Domestic Blitz: A Revisionist History of the Fifties

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The first version of this paper was written for a 1990 conference at the University of Kansas entitled "Ike's America." It was an interesting event—though flawed somewhat by the organizers' decision to schedule sessions and design program flow according to academic category. Eminently sensible from an administrative standpoint, this arrangement worked counter to the articulated aim of stimulating interdisciplinary dialogue by encouraging participants to spend all their time hanging out with birds of their own feather—economists with economists, historians with historians, literati with literati. Like many of the would-be innovative conferences, symposia, and even full-scale academic programs mounted over the last decade, this one was multi- rather than truly inter-disciplinary. This didn't mean that I wasn't able to find any critical grist for my mill. Substantive aspects aside, the two things I found most intriguing about what I heard during those few days were, first, the number and variety of people who had recently "rediscovered" the fifties, and second, the extent to which the pattern of their rediscovery paralleled my own. Arriving there convinced I had made a major breakthrough in elucidating the darker and more complex feelings that undercolored the broadly presumed conservatism of the decade, what I heard over and over again from presenters was the same (gleeful or earnest) revisions, the same sense of surprise at how much had been overlooked. Two messages might be taken from this. The first is that the fifties is suddenly relevant again. The second and perhaps more sobering concerns the mind-boggling power of

American culture to foster an almost complete collective amnesia about events and attitudes of the not-very-distant past. It was the latter consideration in particular that led me to expand my essay (intended originally as a book chapter) into something suitable for journal publication.

The decision was not without its risks. Generalizing as it does on a very wide front, this paper is likely to arouse the ire of fifties specialists of every stripe and hue. And not just fifties specialists, either. National identity has been a unfashionable topic of late. The same people who talk blithely of mega-entities like "postmodernism" or "late capitalism" are accustomed to label any generalization about historic America as unconscionably reductionist. It's easy, of course, to see the basis for this. National culture studies—a major genre in the post-war reconstruction of American intellectual life—lost their goes-without-saying status way back in the seventies when we began to realize the extent to which the notion of national community obscured issues of class, gender and race. Now the danger is running the other way. Dividing the thinkable world into the two widely disparate realms of transnational forces and grass-roots plurality, we no longer have any vantage for elucidating either the concept or the influence of "place." What I would like to propose is that it's high time for the meso-scale account to be revived again,[1] not because it's "truer" than those currently fashionable (it's important to remember that histories are always partial, and scales always arbitrary, no matter how natural and worthy their proponents may make them seem), but simply because of the extent to which it has been neglected of late. And at what cost. Generalizations notwithstanding, the fact is that the kind of "story" adumbrated here is critical to our historical understanding. Without it we have no context, no way to bridge the gap between micro and macro, no explanation for either the local variability of ostensibly universal givens like capitalism and patriarchy or the commonalities which link and constrain the ostensibly random phenomena—lives, texts, objects, events—comprising American social reality. It's that breach I aim to fill with this work. Note, though, the tentativeness of my reference to adumbration. One thing I want to make clear: I am far from claiming that what I tell in these pages is the whole or the real or the only story possible. Perhaps, indeed, the word story is too decorous a term altogether for something as synthetic as this essay, with its procrustian categories, its impressionistic rereadings, and its reliance on cultural representations rather than "real" (embodied, historic, accountable) experience.[2] Given that my intent is less to provide new information than to destabilize old assumptions, it would possibly be more appropriate to call it a "provocation."

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If decades can be said to have characters, on virtually all axes the forties and the sixties would seem to have been polar opposites. Judging by the images purveyed in cultural products, these two periods in American history may be seen as exemplifying the defining ends of practically every dichotomy invoked by post-

war critics in the once-hot debate over the country's social bimodalism.[3] Over the scant space of ten years the popular imagination clearly shifted its point of reference one hundred and eighty degrees: from culture to nature, from history to myth, from law to desire, from formalism to wilfulness, from hierarchy to communalism—in short, from a progressive to a primitivistic world view. Since change of this magnitude rarely occurs unheralded, common sense suggests that the fifties must in some sense have mediated between these extremes. Given the consensus of popular wisdom about the decade's social conservatism,[4] however, it is difficult to avoid the general impression that the change, when it came, was both abrupt and catastrophic. "After 1960," says Peter Filene, "the era of tranquil domesticity dissolved into hurly-burly scenes of rebellion."[5] The suddenness implicit in this quotation was, in fact, an illusion. If one makes the effort to get past three decades worth of nostalgia about that "happy, simple, placid time," what emerges from any reexamination of the fifties, as Ronald Oakley points out, is not its seamlessness but its paradoxes. "It was ... an age of great optimism along with the gnawing fear of doomsday bombs, of great poverty in the midst of unprecedented prosperity, of flowery rhetoric about equality along with the practice of rampant racism and sexism."[6] Most pertinent to the subject at hand, as one may easily infer from the more thoughtful histories of the period,[7] it was an age that gave birth to both the ruptures and the icons that would "make" the sixties.

How? Consider the much-insisted-upon feature of conformity, for instance. There is no doubt that the fifties *was* a conformist era. The growth of consumerism,[8] the rush to the suburbs,[9] the emergence and enshrinement of professional and managerial elites[10]: such factors not only promoted social homogenization but, in combination with Cold War atomic paranoia,[11] triggered the fear that differentness of any stripe—sexual, political, sartorial—was symptomatic of disaffection, even disease.[12] People were not conformist during the fifties because they thought it was a "good thing," therefore, but because they were afraid not to be. *And they knew this.* Quite contra the popular image of happy sheep, the pressure to conform was almost universally decried by contemporaneous commentators as a symptom of national malaise. Sitting oddly with the emphasis on consensus in post-war historiography,[13] much of the "most insightful writing" of the period, as Elaine May points out, took as its subject the dehumanizing effects of the "mass, impersonal white-collar world."[14]

The same kind of discrepancy undercuts what we "know" about fifties innocence and complacency. While it's true that the official line of the time stressed the benefits of affluence, it is notable that bestselling novels, especially after mid-decade, were as likely to treat success as a problem as to propose it as a desirable goal.[15] Judging by the subtext to popular genres of the period, there was also a good deal of uneasiness about the structures that *enabled* the purportedly universal prosperity. Science fiction produced vicious satires of corporate society.[16] Westerns transformed the imperiled community into the corrupt one.[17] Gangster films replaced the Robin Hood anti-heroes of the thirties

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with a new syndicated version,[18] which at its worst, in the form of the faceless cartel or cabal, took on the sinister semblance of big business or big government.[19] Such productions do not bespeak a smug faith in the status quo. Far from complacency, in fact, it is clear from the "enormous outpouring of literature about totalitarianism" during the fifties that a significant fraction of the population felt they were "living in an 'age of anxiety.'"[20] And I'm not just talking about intellectuals here. Conspiracy, dystopia, wasteland—media paeans notwith-standing, by the end of the decade it was images like these that had come to dominate both cinematic and literary depictions of American society.[21] What they tell us, among other things, is that criticisms of fifties social regressiveness are in at least one sense misplaced. The rush to marry and buy homes, the reinscription of traditional gender roles, and the overinsistence on the pleasures of family life were less signs of self-satisfaction than defenses against uncer-tainty.[22] The world inhabited by the man in the grey flannel suit, says Elizabeth Long, is "problematic, fragmented ... full of conflicting memories, responsibili-ties and demands."[23]

The view from the fifties was not, then, quite as benign as posthumous reconstructions (*American Graffiti*, "Happy Days") have led us to believe. The commonest sources of concern, moreover, were exactly those themes that would eventually underwrite the great withdrawal of the sixties: materialism, bureau-cracy, social regimentation. It was not only the substance of critique that laid the ground for later developments, however; the very terms in which disquiet was expressed, regardless of intent, were such as to make revision almost inevitable. One of the key culprits here, ironically, was the anti-communist rhetoric that dominated the communal narrative for the first half of the decade.[24] In its insistence on group purity and traditional values, this discourse would *seem* to have been—and certainly we now view it *as*—one of the most regressive political formations of recent history. In its attack on the actual, however (one thinks here of McCarthy's hammering and repetitive characterizations of modernday America as compromised, effete, and riddled with corruption), it was as damaging to establishment credibility as the most hard-hitting social satire. McCarthy was not alone in his thinking. Liar he may have been, opportunist he certainly was,[25] but the reason he succeeded in his machinations was that his "vision"—*not* just his paranoia[26]—struck a chord with the country at large. The same pattern is reiterated over and over throughout fifties popular fictions: not yet a rejection of transcendent values, but an attack on the society that had failed to live up to them.[27] It is implicit in the burgeoning appetite for escape—the predilection for frontier settings in advertising,[28] the rise of the TV western,[29] the popularity of cinematic epics that salvaged American ideals by dissociating them from the now-suspect context of American society.[30] It is evident most of all in the switching of emphasis and value in almost all strands of communal discourse from the public realm to the private one. Fifties movies "retreat into fairy tale or romance," says Michael Wood. They deal with the "social questions lurking in forties films . . . by leaping over them and looking the other way."[31] Such trends have been

interpreted, especially by feminist critics, as confirming the insularity and repressiveness of fifties culture. Viewed from a slightly different perspective, however, they can be seen as anticipating the sixties canonization of the individual as not merely the carrier but the measure of social ideals.[32]

Countering initial impressions, then, what emerges at closer quarters is that the fifties did, in fact, shift significantly toward the primitivistic pole of the aforementioned dichotomy. Certainly the pastoral saw a considerable revival. Westerns not only flourished but also changed during the period, becoming more lyrical, more serious, and more ambivalent about the civilizing process.[33] In line with this trend, Indians began to be treated more seriously too, attaining in films like *Broken Arrow* and *Cheyenne Autumn* a nobility and complexity they had not been allowed since the days of James Fenimore Cooper.[34] This was not an isolated recuperation. Suddenly noble savage types began to appear everywhere, in every guise—from Bellows' princely blacks through Salinger's children[35] to the ethnic/proletarian fool-saints of popular film and TV.[36] Whatever their specifics, figures like these were definitely on the nature side of the fence.[37]

