also endorsed Rockwell Kent's use of Abraham Lincoln in a speech thanking MOMA that, ironically, also contained a defence of WPA arts funding. Although somewhat at odds with the highbrow sensibility of the CCF, his political agreement with its anti-totalitarianism was becoming increasingly clear. However, in a later memo to Nelson Rockefeller, Roosevelt indicated that the triad of patronage, freedom and participation in excellence was not as unproblematic as he suggested in public. Not only was WPA proving unable to return relief recipients to work, but Congress and voters alike failed to appreciate the need to promote art and literature.[16]

At this stage, Roosevelt did not anticipate that patronage and cultural freedom would be seen as mutually exclusive; the central concern was that of US cultural superiority over European dictatorships. Aesthetics were of secondary importance. Schematically, one could posit that the counterposing of liberal democracy to dictatorship, without corresponding military commitments, drew sustenance from the growing controversy over cultural freedom among sections of the intelligentsia. However, rather than use the CCF as a stalking horse over these issues, the administration arrived at a similar position independently. Formally, both presented political and artistic liberty as interdependent, but the New Deal's architects expressed a greater willingness to reconcile this position with public subsidy. By way of contrast, Hook and his co-thinkers were gravitating toward the opinion that, unless conducting military campaigns in defence of democracy, state intervention was a menace. This position was exemplified by James Burnham in his *Managerial Revolution* thesis (1941).

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[12] See Randolph Bourne, 'The War and the Intellectuals' (1917), reprinted in Carl Reseh (ed.), *The War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph Bourne and Others, 1915-1919* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

[13] Richard W. Steele, 'Preparing the Public for War: Efforts to Establish a National Propaganda Agency, 1940-41', *American Historical Review* 75, 1970; pp. 1647.

[14] Steele, 'Preparing the Public for War', pp. 1642, 1646-47, 1653.

[15] Letter, PL Shannon to Nelson A. Rockefeller, April 27, 1939; PPF 5983, FDRL.

[16] Letter, Roosevelt to Nelson A. Rockefeller, June 6, 1939, PPF 5983, FDRL.

Once again, it appears that the central paradox of New Deal cultural patronage identified throughout this study was asserting itself. In one respect, the administration was setting the tone for radical cultural politics. Just as WPA Federal One established much of the documentary sensibility that characterised the 1930s, now its most prominent supporters associated their work with 'cultural freedom', on a scale that dwarfed the New York literary conflicts which also propelled this theme to the fore. Moreover, such developments also suggest our earlier observations of an 'integration - corrosion' pattern of cultural policy; what begins in an attempt to secure mass consent on a cultural basis leads to damaging unintended consequences. Thus Prohibition won popular support in the 1920s, but within a decade risked alienating the increasingly significant urban populations at whom it was aimed. On a less grand scale, the theme of cultural freedom gained momentum among the literati, ensuring that repellence at political control of art could not be confined to the European dictatorships or to organisations connected to the CPUSA. Ultimately, this process was to culminate in the CIA's sponsorship of abstract expressionism and *Encounter* magazine.[17]

As war clouds gathered over Europe, Roosevelt's interventions in artistic affairs became episodic. Thematically, there was a discernible shift; the task of assembling an inventory of American culture was superseded by the promotion of cultural freedom, legitimising a return to 'art for art's sake'. However, the conduct of the war also produced an interregnum in which the boundaries of the 'national-popular' became noticeably narrower. As government priorities became subject to an increasingly propagandist agenda, latent Cold War themes were gradually taking shape at the fringes of mainstream discourse. Combined with the category of totalitarianism popularised elsewhere, it was to prove a potent ideological concoction in later years. It was, however, not to be the basis of wartime cultural policy at a popular level. It was the sphere of mass culture that saw dramatic changes in state intervention, combining old and new elements in a fashion appropriate to the conduct of war.

Roosevelt's humiliation of the League of American Writers was predicated largely on the declining fortunes of the CPUSA. Most notably, the Nazi-Soviet Pact had undermined Soviet prestige and left the Communists arguing a number of untenable positions. This problem intensified when Russia invaded Finland, confirming mainstream suspicions that fascism and communism were one and the same. As we argued previously, the discussion of totalitarianism among cultural practitioners generated a vocabulary, if not an intellectual framework, through which the new problems could be popularised. They also illustrate a paradox of the 'phoney war' between 1939 and 1941, expressed in growing hostility to the 'Communazis' - personified by Stalin and especially Hitler - and a broader isolationist inertia over US involvement in war. The problem facing the Roosevelt administration was that of how best to transform the former sentiment into public support for the war, in period when repetition of the methods of 1917-1918 were wholly discredited. Off the battlefield, administration methods also reveal a dismissal of craft-based cultural production consistent with Early's effort to break LAW's presidential connection.

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[17] See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), *passim.*

State cultural involvement in the build-up to war engaged with mass culture, at the expense of the craft activities it had sponsored since the inception of PWAP in 1933. This was most evident in the changing relationship between cinema and state. Simultaneously, one of the state's earlier cultural functions, that of censorship, began to complement industry self-censorship, exemplified by Hollywood's Hays Code. Restrictions on radio appearances by voices deemed subversive were encouraged, while Roosevelt's pioneering politicisation of radio, the Fireside Chats acquired an increasingly belligerent tone. Thus, at the close of 1940, a talk on US rearmament measures was introduced as one of national security, at a time when 'never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has our American civilisation been in such danger as now', and 'the Nazi masters of Germany have made it clear that they intend not only to dominate all life *and thought* in their own country, but also to enslave the whole of Europe, and to use the resources of Europe to dominate the rest of the world'. However, despite the threat posed by the Axis alliance, Roosevelt claimed that his purpose was to keep America out of war.[18] Within a year, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was met with a Fireside Chat calling for whole-hearted participation in war. The preceding decade was presented as one of untrammelled Axis aggression, and earlier nuances concerning life under the dictatorships or the inclusivity of US national identity and different sections of America were abandoned, in favour of such public sacrifices as military service, albeit represented as 'privileges'.[19] Perhaps the fast-disappearing sources of cultural patronage were one such sacrifice.

This is not to suggest a total abandonment of cultural policy *per se*. On the contrary, it became increasingly important to the conduct of war on the home front. Whereas federal responses in the arts to the Depression established a sector of cultural production parallel to the struggling mass culture industries, the government's wartime activities brought it directly into the latter. Such processes led to new formations, combining the internal logic of a particular practice with the exigencies of war.

This was expressed in the changing relations between the state and movie production. Throughout the 1930s a pattern had been established that allowed the puritan sentiments of the previous decade to become institutionalised in Hollywood film. By establishing codes of practice on such questions as decency, blasphemy, sedition and miscegenation, a fledgling industry was compelled to articulate the morality that was dominant in the post-1918 period. Moreover, in contrast to the issue of alcohol, where Prohibition was rapidly discredited, a strong Victorian element remained a factor in the regulation of the cinema.[20] Put starkly, this persistence conforms to one of the contradictory features of the New Deal era, that of a combination of hostility to 'Victorianism' coupled with a prudish outlook on sexual mores, especially those that could be characterised as part of the 'excesses of the Prohibition era'.[21] In grafting advocacy of the US war effort onto the existing arrangements between the state and Hollywood, the state gained a potent medium through which to communicate.

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[18] *Mr. Roosevelt Speaks: Four Speeches By President Roosevelt* (London: 'America Faces the War' Series, Oxford University Press, 1941), pp.3-4. Emphasis added.

[19] FDR, Fireside Chat, Dec. 9, 1941; reprinted in Fireside Chats, (NY: Penguin).

[20] See Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), *passim.*

The experience of aligning Hollywood to the war effort also points to some of the limitations of the New Deal insistence on craft production as a form of mass communications. As previous chapters suggest, apart from the FSA photography unit, few attempts were made to integrate industrial technology into New Deal art. Industry was routinely depicted, albeit using such craft forms as the mural or sculpture, but even the Index of American Design rarely considered industrial design to be appropriate, either as a subject or as a practice for recording such subjects. Antiques ranging from Shaker furniture to leather saddles were painstakingly reproduced by hand, but photographs depicting them were given short shrift within the Index's inventories. This reticence to deploy technology, let alone mass produce, explains in part the inability of New Deal art to secure a broader constituency of public support. Although public participation was initially widespread, notably in large audiences for Federal Theatre productions, it was not nearly as substantial as weekly attendance at the cinema. Thus the FAP's 'Art Week' in November 1941 sold a meagre $130 000 worth of pictures,[22] while the screen adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* was seen by millions of cinema-goers. This comparison cannot be undertaken lightly, as Art Week both presupposed a degree of audience familiarity with the visual arts and was conceived and executed in the period of FAP decline. Nevertheless, it reveals a public preference for commercial cinema over government-funded art.

Throughout the development of this study, we have argued that a binary opposition between high and mass culture provides an inadequate framework for understanding 1930s cultural politics. In part, this is demonstrated by the appeal, in comparison to that of a number of attendant cultural forms and practices, of the *political* themes expressed throughout the history of New Deal cultural patronage. Thus, the mass electoral support that swept Roosevelt to power was not accompanied by identical shifts in patterns of cultural consumption. While the 'New Deal majority' was not unsympathetic to mechanisms of patronage established by its elected representatives, its leisure time was seldom expended on such institutions; cinema and radio played a more substantial role in the socialisation of citizens.[23] The qualities that enabled it to play this role were also crucial to its deployment as part of the war effort, especially on questions of morale. Increasingly, mass culture was infused with the wartime outlook of the Roosevelt administration, in a fashion analogous to the encoding of New Deal politics in New Deal cultural production, but finding far greater popular resonance.

Various departments of the state had already developed relationships with the mass culture industries which transcended simple censorship and moved toward sophisticated forms of information management. For instance, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI ran a 'Book

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[21] See George Chaucey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic, 1994), p.340

[22] Belesario Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1983), p.225.

[23] See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919*-1939 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), *passim*. I am also grateful to members of New York Labor History forum for their insights during a seminar discussion of this work.

Review Section' that suggested pre-publication changes based on the manuscripts it 'reviewed' while compiling lists of writers deemed uncooperative or unduly sympathetic to the criminal. Simultaneously, it encouraged glamorous portrayals of its 'G-Man' agents, partly to compensate for low esteem in which the 'college cops' had been regarded, especially in comparison to the Hollywood gangster. The shift to a kind of 'war production in culture' resulted in government offices using this approach to rework public perceptions of warfare. However, in contrast to the FBI's courtship of the nascent leisure industries, the initial stages of the government's campaign of propaganda had an 'informational' character akin to that accompanying the New Deal.

Despite the critical success of Pare Lorentz's *The Plough That Broke the Plains* (1936), a New Deal film making unit did not materialise. However, this did not preclude an official orientation toward existing cinematic practices, such as the newsreel. Under Stephen Early's direction, the Federal authorities ensured that producers portrayed current affairs in keeping with the official view by making the granting of access to news footage dependent on editorial co-operation. By August 1940 Warner Brothers, Paramount and Loew's Incorporated (parent organisation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) were all offering their services to the White House, in a manner that mixed entertainment and the war effort.[24] Echoing the broader shift from a pragmatic system of counter-crisis measures to a war economy, the post-1933 forms of cultural patronage were superseded by a thorough-going propagandist approach. So successful was this incremental campaign that, by an irony of history, 'propaganda' became what the other side did - the Roosevelt administration simply provided 'information' about its aims and objectives.

Given these developments, the documentary and heritage-oriented themes of the New Deal acquired new significance. Whereas they had once provided the rationale for an emphasis on the national-popular that could be extricated from 1920s nativism, now such themes could be represented as part of a culture worth defending against dictatorship. The 'fact' gained new authority; whereas once it had merely indicated that an activity was 'socially useful', now it was essential to the war effort, quelling rumours put about by spies and Fifth Columnists. War-weary suspicions about propaganda were transformed as the US military became committed to theatres of war in Europe and the Pacific. However, there could be no return to the past, and the management of public opinion was conceived, if not always executed, in a neutral, factual, and almost scientific form. As the war intensified, information was subject to increasing censorship, so as not to undermine the war effort, such as controls over photographs of mutilated corpses.[25] At the same time, the Japanese were the victims of a propaganda campaign based upon assumptions of racial superiority, in which Roosevelt himself acquiesced.[26] The cultural practitioners associated with the Popular Front were far from immune to these trends.

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[24] Richard W. Steele, 'The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940-1941', *Journal of American History*, Vol.71, No.1, June 1984, pp.72-74.

[25] Phillip Knightley, 'Chamber of Horrors', *Independent* Magazine, 12 June 1993, pp.51-53.

[26] See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

Johnny Gets His Gun: The Literary Left at War

Already, the political convulsions brought about by the Hitler-Stalin Pact had cut a swathe through the most prominent fellow travellers, causing departures from political life that the Communists explained in terms of their former allies falling off the 'locomotive of history'. History had apparently acquired a momentum of its own, independent of human agency. Indeed, the 'moment of disillusion' with the Pact was to acquire a central significance in Cold War historiography. To hardline anticommunists, this episode reflected their opponents' duplicity and lack of decency. To the liberal anti-communists, it confirmed their own moral rectitude in detecting the menace underlying the Popular Front *prior* to Nazi-Soviet co-operation. Both camps discovered that international developments could be used to consolidate their insistence on the identical nature of the social arrangements in the major powers of Eastern and central Europe.

While the Roosevelt administration became committed to the war on the basis of incremental increases in its military commitments in Europe and the Pacific, the impact of the war on the radical literary milieu was less straightforward. Even if, for a moment, we accept its rather schematic division into fellow-travellers, Communists and New York Intellectuals, it is more difficult to detect a clear approach on the war itself. Given our study's qualified endorsement of V.F. Calverton's anti-war stance, it is clear that it regards a critical approach to the war as the precondition for the survival of Depression-era radicalism. It is also clear that the three major warring camps were united in their confusion over the war.

Among fellow travellers, a common pattern emerges. Age permitting, they often joined the armed forces; surprisingly in light of his failing health, Dashiell Hammett was among this generation of new recruits. Those in non-combatant wartime roles included *Culture in the Crisis* signatories Archibald MacLeish (Librarian of Congress), Granville Hicks (civil defence officer in Grafton, New York) and Malcolm Cowley (OFF officer). In these roles, they continued to operate as cultural practitioners of a sort; Hammett edited an army newspaper in the Aleutian Islands, while Cowley, following an abortive spell at the OFF, became an eminent literary critic credited with rehabilitating Faulkner's reputation.[27] Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, the writers who adapted Hammett's *Thin Man* for the big screen, became involved in Frank Capra's propaganda films, including the notoriously racist *Know Your Enemy: Japan.*[28] Edna St. Vincent Millay's influential poem 'The Murder of Lidice' was penned at the request of the government-backed Writer's War Board and encouraged by the Office of War Information (OWI), with a view to encouraging hostility towards Germany that was on a par with anti-Japanese sentiment.[29] In 1939, when such career opportunities beckoned to the literary left, only former fellow travellers (and ex-CP member Hicks) could accept these roles; the Communists considered war in Europe an inter-imperialist conflict, and were shunned increasingly over the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact. A residue of Popular Front politics, aligned to whole-hearted Communist support for the war effort resurfaced in late June 1941, when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Soviet Union.