This brings us to an issue I skipped over earlier. Another, and indeed perhaps the key, marker for the culture/nature dichotomy in American tradition is the opposition between masculine and feminine. Given the quite palpable turn to nature, therefore, it is not surprising to note signs of a new concern with femaleness during the fifties. These are not all positive by any means. The prevalence of "feminine" monsters in horror films,[38] the association of women with mental disorders,[39] the almost claustrophobic introversion of domestic melodrama[40]—all of these usages clearly reveal that the return of the feminine repressed was viewed with considerable ambivalence. That it *was* returning, though, seems certain. Given the conventional symbolic links (via nature) between femaleness and libidinality,[41] the much-documented fifties obsession with sex[42] is in itself strong evidence of a shift in orientation. But there are plenty of other, less obvious indicators available if we make the effort to "read" culture whole. Viewed singularly, for instance, the refeminization of women's clothing and especially the emphasis on mammary development may be taken simply as one more evidence of patriarchal repression.[43] This authorized explanation is at least incipiently destabilized, however, when we note, in Rebecca Bell-Mettereau's fascinating study of cross-dressing in American film, that the late fifties saw the beginnings of a boom in sympathetic female impersonations (Billy Wilder's 1959 comedy, *Some Like It Hot*, is a landmark here), while during the same period male impersonations disappeared almost completely.[44] We might similarly read the preoccupation with Freud, not—or not merely—as evidence for the overvaluation of social regulation,[45] but as the rationalization of a preoccupation with interiority. "Feminineness" may have been a *socially* disadvantaged category during the fifties, but it is clear from the cultural configuration that it was also in some sense a *symbolically* privileged one.

From all this it would seem that fifties culture did function at least in some aspects as a mediator between the forties and the sixties, generating a variety of

signs modelling the transition from a progressivist to a primitivistic era. Note, however, the qualifier embedded in this sentence. *Other* aspects seem to point in totally different directions. Particularly troubling is the corollary to that last statement about symbolic privilege. If feminineness achieved a certain cachet by the end of the decade, there is ample both hard and textual data to establish that females, real and symbolic, had suffered an opposite fate. The past perfect tense here was chosen advisedly. What needs to be underlined in all this is the fact that the phenomenon we're dealing with is both time-specific and local. This is something that many commentators overlook. Gaye Tuchman, for instance, comments on the "symbolic annihilation of women in the mass media" as if it were a constant.[46] What's interesting and depressing, however, is precisely the fact that it's *not*. Late thirties-through-forties cinema, for instance, produced a striking lineup of strong, dynamic women characters—not entirely liberated, perhaps, but interesting and potent nevertheless.[47] This makes it all the more significant that fifties cinema came very close to wiping this type from its repertoire. The "most socially ambitious cinematic probes of the decade," notes Marjorie Rosen, were "totally devoid of females . . . . 'Women's films,'" meanwhile, "divorced themselves from controversial and timely plots and became 'how to's' on catching and keeping a man."[48]

How do we explain this contradiction—the fact that "the feminine" could thrive during a period and woman not? How, even more, do we account for the paradox that during the sixties, a decade that saw the most striking upsurge of neo-primitivism in a century,[49] the heroine disappeared from American popular culture almost completely? "Of the five top-rated dramatic shows of the 1960-61 [television] season," notes Diana Meehan, "only one, *Gunsmoke*, featured a regular female character." The only guise in which women turned up regularly in the programming of this period, she continues, was that of the victim, a feckless "innocent" who provided the hero with his excuse to aggress by getting herself "robbed, raped, mugged, beaten, kidnapped, and killed."[50] In popular cinema the situation was similar. "In the roles and prominence accorded women," says Molly Haskell, "the decade began unpromisingly [and] grew steadily worse . . . The growing strength and demands of women in real life, spearheaded by women's liberation, obviously provoked a backlash in commercial film: a redoubling of Godfather-like machismo to beef up man's eroding virility or, alternately, an escape into the all-male world of the buddy film."[51] The sixties were even guiltier than the fifties, then, when it came to the sidelining of women. Is Haskell right, though, in blaming the backlash against feminism? I don't think so. Backlash may have been part of it; escapism certainly was—but the *roots* of the development lie elsewhere. In order to determine the real significance of the fifties-through-sixties ambivalence about femaleness—and this issue literally under-writes the aforementioned mediation—it is necessary to consider more critically the difference between the symbolic and mimetic functions of gender representations. The best way to do this is to examine specific changes in the fifties imaging of familial roles and relations.

Fathers

One of the most characterizing features of the sixties was its rejection of authority. Recently I heard someone call it an era of symbolic parricide. If I'm right about the mediating function of culture, then, we may expect to find in the texts of the preceding decade at least some intimations of negative feelings toward the father. The most obvious evidence for such a development would be a proliferation of villainous patriarchs across the oeuvre. In actuality, such open attacks on the institution were relatively uncommon, at least until the closing years of the decade. One of the clearest intimations we get of the anxiety aroused by the issue, in fact, is the effort that was made to ignore or deny it. It is telling in this respect that apart from a few *false* father figures (*The Night of the Hunter*, with a marvelously menacing Robert Mitchum as the psychotic ex-con-cum-preacher on the trail of his fleeing stepchildren, offers perhaps the most memorable example of this typos), almost every "bad dad" in fifties fictions is either "excused" or offset by a more positive exemplar. If the urge to resist is there, in other words—and certainly this much is palpable in the melodrama of the period—so is the fear of it: "Split between madness and authority," as D.N. Rodowick puts it, the text is unable "to evolve as either a fully affirmative or fully subversive form."[52]

If the overtly villainous father is a rarity, on the other hand, the covertly negative one is definitely not. One type we see frequently during the period, for instance, is the father who sins not actively but by omission. The shallow materialist of *Some Came Running*,[53] the cold, too saintly sire of *East of Eden*, the hen-pecked blowhard of *Rebel Without a Cause*: each of these characters injures a child not because of something he *does*, but because of something he *doesn't* give—strength, guidance, protection, even simple love.[54] Common, too, is the feudal patriarch or captain of industry whose predatory behavior outside the home compromises his ability to function paternally inside.[55] Most common of all, though—significantly enough—is the father who damages his offspring inadvertently, as if his malign effect were simply a byproduct of his position *as* father. In some cases, like *Written on the Wind*, this typos is technically "innocent" of wrongdoing; in others, like *East of Eden*, he is culpable at least for his remoteness. Benign or despicable, however, the character of the incidentally bad dad is less important than his mere *being*: the cause of familial discord is virtually always related to his de facto opposition to "feminine" qualities or categories. Exemplary here is *Home from the Hill*. Already coded as anti-feminine by his separation from his wife and his symbolic association with guns (the technologized phallus) and "hunting," when Wade Hunicutt gets in the way of his son's marriage, thus "interfer[ing] with [a] successful resolution of the [boy's] Oedipus complex," he makes explicit his function in both filmic and familial economy as an obstacle to "natural" sexuality.[56]

Symbolic alignments aside, it is also noteworthy that the last-named father has a better relationship with his illegitimate son than with his legal one. Over and

over during this period what we see in popular fictions is a deranging of relationships in such a way that "legitimacy" serves more as a detriment to, than a guarantor of, familial continuity. Just as it is the bachelor uncle who has to play the paternal protector in *Some Came Running*, it is left to the outsiders—the "adopted" son, the daughter-in-law—to model proper filial deportment in *Written in the Wind*. Despite the strikingly bad behavior of the "real" son and daughter in this latter film, however—and despite, too, the father's best intentions—it is telling that the trouble is still at least indirectly attributable to a failure of paternity. The fact that the true offspring are both precluded by libidinal excess (their addictions to alcohol and sex respectively) from fulfilling the role that the patriarchal imperative assigns—that is, either submitting to or becoming the father's replacement—clearly augurs ill for the survival of the lineage.[57] Regardless of individual culpability, familial breakdown is in the end the father's responsibility—in short, his *fault*. Such covert "blaming" of dad for general ills is typical of this period. Indeed, the one thing that sets fifties melodrama most clearly apart from previous versions is its tendency to make paternal influence the source rather than the arbiter of problems. "[W]here the melodramatic Father formerly functioned to legitimate the system of conflict and guarantee its resolution by successfully identifying its heroes on the side of the law, morality, and authority," says Rodowick, "in the 1950s he functioned solely to throw the system into turmoil by his absences . . . his weaknesses, his neglects."[58]

The distrust of paternal influence shows up with equal clarity in the way that fifties fictions depict their *public* fathers. Particularly telling here is the realignment from pro- to anti-militarism that we may detect in war films of the period. The shift was not, admittedly, either as sudden or as unanimous as that blanket statement makes it sound. Throughout the decade, notes Adrian Turner, films ranged "from the self-conscious liberalism of . . . *The Bridge on the River Kwai* . . . to the jingoistic *The Steel Helmet*."[59] One factor Turner sees as underwriting these extremes of stance is "historical distance." While Korean war stories (*The Flying Leathernecks*, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*) continued to stress sacrifice and patriotism, he says, stories set in World War II (*Paths of Glory*, *The Desert Fox*) were typically marked by a considerable ideological softening. Another factor not noted by Turner, however, is the temporal one. While a film as classically affirmative as *Never So Few* (the title says it all) could still appear as late as 1959, there was a perceptible trend over the period toward a greater questioning of authority. Though resolving the problem quickly with the introduction of a fatherly *deus ex machina*, even *Never So Few* casts seeds of doubt about the chain of command by opening up the possibility of political betrayal. Other films went further by far. *Attack!*, for instance, a 1955 entry focusing on the combat experiences of a platoon in the Ardennes, is described by Jeanine Basinger as consciously undermining "established genre conventions . . . by telling of corruption, desire for political power, incompetence, and, above all, cowardice."[60] It is not only the theme that makes this picture portentous. Though it is by no means meant to be funny, there is (in Turner's words) "a vivid sense of the

absurd about it" which anticipates strikingly the anti-war black comedies of the early seventies.