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[27] Lillian Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972): p.220; Stephen B. Oates, *Faulkner: The Man and the Artist* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), pp.211-216.

[28] Ronald Bergan, 'The ideal Hollywood couple', Manchester *Guardian*, 9 May 1995; see also Dower, *War Without Mercy*.

[29] Susan Schweik, *A Gulf So Deeply Cut: American Women Poets and the Second World War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp.17, 62.

The way that the Nazi attack affected pro-Soviet cultural practitioners provides a telling illustration of the influence of political changes on their work. This does not mean that they subordinated aesthetics to political imperatives as the 'liberal narrative' has claimed. Instead, the remnants of the *Culture and the Crisis*-era literary left attempted to maintain a balance between their radical pasts and pro-war political perspectives. As a case in point, we turn to the changing fortunes of Dalton Trumbo and his most famous novel, *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939). The story concerns Joe Bonham, a limbless, faceless, blind and dumb protagonist adjusting to life in a military hospital after being hit by a shell. With touch his sole remaining sense, he first tries to comprehend his situation by exposing his stumps to sunlight. With this agonising task accomplished, he then attempts to communicate by tapping his head on his pillow in Morse code. As soon as he is in contact with the authorities, he requests to be paraded around every town and city in a glass case, discouraging others from enlisting and thereby ending war. His request is denied and outside communication terminated. Bonham remains optimistic that one day his message will be heard.

As with a number of the works of this period, a Cold War received wisdom became attached to the novel, stifling further debate. Thus, 'according to the [anti-communist] myth, the novel was put together as a kind of contemporary *exemplar* to be used by the American Communist Party in the days of the Hitler-Stalin Pact ... by insidiously trying to get the public to read a book which portrayed the mutilation produced by war'.[30] Indeed, the propagandist uses of the novel tend to suggest an element of truth in this. Under McCarthyism, Trumbo's membership of the 'Hollywood Ten' made him a prominent hate figure, predisposing Cold War literary critics to be dismissive of his work. *Johnny Got His Gun* is often overly sentimental and its 'stream of consciousness' sections laboured, despite numerous sequences that are both excruciating and powerful. However, attacks on Trumbo based on his political outlook tend to conflate his weaknesses as a novelist with his abrupt political turns during the build-up to war. Along with Howard Fast, he was one of the few nationally-known literary figures to support the CP's line after the Hitler-Stalin Pact. His activities included a debate with Philip Dunn (a liberal fellow-traveller schooled in the North American Committee for Spanish Democracy), where he opposed Dunn's called for US involvement in Europe. He allowed the *Daily Worker* to serialise *Johnny Got His Gun* during the period when it used the slogan 'the Yanks Aren't Coming' to oppose any intervention. Then, by his own admission, 'after Pearl Harbor its subject matter seemed as inappropriate to the times as the shriek of bagpipes ... World War II was *not* a romantic war ... *Johnny* was exactly the sort of book that shouldn't be reprinted until the war was at an end'.[31] Trumbo made little attempt to explain or justify his abandonment of an anti-war position, nor could he reconcile an earlier aversion to young men not being killed or mutilated on behalf of an elite with his later suppression of *Johnny* on behalf of the war effort. Before he could examine the contradiction between his novel's internally consistent anti-war message and its disappearance from the bookstands, Trumbo was himself deployed in a Pacific combat zone, even stumbling across a copy of the book in Okinawa in 1945. At least in such radio series turned motion pictures as *From Oxford Pacifism to Fighter Pilot* there was an attempt to explain such a shift.[32]

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[30] Leonard Kriegel, 'Dalton Trumbo's "Johnny Got His Gun"', in David Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p.107.

[31] Kutulas, *The Long War*, p.171; Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, p.63; Trumbo, 'Introduction to the 1959 edition'; reprinted in *Johnny Got His Gun* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp.3-5.

Clearly, the character of the Nazi regime figured as a new consideration in any meaningful comparison between the two world wars. Its barbarism was such that it impacted even on those writers who remained loyal to the Party despite the Nazi-Soviet Pact. With a degree of self-deception, the duplicity of an encircled Stalin regime could be interpreted as a blow for peace. However, given the unprecedented advance of the Nazi *blitzkrieg* and increasing awareness of Hitler's racial policies, it became harder for Communist ideologues to sustain the revived 'Third Period' argument that fascism and capitalist democracy were essentially identical. Thus Langston Hughes, a prominent fellow traveller, found that his formal anti-war position in June 1940 sat uneasily with his revulsion at the fall of Paris, a city he had resided in during 1924. Hughes was also dubious about the anti-fascism of the Allies, given the experiences of non-whites in the British Empire and United States. Torn between the two, he resigned as Vice President of the League of American Writers and expressed an 'unspoken wish to avoid being tied to a radical socialist position on the war'.[33] Hughes's dilemma expressed the demobilisation of the post-1918 cultural critique; US entry into war robbed him, and others, of organisational outlets for their opposition to white supremacy. He liked neither side, but felt unable to argue for some form of neutrality. Such confusions meant that there was little basis for addressing a worsening world situation in all its specificity. The disorientation ensued. This was further compounded after the Wehrmacht's invasion of Soviet Russia, when Britain's colonial sins were instantly forgotten in a 'People's War'.

On the anti-Stalinist cultural left, clarity was no more forthcoming. *Partisan Review*'s editorial board polarised between a pro-war Phillips and Rahv and the pacifist Dwight Macdonald, with the latter departing to establish his own magazine. Younger New York Intellectuals like Irving Howe and Clement Greenberg served in the armed forces in Alaska and Oklahoma respectively.[34] Of the two major groupings to which members of this milieu belonged, the League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism - with expressed political commitments including an anti-war stance - disintegrated much faster than the nominally apolitical Committee for Cultural Freedom. The Trotskyists with whom they had once associated maintained an internationalist position - that the main enemy was at home - coupled with a 'Proletarian Military policy' - calling for military recruitment to be placed under trade union control; this had little resonance in wider society. In short, the impact of the war was such that it disoriented and deradicalised a political tradition that privileged cultural analysis over one oriented toward a grasp of social institutions. Our study now takes an excursus into the impact of such confusions within a key section of the literary left, one that has stamped its distinctive impression on 'the Thirties' as a narrative. It is also the point where *Culture in the Crisis* signatory Sidney Hook is reunited with the advocates of proletarian literature based at *Partisan Review.*

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[32] Steele, 'The Great Debate', p.85.

[33] Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume II: I Dream a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.23-24.

[34] Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World* (New York: Oxford, 1986), pp.125-129, 135.

Denigrating Patronage: New York Stories

Previous chapters attempted to explore the question of arts patronage as a response to the depression. In the first half of the study, we examined the best-known example, that of the federal arts funding developed under the New Deal. In the second half, we have focused on the question of 'party patronage'. This is a complex issue, as the rather elliptical structure of the preceding chapters would suggest. First, the party in question was the CPUSA, and our initial survey of secondary sources found that a substantial proportion of literary histories of the 1930s was devoted to this particular political institution. Despite obvious power and influence, dwarfing that of even the most hysterical estimates of 'communist infiltration', the state - including such cultural offshoots as the Federal Writers Project - features less prominently as a concern among post-war literary critics. (This contrasts sharply with a number of fellow-travellers in the inter-war years, whose allegiance to the CP was such that they made the issue of state power into a political priority.) We located the 'privileging' of the Communists in the processes of rewriting history, and creating a myth of 'the Thirties'.

A second complicating factor is the particular form of 'the Thirties' myth as it pertains to literature. In the United States, the category 'proletarian literature' enjoyed a brief explosion in use in the early 1930s, and it was deployed in an enthusiastic fashion by writers for party cultural publications, primarily the *New Masses.* It also echoed the Soviet 'proletcult' movement, which was temporarily granted official support in the USSR, and the Kharkov conference of 1934. Often working from their own experiences of conflict with the proponents of this literary tendency, other writers construed the demand for proletarian writing in the USA and Soviet Union as meaning that there was a 'party line in literature'. In other words, the question of Communist patronage - material support in exchange for control of content - became integral to accounts of 'the Thirties'. As we attempted to show, this interpretation bears little resemblance to the reality of proletarian literature in the 1930s. The tone of the movement overlapped with that of an extant realism that was circulating in the publishing industry, namely hard-boiled fiction. It was also compatible with the wider 'documentary impulse' that was abroad in society as a historically specific response to the depression. Secondly, the debates among the supporters of proletarian writing reveal the absence of a clear 'line'. Thirdly, there was a division between the critics, concentrated in New York and around the *New Masses* magazine, and the writers, largely based outside the metropolis. Finally, to complicate the issue further, much of the realist portrayal of human suffering, and even the didacticism, said to characterise proletarian literature was not necessarily a caricature, nor was it confined to this highly politicised genre. On this basis, it embedded the experience of the slump in fiction. We now consider the narratives that facilitated the construction of 'the Thirties' as a mythical prism through which the past has been comprehended.

A reaction against such representational strategies, and the underlying political framework, informed the cultural criticism that has prevailed in much of the post-war period. Intellectual disillusion with the CPUSA at the end of the 1930s, whether of a political or literary nature, was a constitutive factor in the subsequent trajectory of the intelligentsia. Schaub's survey of US fiction and the Cold War describes mainstream accounts of this process as 'the liberal narrative'. The damaging encounter of American liberals with communism injected realism into their outlook. Society was deemed too complex, and human nature too malignant, for the simplistic solutions advocated in the 1930s to warrant serious consideration. Discussions of mass culture, in which banal explanations of fascism emphasised 'herd instincts' and evil, led to a degradation of human agency, in that social change was regarded with suspicion. Those engaged in this critique shared, according to Schaub, a 'conviction that American cultural life is plagued by a habitual and dangerous innocence, insufficiently complicated and disciplined by an opposing conservatism ... [They] were attempting to provide that conservative critique from within liberalism'.[35]

Detailing the role of such liberals in the post-war consensus would require a separate study in its own right. A number of accounts have appeared that attempt this task with varying degrees of success, including works by Bloom, Brick, Cooney, Gilbert, Guilbaut, Wald and Wilford. Taken collectively, such works suggest that a relatively coherent body of conservative apologetics emerged out of the *Marxisant* cultural milieu generated by the depression. For instance, Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1940) rooted the specific state formations that evolved under Hitler, Stalin and Roosevelt in the ahistorical phenomenon of bureaucrats and administrators. On this basis, the apologetic character of Burnham's account becomes clear, in that the origins of particular state forms in economic breakdown is concealed in a tautology: repressive public institutions are a product of ... repressive public institutions. Thus, scope exists to see New York Intellectuals such as Burnham as apologists for the inter-war period, in that they displaced elsewhere responsibility for various crises, at a time when traditional *laissez faire* arguments were compromised and discredited.

Whereas the 'liberal narrative' can be located within Cold War liberal apologetics, it also suggests a connection between the 1930s (i.e. the second half of the inter-war period) and 'the Thirties', an aggregate of selected themes and issues that shaped the predominant myth of 'the red decade', 'the anxious years' and so forth. This chapter seeks to examine the intersection between what Schaub calls the 'liberal narrative' and 1930s patronage. As we saw previously, a number of writers rewrote their collective contribution to 1930s cultural politics by presenting it as a principled rejection of the 'party line in literature'. The obverse of this argument was the construction of this 'line', alleging the subordination of culture to the politics of the CPUSA. Moreover, the disproportionate emphasis on the Communist Party in cultural histories of the inter-war period, and a near exclusion of the state, has been reinforced by the liberal narrative. Despite this rather skewed sense of priorities, the underlying political preoccupations were such that they formed one of the main prisms through which the 1930s were interpreted. In turn, this sensibility exercised a purchase on the language and cultural of the post-war period.

The term 'New York Intellectuals', used previously in connection with James Burnham, refers to a distinct section of the US intelligentsia, rather than being a general term for intellectuals attempting to make a living in New York City. Historically, the group's founders were based at the Jewish publication *Menorrah Journal*, which moved from a liberal orientation towards providing commentary on public affairs, to a position of sympathy with the CPUSA. However, the decisive 'moment' leading to the group's constitution as a coherent factor in American culture was the relaunch of *Partisan Review*. Readers will recall the journal's appearance as the official publication of the New York John Reed Club, where it defended proletarian literature, albeit in a manner more sophisticated than that advocated by Michael Gold. At this point in our narrative, we must return the mid-1930s, where the basis for the 'mature' stance of the post-war liberal narrative was gestating.

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[35] Thomas Hill Schaub, *American Fiction in the Cold War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p.72.

The first *Partisan Review*'s inclusion of a number of pieces of relatively complex Marxist criticism provided a bedrock for its subsequent caricature of '*Proletcult*'. Whereas the immediate thrust of the critique of 'Leftism' was apposite, it developed in part by assuming that the vitriol and determinism of Gold's *New Masses* columns was representative of the movement at large. Although the contention that economic reductionism made for crude literary theory was (and is) correct, it also created a straw man of the cultural critique that coincided with Third Period Communist politics. Despite its vulgarity and didactic conception of political literature, Gold's 'Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ' suggested that cultural producers had an obligation to be relevant to the Depression. As William Phillips and Philip Rahv argued against this position, they uncoupled the explosive but banal form of Gold's assertions from its broader context, that of the 'documentary impulse' abroad in the era's cultural production. Such claims suggest that *Partisan Review*'s useful emphasis on the relative autonomy of form could lead to neglect, both of content and historical determinants. Thus, while the journal mercilessly exposed crude formulations of a relationship between politics and letters, it proved less adequate at developing an alternative conception of a politically engaged literature.

This becomes apparent on the question of modernist writing. The Soviet based Kharkov conference presented the 'difficult' writing of Joyce, Pound and Eliot as a decadent symptom of capitalist stagnation. In contrast, the *Partisan Review* of the late 1930s presented the case for detaching the innovative, avant-garde form of such writing from the reactionary elitism of its authors. Whereas the journal's first incarnation developed the antecedent of this position, it did so against the political backdrop of attempting to align avant-garde culture to what they mistakenly saw as the vanguard of humanity, the 'communism' of a Stalinised Third International. In contrast, when Phillips and Rahv supported modernist writing on principle in the late 1930s, it signalled their break with the Communist Party. 'Political independence' emerged as a guiding principle for a different rebel outlook.

Frederick Wilcox Dupee, an early co-editor and contributor, linked this directly to the faction fighting among the New York literati. He shared the following observation with Newton Arvin:

> Feeling that political strife is poisoning the intellectual atmosphere just now, we plan to effect a partial divorce between literature and politics to pursue an independent Marxist investigation into American culture and culture in general.[36]

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[36] Dupee to Arvin, June 14, 1937, Dupee deposit collection, Butler Library Columbia University (cited with permission).