It is, of course, in those films where authority is most clearly personalized that the father is most clearly impugned. From the venal Captain Holmes (*From Here to Eternity*) to the obsessive Captain Queeg (*The Caine Mutiny*), the military imaged by the fifties is rife with authority figures who, far from protecting, demean and endanger the men under their command. The flawed leader was not, to be sure, an invention of the fifties. The classic version of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, for instance, was made in 1935. Closer to base, the 1948 western, *Fort Apache*, paints for us, in the person of the arrogant, ambitious, single-minded Colonel Thursday, one of the most literally deadly commanding officers in American fiction. Where the earlier films differ from the later ones, however, is in their tendency to rationalize paternal failure, not by representing it as any less serious (given that it resulted in the slaughter of almost an entire regiment, the father's fault in *Fort Apache* can hardly be considered a trivial one), but by strategies of framing. It should be noted that this isn't simply a matter of intent. The intent is as likely to be exculpatory in fifties treatments of this theme as it was in the forties. If it is ideologically revealing that Thursday's "mistake" is repackaged after the fact as heroism, it is equally notable that Queeg's errors are amended in a post-trial coda that represents him as a good and brave man brought low by a combination of battle stress and disloyalty. *Both* films, in other words, provide a last-minute exoneration of their technically guilty father figures. The difference is in the way this is received. Whether one views Thursday's canonization negatively as a whitewashing for the sake of the hierarchy or positively as an appropriation for the sake of the community,[61] one thing that can be stipulated is that the tone of the picture as a whole—its respect for its hero, its emphasis on the redeeming feature of personal courage—is at least nominally consistent with this retrospective mythicization. The same cannot be said of *The Caine Mutiny*. At least in the film version of this story (in the novel, says William Darby, the bad son is vilified more thoroughly than the bad father[62]) there is such an extreme dissonance between what we are told and what we have seen for ourselves that we are unable to reconcile the two. What sticks with us at the end, moreover, is not the party line, not even a sense of having to resist the party line, but the image of Bogart's Queeg—twitching, hysterical, vindicative—and the memory of the satisfaction we felt in the courtroom scene when, against all odds, his accusers were corroborated by his own lack of control. *Regardless* of intent, then, in 1954 we simply do not believe the face-(or institution-)saving coda any more. Subsequent to this, even the pretence begins to disappear. In *Mister Roberts*, the bad father (James Cagney as a wonderfully cynical and malicious poor-boy-risen-to-a-position-of-power) is so much a given—so much the predictable extension of a predictably inimical system—that we are not even surprised by the meaningless death of the would-be-better son (a kamikaze plane catches him drinking coffee in the wardroom during his first engagement after getting his long awaited transfer to active duty).

The fifties war film was thus a spawning ground for the public version of the bad dad. Perhaps, on the other hand, it's unreasonable to use such a label for this last couple of examples. Both *The Caine Mutiny* and *Mister Roberts* are set on non-combat vessels in the backwater of the war. Far from anomalous, however, this dissociation of the experience of war from the experience of battle is a key step in the de-authorization process. As long as the fiction focuses on the activity of fighting, and especially on the action of the individual fighter, it is difficult to discredit the idea that the patriarchal imperative is a heroic one. Once the immediacy recedes, however, what we are left with is simply the image of arbitrary and dehumanizing regimentation. We should not be surprised, then, that so many of the more memorable fifties war fictions took place far removed from the enemy lines. Given the aforementioned ambivalence about conformity, it is almost predictable that the popular imagination of the day, as Peter Biskind notes, should be fixated less on the contest with "Nazis or Commies" than on "the deadly combat between the individual and society, represented by the army."[63] Viewed from this perspective, Captain Queeg is not just a flawed individual; he expresses to a significant degree a large and growing suspicion that the idea of "fatherness"— indeed, the whole not-to-be-questioned constellation of goals and values that characterized the progressivist patriarchy—was a suspect one. Hence the anti-war picture; hence, too, one would venture, the decade-long cycle of anti-success films like *The Harder They Fall* or *The Sweet Smell of Success*. If the biological father was ambiguous in the fifties, his worldly equivalent, the self-made millionaire or high-flying tycoon was explicitly and almost without exception either unhappy or vicious.[64]

Exacerbating this rejection of paternal values was an even more pointed rejection of the paternal *role*. It is significant, for instance, that Jack Warden, the good sergeant who represents the middle ground between top down corruption and bottom up alienation in *From Here to Eternity*, refuses in the end, *despite* his recognition of the need for his skills and even more his integrity, to become an officer. It is also significant that this character and this decision are played up more fully in the film version than in the novel.[65] Whatever connection the fifties felt with the son betrayed, the thing that focused the real anxieties of the period was the suggestion, more subversive by far, that the bad father was not simply a fluke who could be replaced by a newer model. Indeed, even the *good* father was tainted by now. Read positively, *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* may simply be taken as modeling a healthy response to the pressures of modern society. When Tom Rath makes "the decision to give up the entrepreneurial ideal of unlimited aspiration in favor of a balance between work and privatized familial happiness"—when he turns down the opportunity to become the corporate heir-apparent, *despite* his admiration for the boss-father himself—this "is not merely a revolt against the old," says Elizabeth Long, but "an accommodation to the constraints of the new."[66] For present purposes, however, it seems more useful to reverse the order of that sentence. Accommodation notwithstanding, Rath's decision *is* a revolt against the old. Like Jack Warden, he makes a conscious

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choice not to join the ranks of the fathers. Considering the sad state of the boss's "real" family, both here and elsewhere (it is notable that the captain's marriage in *From Here to Eternity* is both sterile and loveless), it is clear that the public patriarch, traditionally celebrated as the cornerstone of the common weal, has by the fifties become a seriously compromised figure.

The decade replays this refusal in many forms. The gunfighter—a popular hero-type during the period—is considered by most critics to be *other* by definition.[67] When Shane rides out of town at the end of the movie, however, away from the cozy home and the ready-made family, it is more than possible, considering contiguous developments, that far from "exceptional" he is simply acting out a communal fantasy. If true, this would go far to explain the almost complete dissociation of fatherness and satisfaction in the fictions of the period. And not just in the fictions. One might, for instance, note here the late-decade public fascination, entirely disproportionate to either the size or the importance of the movement, with those archetypal drop-outs, the Beats.[68] To be fair, on the other hand, one would also have to note the quite contrary implications of the television of the time.

The fifties domestic sitcom, says Ella Taylor, depicted "a universe in which mild sibling quarrels were quickly but fairly adjudicated by sage, kindly parents equipped with endless reserves of time and patience . . . . Taken together, these shows proposed family life as a charming excursion into modernity, but resting on the unshakeable stability of tradition."[69] Clearly this description is discrepant with the picture we have inferred from film melodrama. Are we, then, simply dealing with another one of the paradoxes mentioned in the introduction? In a way, perhaps. For obvious practical reasons, television fictions *were* substantially more conservative than those produced by other media during the period. This shouldn't, on the other hand, be taken to mean that the subversion wasn't still there. On the small as on the large screen the father in fact lost considerable ground during the fifties. In some cases the deflation was quite explicit. A staple of programs like "Ozzie and Harriet" and "The Honeymooners," for instance, was (in Clifford Clark's words) making fun of "the inept father whose harebrained ideas would have wrecked the family were it not for the common sense and hard work of the wife."[70] Even in series like "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver," however, which seem on the surface to offer an unequivocal affirmation of patriarchy, the father, like the good dad of film melodrama, is covertly disadvantaged simply by virtue of his "position."

It is this covert operation that perhaps best summarizes the fifties view of the father. The real strike against Jim Anderson and Ward Cleaver is that they are never allowed to meet us on their own turf. We know they have jobs, and it is clear from the details of the *mis-en-scène* that they do well enough in them to provide their families with all the normal middle-class advantages. The only time we tend to *see* them, though, is at home, in the traditional territory of moms and kids, confronting, reacting against, and all too often mishandling traditional household problems and crises. Even without explicit character flaws, then, they are

situationally diminished, domesticated into a faintly comic ineffectuality.[71] Much the same might be said of the "real" father during this period. The stress on conformity, the valorization of private satisfaction over public success, the media emphasis on "togetherness"—however these trends might be rationalized individually, what they accomplished collectively was a total recoding of the erstwhile independent male. "In theory," says Oakley, "'togetherness' meant that young couples now spent more time together than married people had in the past and that family roles were becoming less differentiated . . . But it was the [man] who was supposed to have changed the most. Magazines ran article after article on the new husband, who was shown working . . . around the house [or] attending classes with his wife on childbirth and childcare."[72] Never mind the truth we all know, that men didn't "really" became equal partners in homemaking—it is clear from such materials that the *image* of masculinity purveyed during this period, by experts as by filmmakers, was far removed from patriarchal norms. It is also clear that the discrepancy catalyzed more than a little uneasiness. Considering the extent to which comedy is supposed to document communal anxieties, one might, for instance, take note of the fact that so many of the men in the comic strips of the fifties were shorter than, and bullied by, their wives.[73] The sense of threat carried by these representations is palpable.[74] It is worth remembering, on the other hand, that humor does more than simply manage ambivalence—it also acts subversively, to express disreputable wishes. However negatively the negative image of the father may seem to have been viewed, therefore, it may be seen as a necessary first step in developing a more positive counter-ideology privileging the feminine.