Phillips and Rahv regarded Dupee as a significant 'capture', when he became officially independent the following month following his expulsion from the Communist Party.[37] Accused of having 'Trotzkyite associations', he was named in the *Daily Worker* as plotting to dishonour the 'old' *Partisan Review*. Politically, the tone was set for the subsequent collision of the *Partisan* circle with the CPUSA, and the former's persistent association with Trotskyism.

Although we have taken issue with the later *Partisan Review* for its continual revision of its history, we would argue that the journal was at its most compelling when it attempted to align avant-garde modernism and revolutionary communism. Its demanding vision of 'the best' and most innovative cultural production placed it alongside the Marxist traditions that insist mastery of bourgeois culture is an important component of the emergence of a socialist society. Conversely, 'proletarian culture' suggests the working class hegemony described by Marxists as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Significantly, this aspect of classical Marxism was at odds with the stance of US and Soviet Communist parties in the early 1930s. Given *Partisan Review*'s fleeting co-operation with the classical Marxist tradition often known as Trotskyism, this relationship warrants further exposition, as it allows us to consider elements of the journal's approach to aesthetic issues.

Trotsky's cultural critique, most famously outlined in his *Literature and Revolution* (1923), was one which appeared to confirm the early *Partisan Review*'s attacks on 'Leftism'. Phillips and Rahv had opposed the application of non-literary criteria in Marxist criticism, based on a writer's approximation in fiction or poetry of the correct political line. In their eyes, 'insufficient militancy' provided a wholly inadequate basis on which to judge a work of cultural production. (Incidentally, many Communist critics would have agreed with them.) This perception meshed with two of the most controversial aspects of *Literature and Revolution*; first, an insistence that the working class in post-revolutionary societies should preserve and master the cultural traditions of their predecessors and, secondly, a case against attempting to create 'proletarian culture' from scratch. Concerns of this nature came to the fore as an expression of more general considerations about the development of a new society.

Written in the early 1920s, part of Trotsky's analysis was an historically specific attempt to differentiate between class hegemony and cultural hegemony. Given its impact on the *Partisan* circle, a short theoretical exegesis follows. According to Marxists, bourgeois culture developed alongside the growing economic power of the capitalist class, climaxing in its eventual seizure of state power. In contrast, the working class taking power would signal the beginning of the revolution, rather than formally ratify it, unlike a bourgeois revolution. At this point an intense period of conflict would ensue, until the dictatorship of the proletariat was secure. Thereafter, the 'withering of the state' would ensue, and it would cease to be a class-based monopoly on violence. Logically, such 'withering' would also lead to the abolition of social classes, although a division of labour, in theory more advanced than that of capitalism, would continue. Working within this Marxist framework, Trotsky found the idea of proletarian culture unrealistic. It could not exist under capitalism, he argued. It was unlikely to appear during the short life span of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and would be redundant in a classless, communist society. While such formulations would appear unusual in today's literary criticism, they represented a rational conceptualisation of the problems facing the founder of the Red Army at the height of his influence.

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[37] Expulsion Notice, 'Removed', July 1937, Dupee Papers.

A decade later, Trotsky was in exile and Russia's anti-Stalinist Left Opposition was crumbling, amid conditions of intense repression. The communist society he attempted to create was torn between economic autarchy and the ossification of the Communist Party into an instrument for upholding the power and privileges of the *nomenklatura*. Trotsky now characterised the Soviet Union as a 'degenerate workers' state', in that it had abolished capitalism but was ruled by a bureaucrat caste that displaced the power of the majority. What was required, he argued, was a *political* revolution to sweep away the Stalin regime and unshackle Russia's 'progressive' property relations. On the subject of art and culture, Trotsky devoted a chapter of his *Revolution Betrayed* to the degeneration of art and literature in the Soviet state, suggesting that Stalinist cultural policy led to a mixture of philistine repression and Socialist Realist 'court painters'. Whereas contemporary readers may wish to take issue with some of Trotsky's formulations, especially his overemphasis on Soviet 'progress' and his neglect of popular culture, his analysis provided *Partisan Review* with a useful theoretical framework.

In its early years, *Partisan Review* had differentiated itself from its fellow John Reed Club publications through an emphasis on literary theory. In turn, this aspect of the journal took priority over its inclusion of short stories. As a number of editorial board members broke with the CP, their hostility towards the critical stance of the *New Masses* increased. In effect, Phillips and Rahv transplanted Trotsky's criticisms of Soviet cultural policy on to American soil. This was problematic, as conditions of patronage had existed between Stalinism and the Socialist Realists, in that the latter received sufficient resources to produce provided they conformed to official stipulations (as portrayed in Eastman's *Artists in Uniform*). However, as our own study argues, the state of affairs with US '*Proletcult*' was more complex. On one hand, new writers *could* gain from their association with the Communist Party, although not to the extent that was later claimed. On the other, a clear consensus did not emerge among proletarian critics, despite heated debate. Proletarian literature was relegated to a secondary position as the CP adopted a Popular Front orientation toward more established writers. Beneath this placid surface, the Party pursued a frenzied campaign against Trotskyism, a catch-all category for describing their rivals on the left.

As has been argued elsewhere, such campaigning exercised a constitutive influence on the New York Intellectuals, bringing together a group of writers who became influential cultural arbiters in the post-war period. Their temporary appropriation of Trotsky's anti-Stalinism and literary criticism was an important element in their rejection of what they saw as party patronage. In contrast to the John Reed Clubs, which treated political organisations as an opportunity to promote newer writers, the second incarnation of *Partisan Review* saw this as a corrupting influence, in that politics and literature had to be treated as distinctive activities. Blurring this boundary would result, they argued, in didactic and aesthetically impoverished cultural production. While this prediction mirrored the experience of Socialist Realism and the cruder excesses of the proletarian literature movement, it valorised a 'difficult', avant-garde cultural practice, to the detriment of more popular forms.

Unlike traditionalists in, say, the Commission of Fine Arts, Phillips and Rahv projected their own view of a 'great tradition' which was capable of accommodating modernist writing. Likewise, their journal warmly received contributions from such art critics as Clement Greenberg and Meyer Schapiro, who defended modern art against conservative and Stalinist critics alike. Taken together, such arguments formed a succinct defence of high culture, albeit one temporarily aligned to revolutionary socialist politics. This did not prevent writers associated with the journal from opposing censorship on Federal One projects, but it did downgrade the approaches to representation that accompanied the 'documentary impulse' of the 1930s. Moreover, by suggesting that 'the best' in culture could not arise in conditions of political sponsorship, the stage was set for a more comprehensive rejection of patronage.

This situation was further complicated by *Partisan Review*'s relationship with Trotsky. As part of his attempt to establish a revolutionary 'Fourth International', Trotsky encouraged the support of cultural practitioners. Most famously, this resulted in 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' (1938), which appeared in *Partisan Review*, ostensibly written by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera. This manifesto argued for the complete independence of art from state institutions and political parties, while contending that cultural practitioners had a responsibility to confront the central questions facing society - fascism, Stalinism and war. In effect, Trotsky was developing a theoretical armature in which rebellious art and rebel politics had a common interest. Simultaneously, he presented the case for cultural production to engage with revolutionary politics while retaining its autonomy. This last aspect of Trotsky's critique led to conflict with the *Partisan* circle.

Writing to *Partisan Review*, Trotsky described its commitment to '"independence and freedom"' as 'two empty notions', after he was asked to contribute to a symposium on the theme 'What is living and what is dead in Marxism?'. The editors, he concluded, sought to 'create a small cultural monastery ... without participating in the cultural life of [their] epoch'.[38] The dismissal of *Partisan Review* as a 'small cultural monastery' provoked a response from Rahv *et al*, who regarded it as an attempt to regulate their critical activity, and to impose some kind of political control - or patronage - on them. In reply they accentuated one aspect of *Literature and Revolution*, and Trotsky's support for a politically engaged art - with which *Partisan Review* broadly agreed - was forgotten by the journal's editors as their relationship with founder of the Fourth International deteriorated. In effect, Trotsky was seen as attempting to regulate the behaviour of independent intellectuals. According to Ross and Wald, political breaks of this nature also expressed a desire to disengage from political commitment entirely, especially the routine activities that took place under some form or organisational discipline. Like writers for the *Menorrah Journal* before them, the *Partisan* circle insisted on their special role as intellectuals, in contradistinction to the rank and file members of communist organisations. This anticipated the 'independence' that became a shibboleth among post-war thinkers, defining themselves in opposition to 'totalitarianism', and so forth.

In later years, this emphasis on 'cultural freedom' became a staple feature of Cold War discourse, as Serge Guilbaut and Judy Kutulas, among others, have demonstrated.

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[38] Trotsky, 'The Future of *Partisan Review*: A Letter to Dwight Macdonald' (January 20, 1938).

Coupled with the theories of totalitarianism that became popular in the late 1940s (from which we would exempt Hannah Arendt, whose work was largely *popularised* in this period), the loaded concept of 'cultural freedom' resonated among the growing band of intellectuals who were disillusioned with Stalinism, often rejecting any orientation toward social change in the process. In the case of totalitarianism, what began as an inaccurate grasp of Soviet society culminated in claims that the Nazi and Soviet regimes were identical. Such an argument exculpated a morally compromised US establishment, and the market system, from any blame for the Depression and subsequent war. Conversely, it punctured the Soviet Union's new-found moral authority, gained whilst a western ally and an ostensibly anti-colonial power, and perceived as an island of prosperity in an ocean of recessionary trends. In the absence of anything more coherent, the early, sophisticated rejection of CP 'patronage', initially argued from the left, provided some of the raw material and vocabulary for later Cold War discourses. Regardless of intent, *Partisan Review* provided an important arena for this process to occur in.

Conclusion

The absence of a coherent grasp of the world situation militated against the further development of the narrative and representational strategies generated in response to the slump. This is not to suggest that a wrong political line led to poor literary endeavours; indeed, memorable works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Johnny Got His Gun* suggest that the opposite is true. Rather, we contend that political disengagement robbed the literary left of its earlier moral outrage and sense of urgency. Moreover, if the horizons of the radical cultural movement were to be restricted to supporting the Roosevelt administration at war, the question of a literature of social transformation appeared obsolete. Although not wishing to endorse those accounts that stress a continuation of 'Third Period' policies as the basis for preventing the war and its Cold War aftermath,[39] a critical approach to what Lukacs called the 'second imperialist inferno'[40] would at least have provided some guarantee of the exposure of the anti-democratic terms of its resolution.

To claim that the total annihilation of the earlier, more radical forms of political and cultural critique occurred would be to erase from history the minority of thinkers and activists who attempted to maintain an independent, oppositional stance. (Indeed, a number of these have made cameo appearances throughout our discussion, including Paul Mattick, James P. Cannon and C.L.R. James.) Although it is questionable whether V.F. Calverton would have maintained a broadly equivalent approach for the duration of the war, his untimely death makes such speculation irrelevant. The situation was not entirely lost in terms of the personnel available to sustain and extend the radicalism of the 1930s *including its anti-war component*, but the balance of forces shifted irrevocably against them. The forms of American radicalism later categorised as the

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[39] This strange perspective is argued in John Gerassi, 'The Comintern, the Fronts, and the CPUSA', in Michael E. Brown et al (eds.), *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of US Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), pp.75-90.

[40] An expression used by Georg Lukacs in *The Destruction of Reason* (1962) (London: Merlin, 1980).

Culture Critique[41] disintegrated, lacking substantial support in society and experiencing difficulty in withstanding the intellectual pressures brought about by Stalinism and war.

In so far as there are continuities between our initial hypothesis and the shift to a war footing, the 'fearful symmetry' between state and culture is striking. Once again, the role of the state was regarded as both necessary and repellent, as post-slump counter-crisis measures were replaced with preparation for war. In turn, it was the pursuit of 'politics by other means' and not the New Deal that brought the slump to a close. In Paul Mattick's assessment, 'the depression was finally ended not by a new prosperity [predicated on the New Deal] but through World War II, that is, through the colossal destruction of capital on a worldwide scale and restructuring of the world economy that assured the profitable expansion of capital for another period'.[42] It was on this basis, rather than as a result of any successful intervention by Roosevelt and his colleagues, that the legitimation crisis was both transcended and institutionalised.

On one hand, the outcome of the war led to the post-war boom, in turn securing mass consent for the Truman administration. On the other, the international prestige of the market economy was in tatters, a potentially emancipatory development that was as daunting to the elite as the depression itself. Clearly, the basis for the subsequent denigration of 'the Thirties' can be located as much in the war as in the slump. As we argue elsewhere, it took both real prosperity and a makeshift system of apologetics hinging on the notion of totalitarianism to rectify this situation. However, that the war remains an explosive issue can be seen in the recent storm over the Smithsonian Institute's 'Enola Gay' exhibition, which sought gently to pose questions over the morality of using the Atom Bomb on a defeated Japan. Continuing in the 'useable' past tradition of turning history into a contemporary resource, the war is the focus today of numerous controversies - over the meaning of the past - that revolve around the question of legitimacy in the present.

Throughout this study we have argued that cultural patronage was an historically specific response to legitimation crisis and economic slump. In the case of state patronage, it began as a form of unemployment relief for cultural practitioners. However, this alerted various administrators, and their opponents, to the possibility of mobilising cultural production in support of the state formation. Taken together, the themes associated with such production pitched a discursive appeal to 'the people', itself an entity that had to be constructed by the Roosevelt administration and its supporters. Drawing upon Gramsci, we characterised this as a state-led attempt to mobilise a national-popular hegemonic bloc. This marked a break with the nativist politics of the 1920s, and was consequently experienced as a somewhat hateful compromise by sections of the political classes. Their attempts to overturn the New Deal were largely unsuccessful, except in relation to the contentious question of cultural policy. Here, the growing backlash against WPA Federal One was made irrelevant by the effective closure of the project through wartime reorganisation.

The American Communist Party was part of a parallel process. Its members involved in cultural production, primarily through the *New Masses* magazine, also sought to mobilise an historic bloc, conceived as the industrial working class in the 'Third Period' and 'the people' subsequently. This provided the basis for the slogan 'art is a weapon in the class struggle', which was widely interpreted as meaning that the Party commissioned works that were primarily propagandist (hence the idea of party patronage). On closer inspection, both the incoherence of the 'Party line in literature' and the relatively diverse range of works produced suggests that this is a crude reading of cultural history. Nevertheless, there *was* a broad culture of the left, underpinned by organisational networks and affiliations, in which political considerations could make or break literary careers. It was also a culture hegemonised by the CPUSA, the changing wartime fortunes of which contributed to the unravelling of these arrangements and forms of patronage. Collectively, the backlash against New Deal culture and the CP was such that it not only broke the symbolic coupling of 'culture and the crisis' but also initiated a discourse anticipating that of the Cold War.

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[41] Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987), pp.155-187.

[42] Paul Mattick, *Economics, Politics, and the Age of Inflation* (London: Merlin, 1978), p.141.

As a slump-ridden bridge between two intense bouts of international barbarism, the 1930s occasioned an upsurge of interest in the potentialities of social change. When such change did not materialise, at least on the terms anticipated by its adherents, cultural pessimism was the result. One form of this was the construction of 'the Thirties' as a hegemonic account of a capitalist crisis in which the word 'crisis' was barely mentioned. Moreover, such tropes were inextricably linked to the Cold War itself. In closing this study, we shall consider trends in current scholarship on the 1930s/'the Thirties', occurring at a time when the old framework has lost much of its meaning and coherence.

Chapter 9 - 'Clever Hopes Expire': Patronage and 'the Thirties' in the 1990s

This study began by asking this question: was cultural patronage a central response to the slump in the late 1920s and, if so, why? In turn, this obliged us to identify the sources of such patronage, namely the state and a more loosely defined literary left, centred upon the US Communist Party. It was suggested that these issues could be tackled from a comparative perspective, breaking with the orientation of numerous earlier studies. Despite a proliferation of accounts devoted to excavating the 1930s, few attempted to unite the cultural production conducted under the auspices of the state with that of the literary left. Such discussions were largely confined to the issue of project personnel, because the activities of communists on Federal One - real or imagined - had figured significantly in the downfall of the latter in the late 1930s. In short, this study is an attempt to bridge the chasm between two closely related arenas of cultural production. Its key for overcoming the left/state divide in cultural history is the notion of patronage.

The question posed herein is not 'what is patronage' but 'what was the historically specific content of cultural patronage during the 1930s'. In general and ahistorical terms, patronage can be seen as a relationship of support *and* control of cultural production by a public institution. In the context of the inter-war period, which has been characterised throughout this study as an era of legitimation crisis, culture became an arena in which alternatives to the crisis were proposed.

On the part of the state itself, the predominant pattern was one of experimentation, even though the Roosevelt administration inherited cultural policy-determining bodies from its predecessors that mixed social control with an antiquarian aesthetic vision. In terms of the former, the Radio Act of 1927 banned blasphemous material from the airwaves (despite the formal separation of church and state), while measures for regulating the interstate transportation of movies were maintained.[1] The reorganised state formation under the New Deal held on to all of the repressive facilities available to its predecessors, apart from Prohibition, reminding us of the non-negotiable role of the state in the sphere of coercion. In terms of cultural patronage, the Commission of Fine Arts struggled to ensure that the federal 'house style' of building design combined Athens with Imperial Rome, more recent influences being regarded with suspicion. One consequence of the New Deal was that it minimised the influence of such institutions. Roosevelt initiated the provision of unemployment relief for cultural practitioners, by giving them 'socially useful' tasks to perform. Over time, it became clear that these state functions were closely aligned to the New Deal - itself a hegemonic strategy - but that did not exempt them from a multiplicity of tensions and contradictions.

Similar trends were apparent on the literary left. In the 1930s, 'commitment' became *de rigeur* among artists and writers. For some this represented a serious dedication to social change; to others, it was it was but a transient stage in their careers. Social crisis fuelled widespread political engagement, among workers in the mass culture industries (e.g. hard-boiled writers) and ostensibly modernist writers alike. Sections of the Communist Party, like some of their competitors on the far left, attempted to harness this new sensibility to enhance the overall political standing of the group to which they were affiliated. On this basis, it is appropriate to discuss the relationships forged between politics and culture in terms of patronage. Writers, especially those about to embark on their careers, stood to gain from an association with the Party. Organisations like the John Reed Clubs, were part autonomous and partly ran by CP officials working behind the scenes.

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[1] 'The motion picture was [seen as] an immoral intrusion which poisoned the minds of the innocent especially children and immigrants' (Louise M. Benjamin, 'Defining the Public Interest and Protecting the Public Welfare in the 1920s: parallels between radio and movie regulation', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.12, No. 1,1992).

At this point, it appears that the essentials of a patronage relationship existed: cultural producers gained the material support of a public institution, in exchange for their political allegiance. Unlike the state-sponsored artists and writers of the WPA, the Party seldom offered a steady income to aspiring writers and artists: instead, it allowed them exposure and access to a large, sympathetic audience, especially through the *New Masses* magazine. Cultural practitioners who worked full-time for the organisation were under even greater pressure to conform; some, such as Robert Minor,[2] gave up cultural work for political activity, while others, such as Albert Halper, eventually abandoned political affiliations and prioritised the pursuit of their literary careers. Conversely, those who earned the enmity of the CP could find their work subjected to a bureaucratic wrecking campaign or worse. Given this, it has been alleged that there was 'communist infiltration of the arts', attempting to subordinate cultural practitioners to a 'party line in literature'. Especially in the 1950s, commentators constantly reminded their audiences of the Party slogan 'art is a weapon in the class struggle'.

The experience of cultural workers and aspiring social and literary critics breaking with the CP contributed to the 'liberal narrative' which formed a significant strand of Cold War thought.[3] According to the consensus, writers had experimented with radical politics, either as a youthful indiscretion or something more sinister; ultimately, this meant that they gave succour to a 'totalitarian' regime. In fiction, Lionel Trilling's novel *The Middle of the Journey*[4] became an authoritative account of this process. Among the Cold War intelligentsia, organised politics and social change were eschewed, in favour of cultural production informed by a sensibility of 'art for art's sake'. 'Commitment' became a highly suspect and dubious attribute; 'cultural freedom' was its antithesis.

In short, the patronage that this thesis set out to investigate has also formed the backdrop to the *rewriting the of history of the inter-war period.* Thus, throughout this study we have encountered numerous secondary sources, from Eugene Lyons's *The Red Decade*[5] onwards, which have contributed to a received image of the 1930s based on a sequence of falsely polarised binary oppositions: proletarian culture versus individual creativity, fellow travellers against genuine liberal democrats, democracy against totalitarianism. This sequence of false polarities has long informed perceptions of patronage in the 1930s, even whilst constituting a prism through which the decade as a whole was viewed.

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[2] Minor (1884-1952) was a pioneering radical cartoonist who became *Daily Worker* editor and an assistant to Earl Browder. He also served on the CP's Central Committee and Control Commission. See M. Bird, 'Robert Minor', *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Chicago: St. James, 1990), p.475.

[3] See Thomas Hill Schaub, *American Fiction and the Cold War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 7-9.

[4] Trilling, *The Middle of the Journey* (1947) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.)

[5] It is disputable whether *The Red Decade* is a primary or secondary source. In this study it is regarded as both; on the cusp of struggles within the literary left, it was also a journalistic attempt to explain the 1930s and, less consciously, to construct 'the Thirties'.

Beyond a binary

Despite most scholars rejecting this simplistic framework, especially in a post-Cold War context, it has persisted in a number of 'middlebrow' forums, such as memoirs, obituaries, magazine journalism and undergraduate textbooks. Throughout our study, this process was referred to as one of constructing 'the Thirties', the predominant myth and received image of the inter-war period. It demanded that we read cultural history on two levels, by excavating and contextualising concrete events and social processes (i.e. the 1930s) *and* interrogating the mythology of 'the Thirties'. On the surface, such a division appears unjustifiable, as myth and reality mingle freely in the popular memory. As was noted at the outset of this study, history can become a political resource in the present, while acts of periodisation (decades, 'the depression era', 'the anxious years' and so forth) offer a mechanism with which to impose order on events or break up enormous periods of social development into manageable units. As historians, the events and experiences of an era *and* their subsequent reconstruction confront us simultaneously. As with the initially unwieldy notion of patronage, the key factor is to uncover the historically specific content of a given phenomenon. While the process of narrating the 1930s has often made 'real' and 'invented' elements indistinguishable, our own excavation of the period has insisted upon a clear demarcation of these different elements. This is significant because the real and invented elements became intertwined so compellingly, especially in the 'liberal narrative'.

The state became a major cultural patron because of the peculiar counter-crisis measures it adopted, but this was seldom discussed in accounts of 'the Thirties'. Instead, the cultural activities conducted in the orbit of the Communist Party have attracted seemingly endless scrutiny. Thus, in terms of the academic resources devoted to aspects of 1930s culture that are under constant discussion, the CPUSA has eclipsed the Roosevelt administration, in a manner that it proved incapable of doing in reality. A hypothesis concerning this seemingly distorted order of priorities is outlined below.

In effect, the present study has been engaging in two discussions simultaneously. Whilst the immediate object of study was the question of cultural patronage, this also meant that it collided with the selective amnesia and formulaic conclusions that inform a multitude of accounts of the 1930s. Characterisations of patronage and the evolution of 'the Thirties' as a discursive construct have been highly interdependent. Thus, while the documentary images of the decade were largely derived from federally sponsored sources, especially the Farm Securities Administration, the image of the 'Red Decade' was made possible by the insistence *in non-specialist secondary accounts* that the CP functioned as a cultural patron. All too often, the price of this interdependency has been clarity. Although numerous specialist studies of federal cultural projects have appeared since the late 1960s, such writing has been overshadowed by the preoccupation with American Communism, and especially its dealings with writers. An orientation of this nature is not problematic in its own terms, but it might appear to a casual onlooker that the CPUSA was more significant - both as a cultural patron and in general - than the US state, given the disproportionate attention lavished on the former. This unusual intellectual terrain helped to ensure that many of the binary oppositions described above became embedded in the process of remembering the 1930s.

However, as we saw in Chapter One, there exists a rational explanation for this strange pattern of historical memory. Our account presented the launch of the *Culture and the Crisis* manifesto as a 'moment' in the legitimation crisis of the inter-war years. Bearing the signatures of dozens of prominent intellectuals who supported the 1932 Communist presidential slate, this document - and its parent organisation, the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford[6] - signified the extent to which intellectuals were disillusioned with the social order. Although its origins can be traced at least as far back as the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti, such disaffection became especially acute with the onset the Depression. Dissident intellectuals believed that 'culture' was both endangered by the crisis *and* a resource in the struggle to transcend it. Onlookers of a more traditionalist persuasion experienced this as a 'lost generation'; it appeared that an entire layer of the best and brightest were abandoning conventional values and throwing in their lot with the Soviet Union. Although the extent and seriousness of intellectual radicalism is often exaggerated, the overall experience was to serve as a permanent reminder of the upheavals of the inter-war period after 1939. Established commentators execrated and ridiculed committed writers, while former participants in literary radicalism - themselves often adopting a more conservative post-war orientation - attempted to rationalise their past activities as youthful indiscretions.

In the post-war period, this produced dozens of popular articles, memoirs and other '*Red Decade*' or liberal anticommunist accounts, which were pivotal to the construction of 'the Thirties'. Connections between the rise of a *marxisant* cultural critique and the Depression were obscured or erased. Recognising this, our study has characterised 'the Thirties' as a system of makeshift apologetics for the failings of the market system, where economic breakdown becomes obscured behind a narrative of intellectual duplicity and communist conspiracy. On the discursive plane, this represented a shift from politics to culture. In contrast, we have emphasised the role of the state as the primary instigator of cultural patronage. Not only is the notion of a 'party line in literature' outrageously simplistic and too caricatured to be of much use, as numerous scholars have demonstrated; more significantly, the rise of the New Deal cultural programmes suggests that supporters of the CP were not the only people to formulate an approach linking culture and crisis. As the first four chapters of our study attempted to demonstrate, the New Deal incorporated cultural production into the package of counter-crisis measures that formed part of its overall hegemonic strategy. This process also reveals numerous points of convergence, even symmetry, with the activities of the literary left. On this basis, it formed the logical starting point for this study.

At an institutional level, America's post-1918 settlement established the patterns of domination that persisted almost unchanged until the onset of slump in 1929, while also precipitating a legitimation crisis. On one hand, the United States emerged as a global power characterised by exceptional conditions for capital accumulation, namely a colossal internal market and a large - and largely quiescent - population. On the other, the repressive measures used to establish such patterns alienated large sections of the population from the state. Thus, the immigrant working class was hounded by a variety of policing agencies, while many American intellectuals felt that US participation in the First World War had been a tragic folly. Moreover, both groups shared a common contempt for Prohibition. However, the coercion that afflicted them served another purpose, in that it allowed the authorities to cohere the support of other social constituencies, such as 'old stock' citizens. In John Dos Passos's famous phrase, America was 'two nations'.

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[6] For more details on the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, see the appendix to the present study.

This framework of inclusion and exclusion, legitimation and repression, was sustainable in conditions of unparalleled prosperity. Although not everyone shared in the fruits of the boom, the *perception* of prosperity was an important element in bolstering the Republican administrations of Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. As the failings of the market system became clear for all to see, increased state intervention was the response. Whereas demographic change made the nativist politics of the 1920s largely irrelevant, the slump robbed entrepreneurs and incumbent politicians alike of any remaining credibility. The state intervention that ensued was an attempt to compensate for this, but it also involved a violation of the normative political principles that insisted on a separation of the state and civil society into discrete spheres of social life. Pierre Machery's comments on ideology serve as a useful summary of the double-edged character of such intervention:

> Ideology is essentially contradictory, riddled with all sorts of conflicts which it attempts to conceal. All kinds of devices are constructed in order to conceal these contradictions; but by concealing them, they somehow reveal them.[7]

Chapter One sought to locate the New Deal within this problematic. The activities and programme of the Roosevelt administration were characterised as a package of counter-crisis measures, conceived and implemented in order to resolve economic and structural problems, while legitimating the state itself. Public institutions engaged in a concerted attempt to foster a consensus and procure support for a specific 'accumulation strategy'. Although this process ameliorated some of the worst aspects of the depression, it proved insufficient to effect a full-scale recovery; this took another world war and a subsequent period of consolidation between 1945 and 1948. Overall, this process was experienced by the US elite as one of compromise, in which the free market was violated by state intervention and normative assumptions about social hierarchy had to be jettisoned. (Although space does not permit a more detailed discussion, this uncertainty was reproduced throughout the Western world.) Under the New Deal, ideological contradictions of the type identified by Machery were widespread. Our study has attempted to demonstrate that these tensions were the central dynamic of cultural patronage in the 1930s.

Two Traditions

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[7] 'An Interview with Pierre Machery' (ed. and trans.) Colin Mercer and Jean Radford, *Red Letters*, Summer 1977, p.5.

Although the arrangements described above were novel, they were not simply unveiled' by an all-powerful state, which could then freely deploy them as appropriate. On the contrary, the Roosevelt administration inherited a rudimentary cultural policy framework that was far from suitable for an innovative hegemonic strategy. Coercion and regulation aside, the limited arts patronage that occurred prior to the New Deal was largely an appendage of government activity. Thus, when a monument was being designed or a public building embellished, state-appointed experts were consulted. Such specialists met as the Commission of Fine Arts, established in 1912. In Chapter Two, we saw how the Commission's idea of 'culture' conflicted with the arts programmes initiated by the Roosevelt administration. Whereas America's distinct patterns of social development mitigated against the emergence of 'traditional intellectuals' akin to European *clercs*, Commission members - led by Charles Moore - styled themselves on these conventional cultural arbiters. Thus, in Commission correspondence with Roosevelt, cultural production is valorised largely on the basis of its age.