Mothers and Daughters

I made mention earlier of the strong female figures who emerged from forties cinema. I also mentioned that their independence was a qualified one. There has been ample discussion, especially among feminist film critics, of the ways in which, their relative vitality notwithstanding, these women are textually subordinated to the patriarchal order. Mothers are made to appear as monsters of lack or excess.[75] Daughters bond preferentially with their fathers.[76] Career women are punished for their presumption.[77] Romantics are punished for their desire.[78] The innocent and unwary are attacked by madness or madmen.[79] What the plot begins, the structure completes. A common strategy is the imposition of an extrinsically validated discursive hierarchy. In *Mildred Pierce*, for instance, the privilege is established both visually and diagetically. Just as the heroine herself is diminished/contained by the shadowy, noir-coded interior of the police station, her "story," carried in flashbacks, is distanced and contained by the anchoring present interludes dominated by the male detective, with his unsettling gaze and superior knowledge.[80] Despite—or more likely because of—her worldly success, then, the independent female is out-spoken (pun intended) in her own text. This is a common circumstance in forties fictions. What the decade gives with one

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hand it takes away with the other. Even the femme fatale, as Molly Haskell points out, is "exposed" as a male fantasy.[81]

What, we might ask, stimulated such strenuous defensiveness? Considering the tone of some of the more extreme contemporaneous discourses on women—Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*, for instance, with its "discovery" of the later much-bruited phenomenon of "momism," or Lundberg's and Farnham's diatribe on female maladjustment in *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*[82]—it is clearly not enough to invoke something as neutral and dispassionate as "the times." The image of woman produced by Hollywood during its classic period, says Christine Gledhill, must be read *not* simply "as a reflection of an economically constituted problem—the post-war impulse . . . to punish the independent female . . . as a reflex of the economy's need to push women out of production back into the home—but also as a crisis in the function of that image of defining male identity."[83] What triggered that crisis? The fact is, if the forties film heroine was a *subject* of the patriarchal order, she was also, and in some ways more important, its *agent*.[84] The maternal role was particularly crucial here, of course. Due to the association of women with domesticity, and of domesticity with constraint, the mother has historically been ceded a strong regulatory role in America—and viewed negatively because of it.[85] It's hardly surprising, then, that a period like the forties, with its legacy of New Deal social imperatives and even more its wartime prioritization of collective over personal interests, that the mother, as the symbol of the most oppressive aspects of the state,[86] would be first feared and second, in retaliation, denied.

Far from abating with the coming of peace and prosperity, the mood darkened even more after the war. Molly Haskell finds a "Gothic," almost schizophrenic aspect to the period. Especially during the latter half of the decade, she says, "there is a feeling of disaffection [in many films], a glimpse of criminal tracks running parallel to ordinary society not, as in the thirties, with the option of jumping back into the mainline, but continuing forever alongside. The image of woman," she continues, "takes its shadings from [this] general *Zeitgeist*."[87] With what results? On the face of it, mostly negative ones. Especially after Cold War rhetoric began exacerbating private anxieties (and clearly it was significant here, as mentioned earlier, that political subversion was commonly associated with sexual deviancy[88]), defense mechanisms worked overtime. This did not, on the other hand, mean that maternal figures became even more monstrous. Misogyny, thanks to successful management strategies, began to give way to condescension. The mother, no longer *allowed* to be threatening, was contained or subdued. Domestic melodramas for the most part simply defined her out of the picture.[89] In films like *Night of the Hunter* or *Ruby Gentry*, for instance, she is important only for her absence. Even in cases like *East of Eden* or *Rebel Without a Cause* where she still plays an actively inimical role, *qua* person she is so alien, so impervious in her antipathy, that she seems more like a force of nature than a "real," even problematic (like the father), part of the family.[90] All in all, despite the *social* emphasis on mothering during this decade (which was, of course, in

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itself another "containment" strategy[91]), the image of the actual mother becomes very shadowy. Even on television, in fact, that purported last bastion of domesticity, what we see in the main is a process of *de*-realization. The henpecked hubbies that Arthur Hough notes in the earlier years[92] do, it is true, still carry traces of the forties fear-formation, but by mid-decade the mother had by and large dwindled into a fencepost figure, *theoretically* positive perhaps (we'll return to this later[93]), but in practice peripheral to both the action and the emotional dynamics of the situation.[94] Nor did the process stop here. Within a few years, programs like "Bachelor Father," "The Andy Griffith Show," and "A Family Affair" would delete her entirely, displacing her duties onto either servants or— more significantly—wifeless (that is, un- or de-domesticated) males.[95] By the end of the fifties, the mother was hardly even a function any more. In light of such developments the deflation of the patriarch we noted above could perhaps be better seen as spearheading a general deflation of the social *parent*. As an interesting sidelight here one might note that after 1959, Tarzan movies quietly dropped not only Jane but the apeman's erstwhile son.[96]

Fifties moms, then, don't fare much better than fifties dads. The question is, of course, what does this imply for our broader project? Certainly the data so far would seem to do little to support the claims I made in the last section about the subversive implications of familial role changes. If mothers in fifties fictions appear primarily to reflect the long-term effects of forties reaction, however, other feminine figures look more clearly ahead to the sixties. Again we have to step back a little to get the whole picture. I refer the reader once more to Haskell's description of the late forties *Zeitgeist*. General bleakness notwithstanding, at the heart of this cultural configuration, and accounting for much of its dis-ease, was a phenomenon that would ultimately plant the seeds of subsequent revision. With increasing frequency over this period the film heroine begins to be portrayed, not as a mother or a mother-to-be—not, indeed, as *any* kind of social exemplar—but as an *antithesis* to maternity, in asocial and specifically sexual terms.[97] Not merely the vamp but the "good" woman, in other words, becomes identified in the late forties almost entirely with and by her desire.[98]

At first sight this doesn't seem like a particularly liberating development. On the face of it, indeed, the strategy would seem to offer the greatest benefits to the beleaguered male. By "exposing" the deviancy of feminineness, for one thing, it provides a rationale for misogyny without necessitating too close a look at the roots of masculine insecurity. Even more critical, by dissociating the female from her sources of both legitimacy and power, it makes it easier to distance or punish her. In symbolic terms, sex even provides the *means* of chastisement. Here the medicalization motif so noticeable in the late forties/early fifties discourse on women[99] plays a key role. In film after film throughout these years, as Doane notes, sexuality—the characterizing property of the new woman—is associated by means of its "treatment" (both literally and figuratively) with mental or emotional dysfunctions, with physical illness, and even with death. There's a catch to all this, however, and it's here that we find the roots to the counterstrain

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I mentioned above. While it is perhaps inarguable that de-domestication renders the female more vulnerable, it is important to note that it also makes her more dangerous. Hence film noir. If this genre takes great pains to code women as *other*, thus reasserting the norm-sustaining fact of difference,[100] in its entrapped heroes and duplicitous kindred it also models a crucial derangement of the patriarchal family.[101] It is at this place—poised between power and punishment— that we find the disaffiliated heroine at the dawn of the fifties.

Where does she go from there? Into oblivion, many would say. I already mentioned the erasure of women from the sixties popular narrative. In fact, though, this datum is misleading. If we look a little more closely, it becomes clear that the disappearence of the forties-style strong woman from fifties fictions was neither as simple nor as negative as it looks "on the face of it." What needs to be recognized here is that an entrenched ambivalence affects almost every text of the era. Even the most overtly misogynistic discourses—the hard-boiled detective story[102]; the scatterbrained wife variant of domestic sitcom[103]; most striking of all, perhaps, the aforementioned B-movie "creature feature" with its conventional attribution of threat to either unbridled nature or its equivalent, "female" libidinality[104]—while clearly attesting to patriarchal reaction, *also*, if only by virtue of their hysteria, document a recognition of the *power* of the returning repressed. It's a question of which "side" of the picture one chooses to emphasize. In the same way that the ostensibly tough-guy Mike Hammer can be taken as a "hom(m)osexual" who is terrified of his own repressed feminineness,[105] for instance, so Gracie and Lucy and their ilk can be read as either demeaning images *or* empowering ones. How? Even leaving aside the anti-social implications of their sheer wilfulness, the illogic and fractured discourse with which these "imp" types[106] continually confound male rationality are not just failures of mental competence but clearly represent a successful cover for that other "irrational" force, sexuality. Though these examples are all in some sense counter-texts, a similar quarrying can also recuperate the apparently negative domesticating strategies of mainstream fictions during the period.

The first step in this process, obviously, is to determine what exactly these strategies comprise. Many critics would claim that the most significant development over the course of the period was the replacement of the femme fatale with the girl-next-door. Most of those same critics would *also* assert that the trend was a pernicious one. Just as the ritualized dating behavior of the later decade can be seen as a means of controlling sexual experimentation among teenagers,[107] they would say, the increasing emphasis on youthfulness and virginity in women— more extremely, the shift of interest from women to girls—was a tool or at least a consequence of patriarchal repression.[108] The facts in question would seem to be indubitable. Despite this, the reading simply doesn't work beyond a certain point. The real problem is its failure to account for other, equally obvious and strikingly contradictory, aspects of the period. What do we do, for instance, with the pointed implication of films like *Picnic* that sexual repression—especially in its female aspect, the spinster—was at best pathetic and at worst unwholesome?[109]

Even more problematic, how do we explain the continued and even increasing popularity throughout the period of the love-goddess type?[110] And what about the *Playboy* phenomenon?[111] Whatever else happened during the fifties, it is clear from indicators like these that sex was neither condemned nor "contained," as the repression theory implies, but instead underwent a process of exoneration. One way of accomplishing this was by playing up the redemptive powers of love.[112] Another, and more important for the subject at hand, was a kind of rustication.