If a Commission aesthetic existed, it was largely expressed in terms of what it wasn't: neither 'modernist', 'folk' nor mass cultural in its origins. This vision proved incompatible with any attempt to provide artists and writers with unemployment relief, in exchange for their services to the state. In short, Chapter Two set out to explore the limitations inherent in federal arts policy prior to the New Deal, and the notions of a national cultural tradition that this entailed. The Commission defined its role in terms of defending standards in art, but this was a largely *negative* definition: an idealised American classical tradition that could not be experimental, demotic or commercialised. An element of negative self-definition also crept into the variety of unemployment relief projects initiated under the New Deal. Initially, the primary objective of these schemes was providing support for jobless cultural practitioners; rather than pay out 'dole' directly, the government enrolled large numbers of artists and writers to perform 'socially useful' tasks. The criterion of 'socially useful' had a direct bearing on the emergence of federal art as a distinct cultural tradition. According to this standard, government funded artists and writers were discouraged from replicating the work of the mass culture industries, and from producing 'art for art's sake'. The main effect of this was that a folky, craft-produced tradition, which later crystallised into a 'national inventory' of the 'usable past', came to the fore as the officially-recognised national tradition. This *ad hoc* process was considered at length Chapter Three.

Federal One administrators created what was effectively a mass communications apparatus on an industrial scale, using the such media as murals, easel paintings in public galleries, and drama performed before millions of people. Paradoxically, they insisted that this *de facto* industry operated on a craft basis. Photography, for instance, was a permissible means of recording federal art - murals, sculptures, theatrical productions - but an unacceptable technique with which to *produce* it. Only with hindsight was the famous photography of the Farm Security Administration regarded as artistic; it was commissioned by government officials as an administrative and propagandistic device. These institutional linkages also helped to determine the predominant formulation of national identity present throughout Federal One. Thus, the discussion of national art in terms of a folk realism had two main effects: first, it reflected a democratising impulse in which anyone could have access to art and theatre, not just an educated *cognoscenti*. Secondly, it projected the view that official images of heritage and the nation were synonymous with 'the people'. On this basis, we identified federal art as an attempt to fashion what Antonio Gramsci termed a 'national-popular' historic bloc, albeit one built from above by the state. Government-sponsored cultural production exemplified the efforts of the Roosevelt administration to forge a vast political coalition, in the process incorporating the masses into the political system. Whereas the 'structural' components of the New Deal - electoral mobilisation, pork-barrel politics, labour legislation, counter-crisis measures - ensured its success, the arts programmes embedded this process in countless murals and canvases.

Chapter Four considered the documentary character of this approach. We argued that documentary was not simply a 'window on the world', but an active relationship between observer and observed. Moreover, in the process of recording the consequences of the depression, Federal One signalled the demise of an earlier tradition. When representing the present, documentary concretised the failure of the market; in exploring the past, it challenged the assorted orthodoxies of previous generations. Thus, when Social-Ethnic Units appeared as part of the Federal Writers' Project, it suggested the ideological shift that was under way. Whereas 'cultural policy' in the 1920s was forcibly 'assimilationist' (i.e. nativist), revolving around the exclusion of the 'new immigrants', in the 1930s it is not only embraced this group, it even sought to research their heritage. As such, documentary was a language of compromise that also provided the decade with its distinctive 'look'. In the second section of the study, summarised below, this approach moved beyond state-sponsored cultural production.

Red Letters Revisited

The reorientation of the US political life around anti-communism in the post-war facilitated the rise of a myth of party patronage. In accounts by New York Intellectuals - many of whom fashioned a makeshift Cold War ideology out of their experience of 1930s cultural politics - the CP procured propagandist novels and agitational, cartoon-like figurative art to further its totalitarian project. This interpretation caricatures the complex relationship that existed between the CP and the cultural practitioners that constituted much of the literary left. Such connections acquired a qualitatively different momentum with the widespread support given by intellectuals to the Foster and Ford slate in the 1932 presidential election. Nevertheless, the organisations that attempted to concretise the rise of 'commitment', and the capacity of Party publications like the *New Masses* to make or break writers, suggests that the concept of patronage can provide a useful starting point from which to discuss the literary left, and compare its activities and output to that of Federal One.

An important arena in which such tensions were played out was the mass culture industries. In the 1920s and 1930s, the hard-boiled detective genre expanded rapidly, first in magazines, then in novels. Although commercially marketed, such writing foreshadowed the 'proletarian movement' in a number of important respects (Chapter Five considers this theme at length). First, the hard-boiled novel was written in an approximation of vernacular speech. Secondly, it incorporated documentary forms of representation, from the textual inclusion of pseudo-documents to the reproduction of underworld slang. Thirdly, it enunciated a contempt for elites, often by erasing the public distinction between public institutions and the underworld; corruption became emblematic in hard-boiled fiction. Each of these factors demarcated it from earlier, more genteel forms of detective fiction, in a distinctive national idiom. We presented Dashiell Hammett as the exemplar of this process. As we showed through comparative textual analysis, hard-boiled and proletarian fiction were closely related.

This would suggest that the body of documentary-orientated 'Red Letters' of the 1930s, aligned to Third Period Communism, was not as rigidly separate from mainstream American culture as subsequent critics suggested. Even as the CP adopted its Popular Front perspectives, which proved conclusive to co-operation between the CP and established writers, hard-boiled writing continued to embody an outlook that was highly critical of the social order. In contrast to the experiment in proletarian fiction, hard-boiled secured a large popular audience, suggesting the possibility of developing politicised mass cultural forms and genres.

Central to our overall argument is the controversy over proletarian literature. Like a number of revisionist scholars, we attempted to dispense with the caricature of a 'party line in literature'; no such thing existed in the terms in which is conventionally presented. Although Party literature (especially propaganda like the *Daily Worker*) was organised around a political line, there is little evidence to suggest that the CP's collective leadership actively legislated for novels, poetry and non agit-prop drama to perform this function. As has been argued throughout, one of the great paradoxes of proletarian fiction is the way that scholars discredited the Cold War approach to this topic within the academy, while this caricature has persisted in accounts intended for a general readership. On this basis, allegations of Party patronage - meaning complete political and aesthetic control - are far from credible.

However, some of the effects associated with patronage - and emphasised in Cold War criticism - were plain to see. Firstly, association with the CP would boost a literary career (at least until 1941, that is). Secondly, it offered new opportunities for writers and artists wishing to establish themselves. Thirdly, a number of novels and short stories appeared, deploying a moral critique of capitalism that was often didactic in character. While this has been frequently read as a consequence of party instructions, the present study argues that it was a rational and humane response to the slump. On this basis, proletarian writing - like the federal art it coexisted with - became something of a monument, reminding its audience of the failings of the free market. Given this, the commentators involved in constructing 'the Thirties' have responded by emphasising the misguided outlook of proletarian cultural practitioners. In so far as any basis exists for the allegation of 'a line', we argue, it reflects the CP's pursuit of its political objectives among writers, e.g. in relation to the Moscow Trials.[8] This is not to make the case *for* proletarian literature which was, at the end of the day, a politicised variant of extant realist traditions and mass culture industry practice. Instead we point to its emblematic usage by post-1939 critics in a polarised moral fable, partly designed to discredit 'commitment' to radical social change.

Moreover, the development of moral critiques of the slump did not require political instructions. As we saw in Chapter Six, a substantial 'proletarian periphery' existed, far removed from the direct influence of the CP. This trend was explored by a focus on a number of writers, none of whom can be seen as the literary proxies of the CPUSA. We began by looking at what a number of historically specific responses to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* revealed about wider social uncertainties. We then considered the relationship between the realist, anti-authoritarian fiction of B. Traven and the New York literary world. Once again, many of the didactic anti-capitalist themes associated with the proletarian movement appeared elsewhere, in this instance in the mass circulation adventure stories of a European emigre. This moral critique of capitalism was asserted even more explicitly in the fiction which revolved around characters exploring the nation, from Dos Passos's *USA* to Nelson Algren's *Somebody in Boots*. Likewise, when these journeys came to a halt at a dance marathon, a popular form of entertainment in the inter-war period, similar conclusions were reached; James T. Farrell and Horace McCoy exemplified this trend. In short, our argument here is that the experience of the Depression was such that stinging indictments of capitalism featured prominently in Depression-era fiction *regardless* of patronage or a 'party line in literature'.

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[8] Judy Kutulas, *The Long War: The Intellectual People's Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930-1940* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1995), pp 106-113.

To explore these contradictions further, we turned to the life and work of V.F. Calverton. Chapter Seven made no claims to provide an extensive biography of Calverton: instead, it considered his life in terms of its capacity to navigate many of the key trends explored in this thesis. On this basis, he was treated as a 'typical' figure; not 'typical' in the sense that he was ordinary, but as someone who typified the social pressures of his era. As such, Calverton provides a useful model. In the post-war period, Calverton has been discussed in terms of the 'independence' from the CP, a paradigm largely reflective of liberal anti-communism. The emphasis of our study was different: it looked at Calverton's attempts to develop a cultural critique that embraced practical politics, to find a satisfactory formulation of proletarian literature and to develop a methodology for producing politicised novels.

The results of this process were uneven; Calverton was politically eclectic, undisciplined and often an unoriginal thinker and tedious writer, prone to self-destructive behaviour. However, Calverton's emphasis on the importance of propaganda - a 'battle of ideas' - and his anti-war orientation (as late as 1940) demonstrated what was *necessary* for the survival and even expansion of the 1930s cultural critique. It is speculative whether this process could have continued, given his premature death, and it is unlikely that his 'Calvertonian Marxism' could have survived unchanged in conditions of post-war US hegemony. Calverton's importance is two-fold: he serves as a reminder of the missed opportunities of the 1930s cultural left, while leaving a legacy with which to interrogate myths about 'the Thirties'.

Taken together, the sections on federal arts patronage and the literary left intelligentsia provide the starting point for a comprehensive critique of cultural politics in the inter-war years. Each became an arena in which relationships between public institutions and cultural production were initiated, with a view to overcoming the crisis precipitated by the slump. Both were a product of extreme conditions; both displayed a common fascination with heritage and documentary. On this basis, they represent attempts to establish a national-popular hegemonic bloc, using cultural production as a mechanism with which to facilitate this. Even at the level of personnel, there was considerable overlap between federal project staff and radical left cultural practitioners. Thus, each aspect of the 1930s experience can be seen as an attempt to transcend the crisis, yet they are inextricably linked to problems of legitimation. They created the scope to attempt to resolve the crisis but, in the process, created an institutional reminder of the failure of the market system. Hence our emphasis on the New Deal as a compromise, later obscured by an insistence among post-war cultural critics on the evil / duplicity / vulgarity inherent in CP cultural interventions.

Chapter Eight dealt with the breakdown of this embryonic tradition of patronage, in the process reuniting the two separate strands of our argument. After being subject to a campaign of anticommunist harassment, Federal One closed down the Federal Theatre Project. Similar trends affected other departments of Federal One, but the project was quietly assimilated into the US war effort, at which point it withered away. The exigencies of fighting a war, coupled with tensions over the issue of communism, saw the virtual disappearance of Federal One; the government remained a 'reluctant patron'[9] thereafter, until the setting up of the National Endowment for the Arts in the 1960s. During the Cold War, the realist figurative style associated with depression-era art also came under attack, expressed most famously in the CIA's covert support for abstract expressionism.[10]

Similar trends beset the literary left. Many of the latent political tensions within this milieu were brought to the fore by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which dented the Soviet Union's enormous moral authority. The Party twisted and turned to accommodate the new line: Popular Front support for Roosevelt, fleeting opposition to what the CP temporarily characterised as imperialist war, followed by backing the Allies. Needless to say, all this helped to disorient fellow travellers of the CP, including cultural practitioners. Others were assimilated into the war effort, through state appendages like the Office of War Information. Amid such conditions the New York Intellectuals were able to establish themselves as an influential section of the post-war intelligentsia and they played a significant role in theorising a liberal anticommunist consensus. Although a topic for another book-length work, the experience of 1930s cultural politics came to inform the vocabulary and conceptual framework of Cold War thought. In the sphere of ideology, cultural patronage played an almost constitutive role in this process.

The end of the Cold War also undermines the traditional basis on which 1930s cultural patronage was considered. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 led to a brief upsurge of triumphalism. Alternatives to the market were ridiculed, history had ended, and promises of a peace dividend and a new era of prosperity were widespread. The place of 'culture' in this new consensus was uncertain, with delegates at the 1992 Republican Party convention being promised a 'cultural war for the soul of America', and academics anticipating a cultural basis for the 'Clash of Civilisations'.[11] In terms of 1930s culture, the end of the Cold War has presented traditionalists with an opportunity to settle scores. In effect, the collapse of the Soviet Union further demonstrated that the literary fellow travellers had been wrong all along. Thus, in a conservative *tour de force*, Edward Walter uncritically resurrects the notion of the 'Red Decade' to praise

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[9] Gary O'Larson, *The Reluctant Patron: The US Government and the Arts, 1943-1966* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[10] Serge Guilbaut, *HowNew York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Freedom, Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), p.198.

[11] See Samuel P. Huntingdon, 'The Clash of Civilisations', *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

Eugene Lyons and damn the likes of Edmund Wilson, George Soule and Corliss Lamont. Despite conceding the existence of the Great Depression and the injustice of Hoover's assault on the Bonus Army, his real venom is reserved for Group Theater and its successors, among whom he numbers director Oliver Stone and his movie *JFK*. Walter's polemic even contains a complaint that Soviet sympathisers in the 'American intellectual Hall of Fame' 'have not been removed'.[12] Because this strand of the discussion seeks to continue the Cold War, constructing 'the Thirties' along conventional lines, it is largely anachronistic.[13]

A subsidiary component of the emerging consensus is the concatenation of inter-war barbarism with the consequences of the break up of the Cold War order, discussed as a resurgence of ethnic and tribal hatreds. While Eric Hobsbawm's pessimistic emphasis on a new 'age of unreason' has found a wide resonance, we would argue that the events accompanying these perceptions suggest that the ongoing obituaries for Marxism are premature. However, attempts like Hobsbawm's to present a general outline of social trends are under attack from postmodernist perspectives that can be located within an approach that we describe as the new historicism. While space does not permit a more detailed discussion of postmodernism *per se*, we now expand our critique of 'the Thirties' to consider the impact of present day intellectual trends. These can be summarised as a rapidly declining post-Cold War triumphalism, a bleak pessimism of the Spenglerian 'Clash of Civilisations' variety, and a postmodern relativism, all of which are considered below. What unites these approaches is their hostility to radical change.

Paradigms Lost

On the surface, the experience of the 1930s would appear strangely immune to current trends in cultural theory. On one hand, mass hardship drastically reduced consumer expenditure, undermining the scope to investigate the 'politics of pleasure' prevalent in contemporary analysis. On the other, the widespread fascination with developing political solutions to the crisis suggests that the aversion to 'metanarratives', notably Marxism, makes the 'post-political' 1930s into inhospitable terrain for postmodernism. However, if we accept for a moment that the vogue for postmodernism is predicated upon developments beyond the influence of the Academy, one would expect to find a 'Thirties', or many Thirties, as contemporary ideological/mythological prisms through which the inter-war period is interpreted.

A growing band of contemporary critics would reject the notion of historical periods as a useful analytical category. In this small but increasingly significant area of 1930s scholarship, we find a new mythology being established. Whereas Cold War critics emphasised the nefarious 'totalitarian' role of the Communist Party, an approach modified by subsequent traditionalists, the new approach emphasises fragmentation, difference and pluralities. As one might expect, it appears not as a coherent school, but as a range of 'takes' on the past. Preliminary readings suggest at least four central themes. First, assessments of the 1930s are infused with a spirit of 'presentism', which can lead to the judgement of 1930s cultural production and associated policies by contemporary standards. This is distinct from attempting to learn from the past, or establish continuities between the present and earlier periods. Secondly, the broader process of excavation that is central to an accurate reconstruction of the trends discussed in previous chapters is conducted on more 'local' scale. The problem here is not this scale in itself, but more its attendant refusal to develop more extensive conclusions. Thirdly, there is a preponderance of 'identity politics', both as the criteria by which a subject is selected for discussion and as the basis on which the value of cultural responses to the slump is assessed. Finally, this blurring of past and present further occludes the historical 1930s beyond mythology.

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[12] Edward Walter, *The Rise and fall of Leftist Radicalism in America* (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1992), especially Chapters 3 and 4; citation is from pp. 24-25.

[13] In passing, we note that the main response of the declining CPUSA of the 1990s to such trends is that of remaining locked in the cultural struggles of its heyday. For instance, see Phillip Stein, 'The Legacy of Anti-Communism in the World of Art', *Political Affairs*, April 1995, pp. 16-21.

Such trends were clearly expressed in a recent account, Walter Kalaidjian's *American Culture Between the Wars*. A blend of postmodernism and Gramscian strategy, it seeks to draw lessons from the inter-war period in order to inform a politics adequate for the contemporary world. Having accepted that a 'postmodern condition' exists in the present, Kalaidjian attempts to explore continuities between the inter-war period and today. On one hand he insists that 'no reconstructed Marxist would try to graft a 1920s Soviet critique of the Russian avant-gardes onto first-world postmodernism without a considered account of each period's distinctive historical, social, and cultural milieus'.[14] On the other, he notes the implosion of 'social' as a stable referent, undermining a central assumption of the 1930s avant-garde. The numerous changes cited as ushering in the postmodern condition are open to dispute, while no explanation is offered as to whether or not these are sufficient to destabilise 'the social'. Moreover, while the 'decline of the social' may be pertinent to the analysis of developments in contemporary society, it is not necessarily relevant to an analysis of the 1930s. In short, Kalaidjian's interesting study fails to differentiate clearly between changes in the organisation and reproduction of society and theoretical challenges to conventional notions of society. Taken together, the lack of clarity over the comparative impact of social developments and of theory undermines his building of bridges back to the past as the basis for a more general historical understanding of the 20th Century.

Kalaidjian's examination of the relationship between early avant-gardes, a revisionary modernism, and postmodern cultural forms, is useful in one respect. Impressed by their common capacity to shock and innovate prior to their institutionalisation, Kalaidjian's analysis is subjectively aligned to a transformative cultural practice. Despite this, his approach obscures the process of change and continuity linking his historical and contemporary concerns. An analogous tendency appears, somewhat surprisingly, in a recent biography of Lewis Corey, the political economist and activist who features in the appendix to this study. On one hand, his output as a modern dance critic written under his real name, Louis Fraina, is praised. On the other, his biographer appears to chastise him for his indifference to animal rights and a lack of environmentalist thinking.[15] In judging an earlier cultural left by the standards of the present, we risk reading history backwards. Methodologically, there is a thin line dividing such 'presentism' from a more developed archaeology of culture. However, there *is* a difference between logically reconstructing the ways in which a writer or theorist anticipated subsequent trends, and assuming continuity where little exists. Thus, whereas Nathanael West gave shape to a sense that 'high culture is no more valuable, no more transformative, than what has been thought of as its mass-produced antagonist', is this sufficient to warrant his linkage with the Frankfurt School, as did a recent study of his novels?[16]

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[14] Kalaidjian, *American Culture Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.198.

[15] Paul M. Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and The Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Islands NJ.: Humanities Press International, 1995), pp. 57, 171-2.

The creeping pursuit of a self-consciously post-modern agenda in relation to the 1930s casts a shadow over the 'new histories of American Communism', and the related literary attempts at 'recovering the repressed'. Contemporary cultural theory's limited engagement with the 1930s is weighted decisively away from the state and the slump, favouring left-of-centre cultural practitioners. Studies of their local activities provide a daring counterpoint to conventional notions of a 'lost generation', and a monolithic CPUSA, but they also risk further fragmenting our understanding of the crises that generated such responses. If the lessons of the 1930s are to be learnt, then the decade must first be apprehended as a totality. This requires a process of mediation between the particular forms of this experience *and* the more general influence that leant them purpose and meaning. Hence, the structure of the present study, which moves from surface perceptions of a decade through its dominant influences to a consideration of the specific cultural forms produced in such conditions. On this basis, it also attempted to excavate the skeleton of the hegemonic 'Thirties' canon, and assess its related influence on the evolution of Cold War ideology. In turn, this emphasis on connecting mediations has allowed us to suggest the future development of 1930s analysis and 'the Thirties', by considering their place in a post-Cold War world.

By an irony of history, postmodernist accounts are now performing a role inherited unconsciously from the post-war architects of the hegemonic 'Thirties'. Whereas the latter effectively narrowed the key features of a decade to free art, bad art, and the Comintern, at least their depiction of history allocated social relations a walk-on part, usually in the guise of the slump. Conversely, today's postmodern theorists would dismiss such categories as capitalism and Stalinism as metanarratives; too large and beyond the realm of personal experience to warrant further consideration.[17] In this climate, any attempts to generalise about the 1930s without recourse to the totalising myths of the Cold War will inevitably invite criticism. The development of epistemologies that stress experience over theory has codified and generated endless conflicts in the field of cultural studies, in which authors risk 'privileging' one section of society to the detriment of another. Hence the recent comments of an exasperated communications historian, who declared that 'it is ludicrous to debate which of sexism, racism, "classism", or homophobia is most terrible, as if we were in some zero sum game'.[18]

Ironically, some of the first 'postmodernists' from outside the field of architecture, such as Daniel Bell, were members of the so-called crisis generation. Themes like post-industrial society and 'the end of ideology' were in circulation long before postmodern cultural theory could turn its attentions back six decades. As Ellen Meiksins Wood observes,

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[16] Rita Barnard, '"When You Wish Upon a Star": Fantasy, Experience and Mass Culture in Nathanael West', *American Literature*, Vol.66, No.2, June 1994, citation from p.341.

[17] See Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.1.

[18] Robert W. McChesney, 'Is There Any Hope for Cultural Studies?', *Monthly Review*, March 1996, p.4.

> What is striking about the current diagnosis of postmodernity is that it has so much in common with older pronouncements of death, both radical and reactionary versions. What has ended, apparently, is not so much another, different epoch but the same one all over again ... Yet none of us would want to deny the importance of some of these themes. For instance, the history of the twentieth century could hardly inspire confidence in traditional notions of progress, and those of us who profess to believe in some kind of "progressive" politics have to come to terms with all that has happened to undermine Enlightenment optimism.[19]

Indeed, these contemporary theories appear to echo those responses to the post-war boom that stressed the 'end of ideology', the 'consumer society' and the exhaustion of politics.

Today as in the 1950s, such theories have drawn sustenance from broader historical developments, ironically in order to deny the possibilities of historical change. Specifically, both Cold War liberalism and postmodernism offer self-vindication with reference to an apparent triumph of the West. Beneath this surface confidence lie greater uncertainties, and it is here that the comparisons start to break down. This study concludes by considering the 1930s in the nineties, an assessment of the lessons to be drawn from legitimation crisis then and now. In order to pave the way for this process, let us turn to the question of the fate of 'the Thirties', largely a construct of the Cold War, in a post-Cold War world.

There have been numerous responses to the end of the Cold War. Some critics have pursued the themes of Cold War liberalism as an expression of revolt against the radicals of the years after 1945. A cursory synopsis of the radicalism of the inter-war period, for instance, becomes an opportunity to allege delusions of grandeur on the part of 'some culture radicals', coupled with ridicule of their sense of being at the dawn of a new historical era. The faddish enthusiasm for Marxism among sections of particular generations provides the basis for a more general dismissal of historical change.[20] Alan Wald, a scholar-activist whose work has influenced this study, even recalls being presented with a copy of *Writers on the Left* to discourage his participation in the radical Students for a Democratic Society.[21] Indeed, the idea of a 'generation gap' that appeared in response to dissidents of Wald's generation could describe the situation in the 1930s equally well.[22] It appeared to commentators at the time that an entire layer of the best and brightest had abandoned the regnant social values, reflecting the incoherence of latter.[23]

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[19] Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'What is the "Postmodern" Agenda? An Introduction', *Monthly Review*, July-August 1995, pp. 4-9.

[20] Milton Cantor, *The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1975* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p.134.

[21] Wald, *Writing from the Left*, p.17. Autobiographical accounts of Wald's activities appear in his *The Responsibility of Intellectuals: Selected Essays on Marxist Traditions in Cultural Commitment* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. *xi-xv*.

[22] Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History & Society in an Anxious Age* (London: Pluto, 1992), p.167.

[23] Furedi, *Mythical Past*, p.167.

However, should those promoting this interpretation develop the analogy further, they would risk begging the question of the *origins* of such dissent: why did those whom Edmund Wilson, among others, saw as vastly superior writers and critics support Communist candidates Foster and Ford in 1932?[24] The standard replies are based on timeless assumptions as to how writers and other intellectuals respond to a given situation. Once again, a bowdlerised caricature of Benda's *Trahison des Clercs* thesis replaces scrutiny of real developments. The anti-human implications of this argument are evident; particular 'types' are destined to predetermined forms of conduct, irrespective of individual agency. Pessimistic in character, this argument attempts to discredit change, by erecting a continuum of failed attempts at radical change that included those of the present. Lacking in the passion of McCarthyism, this 'end of ideology' approach trivialises the upheavals of the years between 1968 and 1974. It draws sustenance from the mythologies of the Cold War and 'the Thirties'.

Is there an alternative to 'the Thirties'? More specifically, is it possible to develop a totalising approach to the inter-war years that avoids the teleology of 'the Thirties' and the narrow empiricism of the new historicism? Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* contains one such attempt. His thesis divides the 'short twentieth century' (1914-1989) into three components. The 'Age of Catastrophe' ends in 1945. It is followed by the 'Golden Age' (1945-1973), an era that gives way to 'the landslide' which brings us into the present. The 'extremes' appear to outweigh the benefits, especially given the fear and pessimism expressed in this central period. Moreover, the constitutive features of the world that Hobsbawm describes are largely derived from catastrophe, rather than periods of economic expansion. Thus, the 'Great Slump' deprived around a quarter of US workers of jobs throughout the 1930s, and 'destroyed economic liberalism for half a century', whilst opening 'the gates to the Second World War' in 1931. Conversely, 'the USSR appeared to be immune to the catastrophe'; without this, 'it is extremely unlikely that the Soviet system would have been regarded as a serious economic rival'.[25] This insistence on treating the inter-war period as a totality provides a useful counterpoint to the preoccupation with textual analysis and the biography of 'canonical' individuals which has shaped post-war assessments of the 1930s. Furthermore, it posits a basic socio-historical grounding for Hobsbawm's forays into high and popular culture; cultural production was, and remains, part of a 'big picture'.

Hobsbawm's thesis has provoked a number of responses. True to form, those of a broadly traditionalist orientation have taken issue with his assumptions.[26] At the same, a number of left-liberal commentators have derived comfort from his characterisation of the twentieth century as the 'Age of Extremes', as it appears to provide an unsettling antidote to post-Cold War triumphalism.[27] On balance, this account represents a timely but unfashionable attempt to present a totalising history of the century, in which slump and war are accorded an overarching role. Although we might wish to take issue with some of his analysis of (and prescriptions for) the world on the edge of the next millennium, Hobsbawm is clearly operating on a different plane to the postmodern relativism gathering momentum, in the academy and beyond.

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[24] Wilson, cited in Cantor, *The Divided Left*, p.134.

[25] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A Short History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), pp. 93-95, 107, 86.

[26] James Kurth, '"If Men Were Angels...": Reflections on the World of Eric Hobsbawm', *The National Interest*, Summer 1995. Hobsbawm is only nominally the object of this critique; Kurth's vitriol is largely reserved for human nature, the French Enlightenment, the urban underclass and unrestrained individualism. In this respect it is a traditionalist argument, making only a fleeting mention of the Great Depression.

[27] Justin Rosenberg, 'Hobsbawm's Century', *Monthly Review*, July-August 1995, pp.135-157.

None of this is to suggest, however, that relations of unmediated determinacy exist between cultural production and social relations. Indeed, we have argued throughout that *form*, like cultural artefacts, operates on a level allowing it to achieve a position of distance from wider society (and what Louis Althusser calls an 'internal distance' from ideology). One of the advantages of introducing the concept of the relative autonomy of form to a socio-historical analysis of culture is that it allows for the continuation of a particular practice beyond a given historical period. The 'Thirties in the 1990s' is not merely the desired result of cultural archaeology, but an *active process of engagement and construction*. This is most obvious from the recurrent use of the 1930s as a political metaphor, where - among other inaccurate metaphors - the break-up of former Yugoslavia has invited constant comparison with appeasement and the Spanish Civil War, as noted in Chapter One. In addition to the 'middlebrow' reproduction of 'the Thirties', it also appears in popular culture, throughout numerous books and films. Getting away from 'the Thirties' and onto a wider representational terrain, the inter-war period has served as the setting for all manner of productions, from thrillers to advertising. While this has sometimes meant that the past becomes little more than a receptacle in which to place the concerns of the present, at other times it has served to bring forward many of the unresolved questions of the 1930s. On this basis, the relative autonomy of cultural forms that came to prominence in the inter-war period has allowed them to escape becoming timebound and dated.

Take, for instance, hard-boiled style. On one hand it metamorphosed into *film noir*, a genre that articulated the insecurities of the post-war period and further enhanced the reputation of such 1930s luminaries as Cain and Chandler. On the other, 'while the Hollywood Inquisition was cutting down the careers of a majority of the writers, directors and producers of *film noir*, a red-baiting, bastard offspring - frequently set in Los Angeles - appeared on the B-Movie circuit (for example, *Stakeout on 101*) and the drugstore paper-back rack (Mickey Spillane's sado-McCarthyite thrillers)'.[28] There have been attempts to revisit *noir* that are informed by contemporary fears of 'megacities' and 'the underclass', in movies like *Blade Runner* and *Seven*. There have also been attempts to force hard-boiled style in new and brutal directions, further cutting down on description while pumping up body counts, a tendency personified by a contemporary crime writer like James Ellroy.[29] Whereas a particular genre can be constituted by wider social trends, there is nothing given in this relationship that prevents one from developing independently of another.