The key sememe here was Marilyn Monroe. In marked contrast to the venality of the film noir sexpot, Marilyn represented desire in its most beneficent, unthreatening, *animal* form. As articulated by Marilyn, in other words, sex was no longer deforming but natural. This shift—this single *term*, in fact—contains the key to the whole period. At least in America[113] naturalness is consensually associated with the essential feminine. Insofar as the fifties public identified with the love goddess, then, they were also necessarily identifying with a stance or mode that was at least formally opposed to patriarchy. The question is, of course, whether identification is really the proper word to use in a case like this. It must be acknowledged that there are a great many critics who would say that the operative relationship with regard to Marilyn was not empathy but appropriation. It is notable, on the other hand, that one of the most derogatory discussions of the Monroe cult—Michael Wood's—speaks of the phenomenon as signaling a kind of fake-cum-wishful communal coming-into-innocence.[114] Cynicism notwithstanding (Wood himself is concerned primarily with the exploitative potential of what he calls the "Calypso" role), what is most significant about this statement is its offhanded documentation of incipient primitivism. If it is undeniable that at least part of Marilyn's appeal was rooted in her capacity to allay male anxieties (by playing up both her naivete and her accessibility, says Richard Dyer, films like *The Seven Year Itch* not only countered but actually deconstructed the erstwhile threat of feminine sexuality[115]), it is also clear that the deculturalization strategy had the reciprocal effect of unharnessing and by implication revalorizing exactly those elements of excessive feminineness[116] that, according to feminist critics like Mary Ann Doane, the forties text was so concerned to contain.[117]

Accepting this revision, it now is possible to read the late fifties popularity of tomboy and teeny-bopper heroines like "Gidget" and "Tammy"[118] as no more nor less than an extension or product of a general trend toward the rehabilitation of the libidinal. If innocence was the only guarantee that sex would not be used for ulterior (i.e., "unnatural") ends, then the younger and less sophisticated the female, the better. It is important to be clear, on the other hand, that it is the *potentiality* of such figures, not simply their purity, that makes them desirable. In this respect one might note, for instance, that the "bad girls" of the period, like Liz Taylor's character in *Butterfield 8*, are in general condemned not because they have sex outside of marriage but because they do so for the wrong reasons: to get money or possessions or social status. One might also note that the ingenue who falls authentically, out of genuine passion—as in *A Summer Place*[119]—is virtually always treated sympathetically. Far from a defense of celibacy, what we derive

from vehicles like this is the message that sex is simply too important to be trifled with. From such a viewpoint even the cult of virginity can be viewed as a means, not of repressing, but of exaggerating the momentousness of the sexual act, transforming it from a merely social marker into a numinous, even religious experience. It is notable in this regard, as Haskell points out, that even in the most clichéed of the late-fifties sex comedies the virginal status of the hard-to-get heroine is more typically attributable to accident than to moral conviction. From films like *Pillow Talk*, she says, "the image of Doris Day we have somehow accepted is that of a forty-year-old virgin defending her maidenhead into a ripe old age. On the contrary, though she begins, usually, as a sexually backward young woman, she overcomes inhibitions and covers lightyears in sex education. Unabashedly puritanical . . . [when it comes to] drink and dirty words . . . she is [nevertheless] ready to give herself to the man she loves. What prevents her is not her coyness but the plot's."[120]

The picture that emerges when we look at such unconsidered qualifiers, if not diametrically opposed to, at least diverges importantly from, the conventional ideological reading of this decade as simply conservative. If it is true, as the feminists claim, that the sanitization of the fifties heroine resulted in a net loss of power, it is also true that the process of disempowerment, in keeping with our initial predictions, was concomitant with, and diagnostic of, a rehabilitation of her most essential general properties—that is (and here one thinks not only of the no-longer-mercenary mistress but also of the no-longer-domineering mother), those properties connected with her biological rather than her social being. From the feminist viewpoint this is not, by and large, a positive development. It is notable that the most—indeed, one might almost say the only—potent women to be found sixties television households were either pastoralized ("The Beverly Hillbillies," "Petticoat Junction," "Green Acres") or magical ("I Dream of Jeannie," "Be-witched," "The Munsters").[121] In the vast majority of cases, however, on large or small screen, the need to divest the female of her social taint left little more than a cypher. The consequences of this particular combination of facts will be considered further in the next section.

Brothers and Sisters

If the parent was no longer a suitable role model, then common sense would suggest that the obvious heir to fifties affections must have been the child. On the face of it there is ample hard evidence to support this supposition. One of the most telling data is the much documented post-war growth of a separate youth culture.[122] Though centered on and stimulated by the burgeoning of new forms of music, over the course of the fifties the teen movement changed the whole face of the American popular media. Can we take this to "prove" a general valorization of juvenility? Clearly pertinent here is the question raised by numerous commentators as to whether the phenomenon in question represented an authentic grass roots development or was simply a synthetic product concocted by clever

businessmen to take advantage of the growing adolescent market. Due to the quite evident degree of commercialization to which it was later subjected, rock 'n' roll has been a favored target of this kind of critique.[123]   Other kinds of merchandise, however—from film to fashion—are also commonly read as less indicative of youthful desire than of corporate greed. "Teens experiment with tastes, and exploiters carefully scan fan clubs for new trends," says Robert Shayon, "but they also shrewdly feed back stimuli into the young groups and help to develop marketable trends."[124] The image invoked here of conscious manipulation is not only a frequent but an ofttimes justifiable one. Does this mean the whole thing was a fake? I think not. That "exploiters" were quick to jump on the bandwagon does not imply that they invented it in the first place. It is notable, as Oakley points out,[125] that there was virtually no distinctive youth music at the beginning of the decade. It is also notable that rock 'n' roll was at first strenuously resisted by mainstream interests. Only *after* it was successfully promoted by small independent companies like Sun Records, Elvis's original label, did the major producers decide that it would be good business to change their tune. Far from contriving it, "the industry was caught napping" by the unprecedented popularity of the new music, says Andrew Ross. Entrepreneurs and disc jockeys may have "'discovered' the teenage taste for R&B, and helped to make it nationally popular: *they did not 'create' it.*"[126] There seems no reason to believe that the same can't be said of other aspects of teen culture, no matter how commercial they seem. At the very least, then, I think we can stipulate that youth became both a more distinct and a more important category during the period. More contentiously, I would also argue that it accrued more "real" social power.

One of the best indicators vis-a-vis the question of agency is the imaging of teens in general culture. It is axiomatic by now that rock 'n' roll was viewed by adults in its early years as an affront not merely to aesthetic sensibilities but to morality.[127] What is perhaps not so widely recognized, however, is the extent to which this particular opposition reflected a deep-seated concern about, even fear of, the young people themselves. This anxiety was not, to be sure, without some foundation. "Between 1948 and 1953," notes Oakley, "the number of juveniles . . . charged with crimes increased by 45 percent, and it was estimated that for every [one] . . . brought into court there were at least five who had not been caught. It was especially disturbing that juvenile crimes were committed by organized gangs that roamed—and seemed to control—the streets of many of the larger cities."[128] While striking, however, such statistics may also be misleading taken out of context. Crime rates aside, the fact of the matter is that most Americans lived in locales safely segregated from the urban areas where the problem was largely localized. Most Americans, indeed, had never seen a real "J.D." The paranoia so widely noted by contemporaneous as well as subsequent commentators derived, then, not from the reality of, but from the public discourse about, delinquency: the journalistic scaremongering, the endless stream of expert opinion, the cautionary fictional depictions.[129]   And I do mean cautionary. Looking back from the eighties we tend to think of teen flicks as both harmless

and conventional. The view from the fifties, however, bodies forth a quite different picture. The young hoods of *Blackboard Jungle*, for instance, are no Ferris Buellers; they pose real threats to the property and even the physical safely of their adult "keepers."[130] It is telling, I think, as Joseph Reed points out, that this story is conveyed from the teacher's rather than the students' vantage point.[131] One thing we can infer from the sheer disproportion of the "fuss about delinquency"[132] is that the fifties image of the "bad son," in marked contrast to more recent versions, was not just a wishful juvenile fantasy but expressed the feelings of the public at large.

Youth, then, was coded not merely as different but as dangerous in the fifties—just as woman was. It is significant in this regard that the only notable variant on the "feminine" movie monster during the period was the teen one. Films like *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* not only express adolescent anxieties about changing bodies and social roles, as Reed contends[133]; they also attribute to the child-hero a real, and historically anomalous, ability to cause harm. One can't help thinking of the similarly covert empowerment of women not just in horror vehicles but even more, albeit briefly, in genres like film noir. There are some important differences in the two cases, however. For one thing, the bad boy was never viewed as negatively as the bad woman. Quite the contrary, in fact. Even early in the decade there is an evident urge both to exonerate and to normalize him. Some pictures—notably those starring cult heroes like Marlon Brando or James Dean—achieve this simply by focusing their attention on a single complex and sympathetic character.[134] Others, cashing in on the current fascination with unhappy families, make his misbehavior a direct consequence of parental neglect.[135] Dean's "Rebel Without a Cause" is the most celebrated but far from the only fifties bad boy who only needs a little T.L.C. Even "J.D." films, while quite clear about the gang's lawlessness, rarely make their protagonists seem as absolutely *other* as film noir does. In some cases, indeed, it is society that is portrayed as alien. The bikers of *The Wild One*, for instance, though rude and destructive, are less spiteful and certainly less deliberate in their violence than the vigilante band of town fathers. Beside the cold-blooded, hypocritical righteousness of the latter, in fact, Brando's anomie seems justified, even admirable. All things considered, this was probably the most notable feature marking off the bad boy from his feminine counterpart: the fact that his dangerousness was often imaged, at least covertly, as positive. Sympathy wasn't the only thing that separated them, however. More important in the long run was the fact that where women, as noted, lost their potency over the course of the decade, the bad boy reigned well into the sixties.

How, in the light of concomitant patterns, are we to interpret this apparent inversion? Many, especially feminist critics see it simply as capping or confirming the eclipse of the feminine that began in the fifties.[136] Far from subversive, the bad boy, according to this view, is an avatar of patriarchy, continuing and deepening his fathers' oppressive opposition to women. There is some textual support for such a reading. Peter Biskind, for instance, notes the unusual number

of late fifties/early sixties films in which "sex-starved [older] women lusted after young studs"[137]: one could easily read this thematization as an allegory of the battle for both social and symbolic supremacy between the old maternal exemplar and the new disaffiliated youth. The problem, once again, is the recalcitrance of the material: as with those supposedly pro-patriarchal texts we examined in the first section, if one looks just a little more closely at the thing-in-itself, the lines—particularly the battle lines—begin to shift and blur a little. It is notable that in the classic 1950 precursor to this late-decade trend—*Sunset Boulevard*—the older woman, a superannuated movie star who is coded as a combination of the problematic forties career woman and the noir sexual predator, is less clearly a victim than her successors. It is also notable (marking the difference a decade makes) that in this case it is the young stud who is defeated—killed by her in a jealous rage. Even this early, however, and despite the denouement, there is no doubt whatsoever where the film's sympathies lie. The aging actress—vain, deluded, false to the core after a lifetime of trading on artifice and insincerity—represents the full dead weight of history and its stultifying effect on vital youth. The wording is important here, because I want to make clear what the film makes clear: that Norma Desmond (and I think we can extend this description to many of those other stud-hungry spinsters and their ilk[138]) is condemned by the narrative *not* because she represents woman against man, but because she represents the old order—*culture against nature*. The implications of this are, to say the least, provocative. Like the young gardener who nurtures the rich and repressed widow back to life in *All That Heaven Allows*,[139] the bad boy who wanders into town in films like *Picnic* and *The Fugitive Kind* is not woman's antithesis but her alter ego, her competition, at times even her ideal self.[140]

This recoding of the young male was one of the most striking phenomena of the fifties. It wasn't only the new breed of actor, with his animal magnetism and overt emotionality, who had a distinctly androgynous streak. Long before James Dean became an icon, the young people of the nation had taken up as their standard-bearer one Holden Caulfield, the irreverent young hero of J.D. Salinger's much-banned novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, a figure who, in Peter Filene's words, though clearly rebellious (no one ever mounted a more concerted attack on adult "phoniness"), "rebelled tenderly, compassionately, [in a way] more feminine than masculine."[141] There is a sense, in fact, in which the whole of teen culture during the fifties was derivatively "feminine." The key, as one might predict by now, was the property or profession of natureness. It is not coincidental that the primary progenitors of rock 'n' roll—"race" music (R&B) and country and western—both have strong conventional primitivistic associations.[142] Considering the context, in fact, we could almost say that rock 'n' roll managed to combine the numen of the cowboy and the noble savage in one improbable package. And that's only the least of it. The real secret to the "success" of fifties rock—indeed, the single factor that came by the end of the decade to be popularly identified as summarizing both the nature of, and the "trouble" with, the American teenager—was sex. If the explicit lyrics of R&B were cleaned up for

white consumption, there was still plenty of *in*explicit libidinality in the pounding up-beat rhythms of the new music, not to mention the body-language of its performers.[143] "Perhaps Jeff Greenfield, a member of this first generation of rock 'n' roll fans, expressed it best in his *No Peace, No Place*," says Oakley. "'Each night, sprawled on my bed on Manhattan's Upper West Side, I would listen to the world that Alan Freed created . . . a world of unbearable sexuality and celebration, a world of citizens under sixteen, in a constant state of joy or sweet sorrow.'"[144] It is clear from this quote that the youth of the day felt their culture set them apart from—and thus tacitly *against*—their parents. It is equally clear from our observations in earlier parts of this paper about the linkages made between nature, sex and the feminine that the means by which this dissociation was accomplished entailed not merely the marking of a generation gap, not merely the rejection of fatherness, but a full-scale realignment with modes of being or feeling more conventionally assigned to woman.[145]

There's no accident in any of this, of course. In America rebellion *by definition* belongs on nature's side of the fence.[146] Simply showing an urge to rebel would thus already predispose youth toward feminineness. Or perhaps the urge to rebel was simply the byproduct of a more general feminization. Whatever the sequence, the bottom line is that the social subversiveness of the fifties bad boy was (ironically enough) defined by and dependent upon a subversion of his ostensibly immutable masculinity. Why, though, a boy? The reader will no doubt have noticed the biased gendering of pronouns in a section entitled "Brothers and Sisters." And this last observation exacerbates the problem. If feminineness is indeed the key to the new empowerment, why don't we see more potent females in the fictions of the fifties? The previous section already answered this. More deeply implicated in patriarchy than her brothers, the American heroine (and it is notable that this term already carries a burden of social responsibility, a de facto positioning on the side of "right," which is entirely absent from the masculine version of the word) is pre-coded as an opponent of "liberty." The only way to eradicate this stigma, as we have seen, is to detach her from her erstwhile conventional, and especially domestic, character. Once divested of her social powers, unfortunately, she also loses the potential to play any kind of *anti*-social role. In part this is due to the necessities of the divestment itself. To be redeemed, the heroine *has* to be good. If she's good, on the other hand, she's not interesting any more—not in a period of burgeoning primitivism anyway. One of the reasons we are satisfied with the denouement of *Sunset Boulevard*, for instance, is the fact that the "nice girl" who is set against the conniving older woman in the contest for William Holden's soul is simply not dynamic enough to seem even a suitable mate for the man, let alone having the charisma to stand in his place. Merely because she *is* nice, she lacks both his edge and his ambivalence—the very qualities that comprise and define his subversiveness. To render the female eligible for election to the ranks of the anti-heroes, then, is almost perforce to render her unsuitable. That's the first problem. The other is more basic still. Paradoxically, it is only the male who can thrive in those times and landscapes that

Americans identify with a state of nature. Hence the seemingly quite unjust fact that the free spirits of the "feminine" sixties—real as well as fictional[147]—were virtually all masculine.

It becomes necessary at this point to introduce a qualifier into the argument. One of the dangers in this kind of essay is the blurring of the categories of "real" and fictional. From what I have said in this section it would be easy to see the privileging of youth in terms solely of its effects on and utilization by flesh and blood adolescents. It is true, of course, that life copies art. It is also true, however, that fictional representations, even realistic ones, are never entirely mimetic. Especially when it comes to the imaging of so highly mythicized an entity as "family," it is always necessary to think in terms of psycho-drama, not merely reportage. In this case, for instance, it must be made clear that the youth cult was not a phenomenon reserved for the young but a product of the broader popular imagination. Our comments on rock 'n' roll notwithstanding, there is some indication, in fact, that teenagers themselves were far less constructing than constructed during this period—a creation, not of Madison Avenue (I will still stand firm on this), but of the general public mood. Certainly this is the impression they gave contemporaneous observers. Sociologist Talcott Parsons talked about their "compulsive conformity" to the peer group.[148] Others, even more damningly, spoke of their conformity to the values of their elders. "The conservatism of the college generation prevailed throughout the decade," says Oakley. "In a study [published] ... in 1951, *Time* magazine noted that 'the most startling thing about the younger generation is its silence' ... [In 1953] *Newsweek* reported that students were hardworking, ambitious conformists who looked forward to secure jobs and a happy married life. ... Similar collegiate characteristics were reported in a 1955 study by David Riesman ... [and] in 1957, when *The Nation* surveyed college and university professors about what their students were reading and thinking."[149] Whence, then, came that omnipresent image of rebellion? From the air? Perhaps. Though it may seem frivolous in a scholarly text, this may actually be the best way of putting it. We have already mentioned the middle class appropriation of the Beat movement.[150] Never mind that most of the attention was pejorative: the fact that conservative suburbanites could be captivated by a phenomenon so antithetical to their accustomed values and lifestyle suggests that there was in the population at large a *preparedness* to be or to value difference. We could say the same thing about the obsession with delinquency. It is telling, I think, that the most striking bad boy images of the decade were found, not in low-budget "B" flicks, but in respectable establishment vehicles. Fascination (and no matter how great the ambivalence, this *was* the word for it) with the rebellious young anti-hero was a cultural rather than a sub-cultural phenomenon. *As* was the dis-identification with the father. *As* was the general revalorization of feminineness during the decade.

It was all part of the covert realignment with nature which laid the ground for the sixties.

Postscript

Only one thing remains to say on this topic. Intrinsically interesting because of what it reflects on the complex interrelations between the social and the symbolic deployment of gender categories in America, the foregoing may also contain the seeds of an important cautionary tale. The last decade was in many ways a replay of the forties. "Miami Vice," Ronald Reagan, postmodern public spaces, an obsession with the lives of the rich and the royal, the return of the nuclear family to television, of artifice to popular music, and of male monsters to the horror flick, the pop-cultural rehabilitation of machismo, militarism and technology—as eclectic as they may seem on the surface, these signs of the times are all signs of a progressivist mind-set. Most important for the subject at hand, the parade of strong, interesting female characters across both the large and the small screen throughout the eighties was a clear indication of a new concern with the social. Beginning with *Kramer vs Kramer* in 1979, vehicles as disparate as "Cagney and Lacey," "Kate and Allie," *Out of Africa*, *Places in the Heart*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, "Murphy Brown," *Desperately Seeking Susan*, "Designing Women" and *Steel Magnolias* brought back to the mainstream not only the experience but the authority of women. Never mind that feminist critics continued to complain about textual and political subordination, the fact is that women's films comprised a large proportion of the important films made during the decade. It would be tempting to view this as a triumph of feminism if it weren't for one thing—the historical parallel.[151] If the eighties were the forties, there are already signs abroad that the fifties aren't far behind. Most telling, of course, in light of the foregoing, was our recent, rather definitive rejection of the political father. But that's only the tip of the iceberg. Consider some of the surprises to be found in early nineties popular culture. The new working class comedy. The return of the creature feature. The new western with its old noble savage. The huge and entirely unexpected crossover success of country music. "Northern Exposure." Spike Lee. Ross Perot. I could go on.[152] Not all the revivals are quite so benign as these, unfortunately. It's easy to see the war on drugs—xenophobic, anti-libidinal, obsessed with righteousness and disguise—as the cutting edge of a new McCarthyism. It's also easy to see the fear of otherness that lurks beneath the surface of this so-called war. If we add in the recent upsurge of racism across the country, the growing visibility of the anti-pornography and anti-abortion movements, the "justified" misogyny of films like *Fatal Attraction* and *Misery*, what we have, in fact, is a clear indication that, for good or ill, the returning repressed— the face of threat—is again beginning to be construed as feminine. The same round, the same mulberry-bush, the same garden path we went down the last time.