This recognition offers no guarantee of a sustainable aesthetic theory. In effect, we have recalled our earlier distinction between the external and internal politics of art.

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[28] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los* Angeles (1990) (London: Vintage, 1992), p.44.

[29] On the comparison between Hammett and Ellroy, see the present author's 'Hard Boiled City: Dashiell Hammett's Democratic Moment and Beyond', *Diatribe* 6, Summer 1996.

Externally, such institutions as the gallery, the market and even the censor can shape both the production and reception of a work of art. Internally, such considerations as technique, presentation and, more controversially, quality and value come to the fore. In effect, the individual work of art acts as the point bridging the two. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, once mechanically reproduced, this relationship becomes more complex. One's capacity to address the question of aesthetic value is not assisted by the fact that we tend to confront these two aspects of art concurrently, in both its internal and external dimensions. Thus, whereas New Deal murals in the 1950s were approached suspiciously and regarded as propaganda, a more contemporary perspective treats them as documents of a bygone era. Guided by the principle of historical specificity, an appreciation of the aesthetic merits of a cultural form can be arrived at without losing sight of the power relations underlying criticism *per se*. Indeed, this capacity to differentiate was behind *Partisan Review*'s controversial echo of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, in which they praised T.S. Eliot's modernist iconoclasm while condemning his reactionary political outlook.[30] Cultural forms can be incorporated into the power structure in later years *despite* their subversive appearance, as was Eliot's modernism; simultaneously, the process of canonisation should not distract us from the inherent strengths, weaknesses and even cultural value of a given form.

The eventual canonisation of aspects of modernism, and its self-conscious rejection by numerous postmodern theorists, would suggest that cultural production and popular culture has no inherently subversive or political qualities in and of itself. Indeed, we have witnessed hard-boiled fiction express such tendencies; iconoclastic in the 1920s and 1930s, reactionary in the 1950s, misanthropic today. Only when coupled with the key mobilisations of our age did particular texts and representational approaches acquire greater significance. Conversely, unravelling such mobilisations was often a feature, if not a priority, of subsequent phases in cultural politics. Indeed, the very formulation 'cultural politics' was anathema to Cold War liberals, who usually responded by stressing 'art for art's sake' on principle. The nuances and practical difficulties of separating political and artistic considerations were a more secondary fixture of their outlook.

Contemporary critics are not so naive, to the extent that today 'culture' often appears to have acquired disproportionate weight as an explanatory category. The point of this study, however, has not been to align 1930s cultural patronage to one or other of these approaches, but to retrieve it from false binaries established in the 1950s and continued, often in reformulated guise, into the present. While this study by no means exhausts the possibilities of this task, especially given its focus on New York City and its rather restrictive archival base, it nevertheless offers a concrete engagement with the cultural politics of the 1930s as a totality and hopefully goes some way to redressing the imbalances generated by 'the other Sixties', an inter-war period that raises numerous embarrassing questions about the social order.

The New Deal *per se* cannot be read as a challenge to that status quo *from without*; it involved instead a pragmatic reorganisation of the state with a view to seeing through a package of counter-crisis measures.[31] However, once cultural production became a component part of this process, the relationship between the structures of the New Deal and American society became more complex. Part of this turn to the 'cultural sphere' reflected a felt need, on the part of the government, to *reach out* to the people. Moreover, we should also note that 'the people' as a coherent entity had no *a priori* existence that was tailor-made to the New Deal; this required an active and subjective process of constitution and reconstitution, from above and from below. Undoubtedly, this emphasis on a common culture facilitated a mobilisation in support of the state formation, but this was not simply a 'top down' activity, as state-sponsored cultural production had to be adapted to the idiom and aspirations of its potential supporters.

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[30] See Harvey Teres, 'Remaking Marxist Criticism: *Partisan Review*'s Eliotic Leftism' in *American Literature* March 1992.

At one level this involved a compromise: official accommodations to popular concerns reflected the curtailment, at least in terms of presentation, of earlier elitist conduct on the part of public institutions. At the same time, notions of the national and the popular were contested and reforged. Cultural patronage developed as a response to the slump, but its impact was much wider. It was welcomed by hungry cultural practitioners, and some attempted to channel state resources into their own political projects. In terms of expanding the frontiers of human knowledge, the consequences of government sponsorship included extensive attempts to *document* society and *democratise* culture. Notably, this did not involve an embrace of popular culture, the influence of which nevertheless permeated the documentary activities of public institutions *despite* official attempts at regulation. Once this dynamic was unleashed, individuals and organisations could consider the possibilities arising from the contradictions thrown up by the crisis. For instance, the documentary images of the suffering associated with the 1930s could be mobilised in different ways: to advocate humanitarian unemployment relief, to legitimise state policy, or to codify the failings of the market economy. Without wishing to detract from the important political struggles of the Slump, it is clear that Depression-era culture was a site of contested meanings (within an overall context of crisis). On balance, the experience of Federal One and its unintended consequences offers a case study of the place of cultural production in social change. It contributed to a climate in which realist representation and a concern with 'the social' could thrive, both as a point of reference and a focus for change.

New Deal culture accompanied the formation of a robust political coalition that lasted until the 1960s despite an assortment of Cold War Republican administrations. In terms of sheer scale, Federal One can be seen as a *de facto* mass communications industry, albeit one that was dogmatically committed to craft production. It also secured a mass audience for itself, primarily through the Federal Theatre Project. Where it was less successful was in building up a base of sustainable popular support for public arts funding. Hence when the war effort took priority, and the first chill winds of a backlash against the left gathered pace, the WPA arts projects were among the early casualties.

Part of the challenge to the status quo in the 1930s involved forms of mobilisation that drew upon popular culture as part of an active process of change and engagement. At the centre of this process was the Communist Party, which occupied the moral high ground among the intelligentsia on account of the Depression. Ultimately this project was a failure, unable to overcome the strength and resilience of American capitalism and fatally flawed through the influence of Stalinism. As a result, the makeshift system of negative apologetics characterised throughout this study as 'the Thirties' has prospered in the absence of a credible challenge. However, it remains possible - even necessary - to integrate these experiences into a future critique. While rejecting Stalinism as part of the baggage of the past, and recognising the need for new political traditions to develop a radical subjectivity appropriate to contemporary conditions, the question of a cultural front remains a pertinent one. Only by situating alternatives to the present crisis in the language and experience of everyday life, while expressing a preparedness to transcend its limitations, can we avoid the pattern of lost opportunities and disorientation that characterised the inter-war period.

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[31] As was noted throughout our study, this process alienated traditionalist sections of the Establishment, tilting various historical accounts in a hostile direction. In turn, conservative historiography - in addition to that of writers such as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. who were more sympathetic to Roosevelt - was subject to the critiques of the New Left.

Appendix - Defence Campaigns and the League of Professional Groups

What follow is an attempt to summarise the pivotal 'moment' in the development of a radicalised US intelligentsia during the inter-war period. First we should note that three mutually reinforcing trends have shaped our understanding of intellectuals in the 1930s. These include a 'classical' approach which owes much to Julien Benda; Cold War condemnations of 'the God that failed' (drawing on individual biographies and fears of mass society), and more liberal attempts to re-examine the period (sometimes in order to formulate a guide to contemporary cultural practice). Put bluntly, the first two of these tend to conflate the socially conscious intellectual, the New Deal administrator and the Communist apparatchik into a comprehensive folk devil that embodies what is worst about the 1930s. More critical commentators would note that they call into question the significance of their subject matter: why are so many column inches and pages devoted to the writings of the left, seemingly at the expense of assessing the cultural practice associated with that more socially substantial political formation the New Deal? If, as Alan Sinfield argues, literature invites discussion and interpretation of the present and future possibilities while allowing for social groups to develop an identity through it,[1] what purposes are served by those 'literary wars' contested through issues derived from the 1930s?

One approach to this question can begin with an examination of the lived histories and practices of the individuals involved in such activities. This is important, in that it reveals the interaction between political expectations and how such ideals were built upon in an attempt at a broader engagement with society. By comparing the models of conduct imagined and established by radical cultural practitioners in the 1930s to influential interpretations of them in the Cold War period, we can find a useful starting point for clarifying the debate.

The participation of intellectuals in radical politics is not a phenomenon specific to 1930s America, although both its scale and the significance attached to it by contemporary cultural historians suggests a degree of novelty. Indeed, some commentators root the development of the 'New Left' of the post-1945 period in the 1930s, highlighting the extent to which writers' orientation toward social change was a new departure at the time.[2] Intellectual radicalism is not reducible to a continuum; rather it develops out of the collision of a variety of historical forces and determinacies.[3]

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[1] Alan Sinfield (ed.), *Society and Literature, 1945-1970* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983), pp. 4-6.

[2] Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic, 1987); Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement* (New York: Oxford 1993).

[3] This observation does not preclude our attempting to locate antecedents for such commitment; we should note that those wishing to initiate the transformation of society sought to do the same. It is not uncommon to find the radical projects of the 1930s motivated - if not legitimised - by reference to an earlier tradition. Anniversaries, for instance, furnished Communist writers with a number of opportunities to promote preoccupations more specific to the time of writing. For example, see Theodore Draper's comments on Marx and the 'fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Prophet' (Draper to Lewis Corey February 20, 1933, Lewis

A pivotal episode in this process was the response of intellectuals to the trial, incarceration and eventual execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian anarchist immigrants accused of murder and robbery.[4] This case made such a colossal impact because it was widely interpreted as an indictment of American justice and, less consciously, it fostered the perception among intellectuals that the Bohemian lifestyle of the 'exile' and Greenwich Village was morally suspect. Although a defence committee was founded in 1921 by Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti - themselves framed on a murder charge in 1913 - the participation of intellectuals was not immediate. The involvement of established writers began with H.L. Mencken in 1924, while John Dos Passos joined in December 1926, followed by Upton Sinclair several months later.[5] The challenge of the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign was that it implicitly demanded a degree of seriousness and involvement from the young cultural practitioner thought hitherto unnecessary.

Thus Granville Hicks recalls a feeling of indignation, of wanting to do something, and of obligation to join protests in Boston and risk jail; the same activity also counted Dos Passos and Michael Gold amongst its participants.[6] Malcolm Cowley's praise for Newspaper Guild founder Heywood Broun - 'a crusader for lost causes' - hinged on Broun's columns supporting the defendants,[7] while artist Ben Shahn produced a series of 23 paintings to commemorate the martyrs.[8] The enormous impact of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair upon the intellectual community is undeniable; it produced a spate of plays, poems, and novels, many of them written by men and women whose radicalism was first kindled by the death of the 'dago Christs'.[9]

The execution furnished radicalism with an issue and an image around which to orchestrate other grievances with the existing order. The injustice that became associated with the Boston legal system was such that it provided a searing indictment of Governor Fuller of Massachusetts and, by implication, American civilisation. Given that the 1920s boom exercised a legitimising influence in society, non-economic concerns were a logical priority for dissident intellectuals, especially once the repressive atmosphere of the Palmer Raids was receding. Less obviously, the participation of intellectuals in the campaign to save the unfortunate duo became a model for organising such intellectuals in the future. While the

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Corey papers, Box 9: 'Correspondence Folder 1932-33', Butler Library, Columbia University, New York [cited hereafter as Corey papers]. See also Granville Hicks, 'The Legend of John Reed', *New Masses*, October 19, 1937, p.9.

[4] See Brian Jackson, *The Black Flag: A Look Back at the Strange Case of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1981).

[5] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961) (New York: Morningside Books, 1992), p.170.

[6] Granville Hicks, *Part of the Truth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), pp. 64, 69.

[7] Malcolm Cowley, *Dream of Golden Mountains*, (1964; New York: Penguin, 1981 edition), p213.

[8] Ben Shahn, *The Passion of Sacco and Vazetti*, (1931-32; tempra on canvas, 84" x 48", Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art: gift of Edith and Milton Lowenthal in memory of Juliana Force), is reproduced in Patricia Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s* (Boston, Mass.: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983).

[9] Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p.172

episode politicised many it illuminated opportunities to those already politicised. (None of this is to deny the genuine humanitarian impulse behind such engagement with social problems.)

Just as the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti projected an influential framework for expressions of political commitment, it also allowed writers to define a formula for campaigns based on their talents and professions.[10] An important figure in this process is Dos Passos, for along with his practical participation in protests and demonstrations, he also penned a central item of propaganda for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defence Committee.[11] Its powerful finale, an almost poetic cluster of demands, suggests that scope existed for a reconciliation of creative writing and political commitment:

> Demand the truth about Sacco and Vanzetti.
>
> If the truth had been told they would be free men today.
> If the truth is not told they will burn in the chair in Charlestown Jail. If they die what
> little faith many millions have in the chance of Justice in this country will die with them.
>
> Save Sacco and Vanzetti.

The widespread receptivity to these demands suggests a turning point in the prevailing political mood, and a decade in which old certainties were making way for a more unstable period. Dos Passos was a credible novelist, reporter and satirist, building upon American radicalism's heritage; he was associated with the *Liberator*, widely seen as the leading non-conformist publication while it bridged the gap between the *Masses* and its successor, the *New Masses*. Eventually, attempts to resolve the Sacco-Vanzetti case in favour of the defendants highlighted ‘the perfect impotence of individualists in the face of mass realities’,[12] but Dos Passos himself emerged in high regard, as someone to emulate, if not to transform into an active fellow traveller. His conduct served notice to liberal writers that bohemian complacency was an inadequate response to modern conditions. Dos Passos's intervention helped to ensure that a previously low-key murder trial became part of the consciousness of his fellow cultural practitioners.

Besides the emotional impact of the case itself, the Defence Committee pamphlet put forward arguments that were reformulated subsequently in radical fiction and poetry.[13] On one hand the execution was explained as a result of the anti-alien red scares,[14] prefiguring the appearance of such insecurities as a theme in the works of such writers as Gold and Henry Roth.[15] Less explicitly it addressed the labour movement on a populist basis, calling for adherence to American traditions of justice. Such rhetoric foreshadowed that of the Popular Front; in effect, the Defence Committee was engaged in national popular interpellations.[16] Dos Passos identified Sacco and Vanzetti's fate with that of the individual in society, revealing himself as an intellectual siding with the 'working people, underdogs, reds'.[17] The campaign's multi-faceted nature, personified somewhat by Dos Passos himself, made a lasting impact on American writers.

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[10] See Robert Morss Lovett, 'Liberalism and the Class War', *Modern Quarterly*, November 1927-February 1928, pp. 191-194.

[11] John Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair: The Story of the Americanisation of Two Foreign born Workingmen* (Boston, Mass.: Sacco-Vanzetti Defence Committee, 1927).

[12] Matthew Josephson, *transition*, No, 14 (Fall 1928), p.57.

[13] The representation of the Sacco-Vanzetti case was also an important element in Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy.