Does this mean that women are doomed to suffer the same erasure? Well, that's the sixty-four thousand dollar question, isn't it? One would like to hope not. The evidence is far from unequivocal, however. One important difference between the forties and the eighties was that the latter allowed women a greater flexibility of roles and traits. I'm not just talking about getting out of the kitchen

here, although this was obviously a step in the right direction. Far more critical was the fact that the decade saw females making symbolic inroads into such classically male preserves as the buddy film (*Outrageous Fortune*) and the hard-boiled detective novel (Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski). Women not only played their traditional, pro-social functions in eighties popular fictions, in other words; they also toyed with more oppositional kinds of positioning. One would like to think that this might destabilize traditional alignments when it comes to fielding a new anti-hero. There's only one fly in the ointment. Just as last time it was the hithertofore primary source of the female's worldly power—her maternity—that subsequently served as the instrument of her subordination, it is possible that the new "working girl" may turn out to be her own worst enemy. Think for instance, of the fable we are offered in the film of that name: a nasty, selfish, aggressive, unfeminine female executive gives way to a kinder, nicer, more domesticated version of the type. This may, alas, turn out to be a true story. Just as June Cleaver and Margaret Anderson were done in by their own goodness, it is all too easy to imagine the businesswoman of the nineties being idealized into symbolic oblivion. So what if she commands a different and larger domain than her domestic precursor. When the time comes for the next great escape, she'll still be stuck on the side of social responsibility.

Notes

1. Many would challenge my use of the term "revive" here on the grounds of the ample excellent work that has been done on American cultural history, *including* the fifties, over the last decade. I don't debate this for a minute. Indeed, many of the books and authors they would be thinking of in mounting their objections are cited in the following pages. Insofar as this kind of work is no longer considered trendy, however, its influence rarely extends much beyond its immediate academic enclave. Its stock is lowest, moreover, among the very group who should be relying most heavily on its insights. It is interesting to note in this regard the sparsity of indigenous reference in the essays contained in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York, 1992), a collection which bills itself as not merely representative of, but exemplary for, its titular field. Despite its professed filial reverence for the British Birmingham School, in fact, the new American Cultural Studies habitually gives more weight to international theory than to homegrown history - even when it purports to be talking about "America." What I'm asking to be revived, consequently, is not so much the national culture study per se as the recognition that this kind of grounded analysis is important, even propaedeutic, to any valid cultural critique. For a more extended discussion of this point, see Gaile McGregor, "Cultural Studies and Social Change: The War Film as Men's Magic, and Other Fictions about Fictions," forthcoming in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*.

2. Given the current intellectual climate, and especially the trend toward identifying cultural meaning exclusively with reception, it is the last of these features which would seem to require the most explanation. Without getting into a full-scale philosophical discussion of the issue, I would just like to refer the reader to William Graebner's remarks on the inadequacy of a "consumption-based" approach to cultural studies when one is dealing with a period remote in time ("It is one thing," he says, "to gather the fresh interpretations of youth who have just seen a Madonna video, but quite another the generate a trustworthy oral-history acount of what it was like - and what it meant - to listen to Charlie Parker in 1944") and even more to his resuscitation of the notion of an expert reader. See *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston, 1991), xii-xiii. Graebner's own work is the best possible demonstration of the riches to be gleaned from a careful contextual reading of cultural documents.

3. See, for example, Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York, 1957); Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel* (New York, 1963); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964); Michael Kammen, ed., *The Contrapuntal Civilization: Essays toward a New Understanding of the American Experience* (New York, 1971).

4. J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York, 1986); Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago, 1989).

5. Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, 2nd edition (Baltimore, 1986), 177.

6. Oakley, *God's Country*, x.

7. Lest I seem to be setting myself up as the spearhead of some heroic revisionist project here, I should perhaps underline the literalness of what I said a few sentences back. What I am presuming to correct in this essay is a "general" impression, not a universal one. It would be dishonest to suggest that there has been no scholarly recognition of either the changes that took place during, or the transitional status of, the fifties. W. T. Lhamon's *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, D.C., 1990), for instance, while in my opinion wrong-headed in many of its specific interpretations (if pushing back the roots of the sixties, this book is by no means free from catastrophism), is at least useful in its attempt to historicize phenomena that are all too often viewed in a vacuum. Though technically focussing on the forties, Graebner's previously mentioned *Age of Doubt* also conveys a strong sense of the historical process. Indeed, insofar as many of his most salient examples are drawn from the later years of the decade, Graebner provides a valuable background to my own work by explicating the early warning signs of the culture-to-nature shift that would later so strikingly emerge from the closet.

8. Paul Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York, 1983), Chapter 2.

9. Oakley, *God's Country*, Chapter 7.

10. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass Consumption Society," in May, *Recasting America*, 38-57.

11. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and American Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York, 1985).

12. Oakley, *God's Country*, Chapter 7; Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York, 1989), 43ff.

13. See John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and in Peace, 1941-1960* (New York, 1988), 253 ff.

14. Elaine May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988), 20-22. Among the best known of the texts to which she alludes in this quote are David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Denney Reuel, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1950); C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York, 1951); William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York, 1956).

15. Elizabeth Long, *The American Dream and the Popular Novel* (Boston, 1985), Chapter 4.

16. Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties*, 237ff.

17. If the most famous example of this is *High Noon*, the most intriguing is surely *Johnny Guitar*. This 1954 film not only anticipates the more extreme anti-social sentiments of the sixties in its portrait of civic injustice, but provides a literal albeit decidedly grotesque foreshadowing of the feminization process discussed below by casting women in the otherwise eminently conventional roles of villain (the greedy, ruthless cattle baron who is prepared to sacrifice anyone and anything to fulfil "his" ambitions) and hero (the nonconformist saloon-owner who stands for individual liberty against corporate brutality). See Robert Schultz, "Celluloid History: Postwar Society in Postwar Popular Culture," *American Studies* 31 (Spring, 1990), 41-63.

18. Richard Whitehall, "Some Thoughts on Fifties Gangster Films," *Velvet Light Trap* 11 (1974), 17.

19. Richard Dorfman, "Conspiracy City," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 7 (1979), 434.

20. Warren Susman with Edward Griffin, "Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America" in May, *Recasting America*, 23; see also May's introduction, 6ff.

21. Gary Wolfe, "Patterns of Paranoia in the 1950s," *Journal of Popular Film* 5, 1 (1976); Gaile McGregor, *The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Notes toward a Syntactics of Place* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1988), chapters 4 and 5.

22. May not only documents the symptomology of the post-war demographic explosion, but elucidates the often-ignored connections between private affluence and political upheaval by pointing up the tensions that domesticity obscures. "Rootless Americans struggled against what they perceived as internal decay," she says. "The family seemed to offer a psychological fortress that would protect them against themselves. Bolstered by scientific expertise and wholesome abundance, it might ward off the hazards of the age." *Homeward Bound*, 11.

23. Long, *The American Dream*, 85.

24. Oakley, *God's Country*, Chapter 4.

25. *Ibid.*, 57-9.

26. Daniel B. Leab, "See It Now: A Legend Reassessed" in John E. O'Connor, ed., *American History/American Television: Interpreting the Video Past* (New York, 1983), 10-11.

27. Long, *The American Dream*; William Darby, *Necessary American Fictions: Popular Literature of the 1950s* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1987).

28. Hal Himmelstein, *Television Myth and the American Mind* (New York, 1984), 60.

29. Rita Parks, *The Western Hero in Film and Television: Mass Media Mythology* (Ann Arbor, 1982), Chapter 4.

30. Michael Wood, *America in the Movies, or "Santa Maria, It Had Slipped My Mind,"* 2nd edition (New York, 1989), Chapter 9; Joseph W. Reed, *American Scenarios: The Uses of Film Genre* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1989), Chapter 1.

31. Wood, *America in the Movies*, 110; see also Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties*.

32. Given the much underlined solidarity of sixties youth—at least acccording to popular images, one of the key signifiers for the hippies was the commune movement—this last statement may strike the reader as somewhat dubious. Political rhetoric notwithstanding, however, a closer look reveals that the collective reference was largely illusory, based on the fact that, with the discrediting of hierarchy, the privileged relational mode of the period was horizontal. As early as the forties, as Graebner points out, there was a reorientation of the national imagination from "the group and democracy to . . . the individual and freedom" (*Age of Doubt*, 9). The fifties fortified this tendency, especially among young people, with its celebration of sex and rebellion. It is telling, as Serge Denisoff points out, that sixties music, for all its radical content, facilitated the production of "stars" ("Protest Songs of the Old and New Left" in *Sing a Song of Social Significance*, 2nd edition [Bowling Green, Ohio, 1983], esp. 109 ff.). Unlike the Old Left of the Thirties, he adds, performers of the sixties not only expressed but paraded their subjectivity. Thinking back to the eclectic clothing, the partnerless dance styles, and the obsession of social protest with individual rather than collective liberty, it seems clear that their audience did too.

33. John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago, 1976), 247ff.

34. Alan Lovell, "The Western" in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods: An Anthology* (Berkeley, 1976), 164-79.

35. Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton, 1961).

36. George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, 1990), Chapter 3.

37. See McGregor, *The Noble Savage*, especially Chapter 4.

38. *Ibid*, Chapter 5.

39. Janet Walker, "Hollywood, Freud, and the Representation of Women: Regulation and Contradiction, 1945-early 60s" in Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London, 1987).

40. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin, Texas, 1986), 278-308.

41. McGregor, *The Noble Savage*, 102-4.

42. See, i.e., Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (New York, 1973), Chapter 18.

43. Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women since 1945* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1987), Chapter 1.