[14] Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair*, pp.46-54. He was to echo these sentiments in a later article which opposed the nationwide arrest and conviction of a number of Communist organisers, including William Z. Foster. In so

This was well summarised by Malcolm Cowley, to whom the Sacco-Vanzetti case was another crisis in the development of the intelligentsia. Previously, its 'only group manifestations were literary teas; their only political platform was a cocktail tray'. In contrast, once Sacco and Vanzetti's plight had gripped the intellectual community, it was they 'rather than the labour unions that conducted their defence'.[18] Despite the failure of the campaign to save the martyred duo, such activities continued after the execution, around an apparently ever-expanding range of injustices.

Intellectuals organised around the defence of 'class war prisoners' were not formally under pressure to endorse the Communist Party platform. Rather, they were treated as fellow participants in a campaign based around a common cause. Their specific talents and positions of influence were deployed in support of Tom Mooney, the 'Scottsboro Boys' and the like, but there was seldom a perception that groups like the National Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners (NCDPP) were the sole property of intellectuals. Neither were struggles for social justice confined to the issue of prisoners; hence, expressions of solidarity with striking miners, a symbolically important aspect of the realignment taking place. Cowley considered his visit to the coal fields of Harlan, Kentucky, in a delegation alongside Waldo Frank, as a crucial episode in his own politicisation. The events also consolidated Theodore Dreiser's identification with the Communist project, and he became chair of the NCDPP. Others dissented with the Communists' domination of the Committee; Herbert Solow and James Rorty attempted to implement a 'united front' strategy before it was official policy, while Solow, Anita Brenner, Lionel Trilling and Eliot Cohen resigned in May 1933 over 'bullying factional tactics', founding the Provisional Committee for Non-Partisan Labour Defence.[19] On balance, we should treat expectations as to the appropriate relationship of society to writers and artists, as vague and undeveloped in CPUSA circles during the early 1930s. Throughout those years this uncertainty was gradually undermined, beginning with the election of 1932.

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doing, he explicitly raised the issue of intellectuals having a specific responsibility to support the victims of such coercion. See Dos Passos, 'Back to Red Hysteria!', *New Republic*, July 2, 1938, pp. 168-169.

[15] See Gold, *Jews Without Money* (1930) and Roth, *Call It Sleep* (1934).

[16] A concept developed from Antonio Gramsci by Ernesto Laclau. For a critique of this approach see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 46-54.

[17] Walter Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 159.

[18] Malcolm Cowley, 'Echoes of Crime', *New Republic*, August 28, 1935, p.79.

[19] Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p.373*n* (on Cowley); p.439*n* (on the Solow group).

The Communist Party fielded leader William Z. Foster and James W. Ford of Alabama as candidates for President and Vice President respectively; Ford was the first black American to run for national office. They received 102,991 votes. During the campaign Foster met with a number of writers, convincing Dos Passos, Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson to endorse his platform. On 12 September a variety of metropolitan newspapers carried a statement supporting Foster and Ford. It was signed by 53 cultural practitioners, all recommending readers vote Communist in the election.[20] This formed the basis of the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford. Its public format was the political open letter backed by 'celebrity' endorsements, an important device in the subsequent 'literary wars'. Initial signatories included Hicks, Cowley, Waldo Frank, Erskine Caldwell, Robert Cantwell, Newton Arvin, Edmund Wilson, the dramatist Sidney Howard, Matthew Josephson, Sidney Hook, Kyle Crichton and Lincoln Steffens. Under secretary James Rorty, an executive board was hammered out, consisting of Cantwell, Corey, Cowley, Joseph Freeman, Maxwell Hyde, William Gropper, Joseph Pass, Corliss Lamont, Bernhard Stern, Felix Morrow, Meyer Schapiro and Ella Winter.[21] League stationery bore the following legend:

> The League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford is composed of writers, artists, teachers, engineers, physicians, architects social workers, lawyers, journalists and other professional workers who are supporting the Communist ticket this year. With rare exceptions they are not members of the Communist Party. The organisation further represents an attempt to clarify and define the issue of the professional worker with relation to the deepening crisis of the capitalist world, and the forces which are working to build a new social order.

Cowley recalls 'a strange campaign ... considering that the party I supported had little chance of carrying so much as a single precinct'.[22] He remained in its orbit, involved in the often tortuous production of its pamphlet, *Culture and the Crisis: An Open Letter to the Writers, Artists, Teachers, Physicians, Scientists and Other Professional Workers of America*; fifty thousand copies were distributed through the Workers Bookshops network in October 1932. Peppered with metaphors describing a decaying social system, it outlined the contribution which professionals could make to the revolutionary movement. Such participation was often seen as intellectuals lashing out against the lunacy of the market,[23] but others took a less generous view. Whatever perspective was adopted, it did little to undermine the CPUSA's fluctuating perception that writers were little more than unstable bohemians.[24] While the League recruited such people, often albeit fleetingly to the cause, it also served to reactivate a number of more established radical intellectuals. An archetypal figure in this group was Lewis Corey.[25]

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[20] A full list of the 53 signatories appears in Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p.457*n*. James T. Farrell considered an unknown at this time wasn't asked to sign. See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p.389*n*.

[21] James Rorty to Lewis Corey, November 25, 1932, Corey papers, Box 9; League of Professional Groups folder.

[22] Cowley, *Dream of Golden Mountains*, pp. 112-113.

[23] Rideout, *Radical Novel*, p.113.

[24] Cowley, *Dream of Golden Mountains*, p. 117. Within a decade, Cowley's participation in such 'unamerican' activities was sufficient to warrant government vetting of his work at the Office of Facts and Figures. See the transcript of his interview with George J. Gould 'Statement Made in the Investigations Office, OEM; February

Born Luigi (later Louis) Carlo Fraina, Corey is important as a member of 'the missing generation', that heterogeneous group of writers and activists immersed in indigenous American radicalism prior to its engagement with the Communist project, and often at odds with the escapist trajectory of the 1920s 'exile' generation. The son of Italian immigrants, he arrived in New York's Lower East Side at the age of three. In 1901 he joined Daniel De Leon's Socialist Labor Party, and was writing for its press within a year. A decade later he was jailed on charges of war resisting, and in June of that year he chaired the National Left Wing Conference. The Conference delegated him to attend Comintern meetings, an involvement culminating in his marriage and disappearance to Mexico financed by $4,200 of Comintern funds. Accused of embezzlement, his relationship with organised radicalism was effectively over, and his writings on cultural issues also petered out around this time. Upon returning to the United States he adopted the protective pseudonym 'Lewis Corey'. In the years between his exile and return, he had moved from being a virtual autodidact to 'probably the outstanding American Marxist economist of the Thirties'.[26] The League's election appeal restored his enthusiasm for political participation.

Corey was a contributor to *Culture and the Crisis*, and eagerly anticipated making a substantial contribution to the organisation's post-election evolution. His ambitions went beyond the desire to see Foster and Ford in the White House and he supported the League's commitment to 'the development of the revolutionary movement among professionals and intellectuals ... part of the larger task of winning the lower middle class for the revolution'.[27] The basis for this would consist of struggles both on a cultural and industrial front, although this was undermined by the reluctance of League members to study and develop a more substantial theory of the middle class. The significance of such an understanding was more than academic; a sounder theoretical interpretation of the intelligentsia as a distinct social group would have better informed League activities. Critics of Corey have suggested that his theory of the middle class, like that of V.F. Calverton, was not substantially different from those of his contemporaries.[28]

5, 1942', reprinted in Thomas Daniel Young (ed.), *Conversations With Malcolm Cowley* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1986), pp. 22-27.

[25] Biographies of Corey (1892-1953) appear in Lee Baxandall, 'The Marxist Aesthetic Theory of Louis C. Fraina' in David Madden (ed.), *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), pp. 194-197, 207-210, 216-218; Ester Corey, 'Lewis Corey (Louis C. Fraina), 1892-1993: A Bibliography with Autobiographical Notes', *Labor History* (Vol. 4:2, Spring 1963; New York: Tamiment Institute edition), pp. 103-31; Paul M. Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/ Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlights, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1995).

[26] Baxandall 'The Marxist Aesthetic Theory of Louis C. Fraina', p.209. Perhaps one indicator of his ability is his attempt to theorise the role and position of the middle classes, an approach integrated albeit critically, into earlier sections of the present work.

[27] Program of the League of Professional Groups, 1933; Corey papers, Box 9: League of Professional Groups folder, p.1.

[28] Frank A. Warren, review of Leonard Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton: Radical in the American Grain* (American Studies, Vol. 35:1, Spring 1994, p.166).

This is somewhat unfair, as few other members of Corey's social milieu were prepared to theorise the middle class at all; it was too often seen as merely 'corpulent', 'proletarianised', 'reactionary' or 'democratic', depending on the political priorities of a particular author. League activities came to express a basic tension between the subjective desire to recruit professionals and a rather limited conception of their role once recruited. Thus, when the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford voted to dissolve itself on November 21, 1932 - its electoral work completed - some 43 'charter members' decided to continue the organisation as a focus around which to cohere professionals against the slump.[29] Its subsequent rapid disintegration is testimony to many of the barriers in involving professionals in revolutionary politics.

While they lacked the socio-economic weight and factory-imposed discipline of the industrial worker, there were few perceptions of an objective contradiction of interests of the sort ascribed to big business in journals like *New Masses*. 'They have no real stake in the capitalist order. They have no trade union basis. They are something ephemeral - "intellectuals"', the League declared.[30] Often the sociological generalisations read as reflexive comment on some of the problems of organising the League; the Communist Party leadership felt it necessary to maintain a permanent fraction within the campaign.[31] James Rorty highlighted the extent to which its membership was top heavy with cultural practitioners, complaining that 'the writer has probably exhausted his usefulness [as League secretary]; how about an engineer, or an architect?'[32] While more tactful than the correspondent to whom the League 'reeks with sterility and has not been ventilated with any programme or satisfactory relationship',[33] Rorty expressed real misgivings about the League's future. Sure enough, the writing was on the wall. In January 1933 Corey tendered unsuccessfully his resignation from the Executive Board and Editorial Committee, and again the following month.[34] Before long the League had collapsed; it had lasted less than one year.[35]

Despite such problems, this experience established a number of important precedents. Firstly, it contributed to a practice based on the celebrity of various intellectuals who were used, through public endorsements, to further the objectives of the CPUSA. This should not lead us to endorse traditionalist interpretations that the League was merely a party

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[29] Rorty to Corey, November 25, 1932, Corey papers, Box 9: League of Professional Groups folder.

[30] Epigram to untitled/undated carbon on 'facts concerning the League's membership', Corey papers, Box 9: League of Professional Groups folder.

[31] I am indebted to Paul Buhle for this information (Buhle to author, August 14, 1994).

[32] James Rorty, *Program Committee Memorandum,* circa 1933; Corey papers, Box 9: League of Professional Groups folder.

[33] Untitled/undated carbon on 'facts concerning the League's membership', *op. cit.*

[34] See Corey to Rorty, January 11, 1933 also February 21, 1933 (not sent); Corey papers Box 9; League of Professional Groups folder.

[35] Perhaps one reason for this is that 'all emphasis in this period was mobilisation, and many intellectuals felt guilty doing their particular thing, a factor that demoralised LPG activity from the end of the election campaign onward' (Buhle to author, *op. cit.*). Indeed it seldom appears in the critical biographies of the period and a surviving participant had no recollection of its existence, let alone his involvement in it. Author interview with Corliss Lamont, October 1993.

'front'; far more complex is the volatile mixture of partial commitments, smouldering moral outrage and temporary career opportunities conferred on writers by political commitment. One expression of the influence of such practices is the attempts by *New Masses*, later on in the decade, to orchestrate their repetition in galvanising opposition to Hitler.[36] Thus, open letters and alliances with liberals - often directed at 'Trotskyites' - became an organisational staple of the Popular Front. Lobbying for forms of US foreign policy that corresponded to Soviet needs was also widespread, such as 'collective security'.[37]

Secondly, the League floated the proposal for an alliance of progressive professionals, which it proved unable to implement. In the process, organisational forms developed that would be later reworked in 'Thirties' perceptions of the 'Red Decade'. Politicised cultural practitioners were later represented as communist dupes and, simultaneously, their activities were portrayed as frivolous. Although ostensibly a body of professionals, there was a preponderance of journalists over other sections of the intelligentsia that worked in areas such as administration, law and medicine. This reflected the League's sociological composition, or at least the concerns of its most prominent members. In short, the League of Professional Groups failed to organise professionals or, to use Gramsci's phrase, organic intellectuals. Subsequent groups, such as the John Reed Clubs, the League of American Writers and even the Committee for Cultural Freedom fared much better, on the basis of an explicit orientation toward a narrower stratum composed of cultural practitioners. Consequently, horizons narrowed as to the League's target audience - i.e. no longer *all* professionals, but merely those engaged in cultural production - and sympathetic intellectuals directed their energies elsewhere.

The League left two peculiar legacies: first, most obviously, the key image - or caricature - of the fellow traveller was partly derived from its activities. Accounts of CP-sympathising intellectuals and their activities have featured substantially in the numerous Cold War accounts of 1930s literary commitment. Often such interpretations conspicuously failed to discriminate between left-wing writers and the intelligentsia as a whole, placing New Deal administrators on a footing of equal moral worth with so-called 'parlour pinks'.[38]

In concluding, we should note that the collapse of the League of Professional Groups did not signal the demise of writers' fascination with all things Communist. It provided an early indicator that the trend towards cultural practitioners declaring 'leftward ho!'[39] and becoming politically committed was not necessarily predicated on some sudden dramatic transformation of consciousness. Rather, the piecemeal attempts to establish the League reveal the difficulties of moving intellectuals beyond a vague antipathy toward the Hoover administration and into a position of organised resistance. Despite these difficulties, the conditions that spawned the League would continue to demand some form of revolutionary organisation for the artist and writer. It was through the establishment of such organised literary and artistic expressions of dissent that the relationship of cultural policy to cultural practice would become an important controversy. On this basis, the agitational couplet of 'culture and the crisis', coupled with the apparent defection of the best and brightest to communism, was an unsettling response to the slump.

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[36] Joseph Freeman to Corey, March 3, 1933; Corey papers, Box 9: 1932-33 Correspondence File.

[37] See Frank A. Warren, *Liberals and Communism: The 'Red Decade' Revisited* (1966) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[38] The general flavour of this approach can be gleaned from the Missouri Republican John Stormer, who cites approvingly George N. Peek, first head of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Peek claimed that the New Deal meant 'a plague of lawyers settled on Washington ... to introduce the collectivist system of agriculture into the country'. In the cultural sphere, Long Island Republican Robert L. Brion called subsidised political theatre as 'the flower of American Brains Trust Communism'. See John A. Stormer, *And None Dare Call It Treason* (Flourissant, MO.: Liberty Bell Press), p,186; *New York Times*, March 15, 1936, p.27. Such commentary is indicative of the discrete conflation of New Deal experiments and fellow travelling in Cold War rhetoric.

[39] V.F Calverton, 'Leftward Ho!', *Modern Quarterly* 6:2, Summer, 1932, p.14.

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