44. Rebecca Bell-Mettereau, *Hollywood Androgyny* (New York, 1985), Chapter 1.

45. Walker, "Hollywood, Freud."

46. Gaye Tucheman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, eds., *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York, 1987), 3ff.

47. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, 2nd edition (Chicago, 1987), 189ff.

48. *Popcorn Venus*, 264-5.

49. McGregor, *The Noble Savage*, chapters 4-6.

50. *Ladies of the Evening: Women Characters of Prime-Time Television* (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1983), 66.

51. Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 323.

52. D. N. Rodowick, "Madness, Authority, and Ideology in the Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s," *Velvet Light Trap* 19 (1982), 45.

53. Many of the texts cited in this paper, and especially in this section, were successful novels before they become films. Because the film versions are now better known and more accessible, thanks to TV reruns and video, I have in general placed more reliance on these than on the books in preparing this paper. Inasmuch as I am dealing for the most part with gross features of plot and structure rather than nuances of style or characterization, on the other hand, it may be assumed, unless I stipulate otherwise, that my comments are at least loosely applicable to both media.

54. Robert Lang, *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minelli* (Princeton, 1989), 194-209.

55. *Ibid.*, 209-23.

56. Richard de Cordova, "A Case of Mistaken Legitimacy: Class and Generational Difference in Three Family Melodramas" in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 262.

57. *Ibid.*, 264-66; Rodowick, "Madness, Authority," 45.

58. Rodowick, "Madness, Authority," 44-45.

59. Adrian Turner, *Hollywood 1950s* (London, 1986), 38.

60. Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York, 1986), 307; see also Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York, 1983), 92ff.

61. For a review and rebuttal of the generally critical view of this ending, see Leland Poague, "'All I Can See Is the Flags': Fort Apache and the Visibility of History," *Cinema Journal* 27 (1988).

62. Darby, *Necessary American Fictions*, 43-55.

63. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 59; see also McGregor, *The Noble Savage*, 184ff.

64. Biskind, 253.

65. Darby, *Necessary American Fictions*, 345-65.

66. Long, *The American Dream*, 89.

67. Will Wright, *Sixguns & Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berekley, 1975), 40-59.

68. Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York, 1971), 91ff.

69. Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post-War America* (Berkeley, 1989), 27; also Michael Malone, "And Gracie Begat Lucy Who Begat Laverne" in Les Brown and Savannah Waring Walker, eds., *Fast Forward: The New Television and American Society* (Kansas City, 1983), 191.

70. Clifford Clark, "Ranch-House Suburbia: Ideals and Realities" in May, *Recasting America*, 173.

71. See Gatlin, *American Women since 1945*, 9.

72. Oakley, *God's Country*, 119.

73. Filene, *His/Her/Self*, 173.

74. Given the recent almost exclusive concern with the plight of women, it is perhaps worth repeating here what May notes in *Homeward Bound*, that contemporaneous "observers of middle-class life considered homemakers to be emancipated and men to be oppressed" (20).

75. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Women's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1987), Chapter 3.

76. Naomi Scheman, "Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters: Framing the Sight of Women," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988), 62-89.

77. Reed, *American Scenarios*, 199ff.

78. Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Chapter 4.

79. Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, Chapter 14.

80. Pam Cook, "Duplicity in Mildred Pierce" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir* (London, 1980), 68-82.

81. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 190.

82. See Walker, "Hollywood, Freud."

83. "Klute 1: A contemporary film noir and femininst criticism" in Kaplan, *Women in Film Noir*, 12.

84. Wood, *America in the Movies*, 69ff.; Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 266ff.

85. For different perspectives on this, see Geoffrey Gorer, *The American People: A Study in National Character* (New York, 1948); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977); Michael S. Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective" in Harry Brod, ed., *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (Boston, 1987), 121-54.

86. One is reminded here how often women were used in World War II films as the means or occasions of masculine reconstruction. *Casablanca* is the classic example (see Bernard Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* [Lexington, Kentucky, 1986], 167-71), but the theme of domesticating the maverick is a common one throughout forties popular culture. The ambivalence triggered by this process is best evidenced in the deeply disturbing bedtime scene in the 1946 melodrama, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where the armless veteran, divested not only of his "natural" potency (the amputation of a limb is a conventional symbol for castration) but here of his compensating hardware as well, learns from his girlfriend the lesson of utter dependency.

87. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 194. For an interesting discussion of the way that the formal features of forties films themselves modelled or anticipated textual ambiguity, see Dana Polan, "Blind Insights and Dark Passages" in *Power and Paranoia: History, Narative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York, 1986).

88. See Gatlin, *American Women since 1945*, Chapter 1.

89. Nina C. Liebman, "Leave Mother Out: The Fifties Family in American Film and Television," *Wide Angle* 10 (1988).

90. Darby, *Necessary American Fictions*, 209.

91. Oakley, *God's Country*, Chapter 7; Gatlin, *American Women since 1945*, Chapter 1.

92. Arthur Hough, "Trials and Tribulations—Thirty Years of Sitcom" in Richard Adler, ed., *Understanding Television: Essays on Television as a Social and Culture Force* (New York, 1981), 201-22.

93. For examples see Meehan, *Ladies of the Evening*, Chapter 4.

94. Liebman, "Leave Mother Out."

95. Hough, "Trials and Tribulations," 206-8.

96. Derral Cheatwood, "The Tarzan Films: An Analysis of Determinants of Maintenance and Change in Conventions," *Journal of Popular Culture* 16 (1981), 139-40.

97. Sylvia Harvey, "Women's place: the absent family of film noir" in Kaplan, *Women in Film Noir*, 22-34; Scheman, "Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters."

98. Doane, *The Desire to Desire.*

99. *Ibid.*; also Walker, "Hollywood, Freud."

100. Doane, *The Desire to Desire.*

101. Harvey, "Women's Place."

102. Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, 1981).

103. Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy" in Tania Modleska, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988).

104. See Biskind, "Pods and Blobs" in *Seeing is Believing.*

105. Robert Lang, "Looking for the 'Great Whatzit': Kiss Me Deadly and Film Noir," *Cinema Journal* 27 (1988), 32-44.

106. Meehan, *Ladies of the Evening*, Chapter 43.

107. Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb" in May, *Recasting America*, 154-70.

108. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 272ff.

109. Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 269-77.

110. Richard Dyer, "Monroe and Sexuality" in *Heavenly Bodies, Film Stars and Society* (New York, 1986).

111. Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth* (New York, 1977), Chapter 4.

112. Darby, *Necessary American Fictions*, Chapter 7.

113. For a counter-example, see Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto, 1985), especially 133ff.

114. Wood, *America in the Movies*, 71ff.

115. Dyer, "Monroe and Sexuality," especially 40-42.

116. Though Marilyn's revivifying power is not, in fact, made explicit until her last film, *The Misfits*, it is telling that it is in the guise of life-giving love goddess that she is most often remembered today. For a discussion of this, see Carl Rollyson, "More Than a Popcorn Venus: Contemporary Women Reshape the Myth of Marilyn Monroe," *Journal of American Culture* 10 (1987), 19-25.

117. Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Chapter 4.

118. See Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, Chapter 19.

119. *Ibid.*, 312-13; Oakley, *God's Country*, 310.

120. *From Reverence to Rape*, 265.

121. See Hough, "Trials and Tribulations," 309.

122. Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York, 1972), 24ff.

123. See, for instance, Joe Ferrandino, "Rock Culture and the Development of Social Consciousness" in George Lewis, ed., *Side-Saddle on the Golden Calf: Social Structure and Popular Culture in America* (Pacific Palisades, California, 1972), 265-89.

124. Robert Shayon, "Consumers, Commercials, and Men about Town" in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (New York, 1976), 194.

125. Oakley, *God's Country*, 11.

126. Ross, *No Respect*, 94; for a more general review, see Gillett, *Sound of the City*, Part 1.

127. Ferrandino, "Rock Culture," 268ff.

128. Oakley, *God's Country*, 269.

129. *Ibid.*, 269-71, Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 197ff; for a review of scholarly opinion on the topic, see Michael Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain, and Canada* (London, 1985), Chapter 2.

130. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 202-6.

131. Reed, *American Scenarios*, 139ff.

132. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 197.

133. Reed, *American Scenarios*, 133-5, 152-3.

134. See Ferrandino, "Rock Culture," 273.

135. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 199.

136. See, for instance, Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 323ff.

137. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 326.

138. See Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 242ff.

139. Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing*, 323-33.

140. See, for instance, Steven Cohan, "Masquerading as the American Male in the Fifties: *Picnic*, William Holden, and the Spectacle of Masculinity in Hollywood Film," *Camera Obscura* 25-26, (1991), 42-72.

141. Filene, *Him/Her/Self*, 182.

142. For varying views on the primitivistic roots and associations of the genre, see George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America* (New York, 1981), Chapter 10; Gillett, *Sound of the City*, Chapter 1; Ferrandino, "Rock Culture." For a discussion of the primitive allusions carried subliminally by the formal aspects of rock, alternatively, see Wilfred Mellers, "New Music in a New World" in Jonathan Eisen, ed., *The Age of Rock: Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution* (New York, 1969), 180-88.

143. Gillett, *Sound of the City*, 268ff.

144. Oakley, *God's Country*, 250.

145. Leerom Medovoi, for one, while endorsing the "facts" would probably object to the positive and dynamic implications of my description of this phenomenon, preferring to view the feminization process as a natural and negative consequence of corporate culture ("Mapping the Rebel Image: Postmodernism and the Masculinist Politics of Rock in the U.S.A.," *Cultural Critique* [Winter 1991-92], 153-88). To say that the masculine appropriation of feminine modes during this period was only making a virtue of necessity is misleading, however, insofar as it fails to explain why, at other periods (the 1900s or the mid-1980s, for instance), the sense of male disadvantagement leads *not* to feminization but to a reassertion of machismo. See, for instance, T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York, 1981); also William Warner, "Spectacular Action: Rambo and the Popular Pleasures of Pain" in Grossberg *et al.*, *Cultural Studies*.

146. McGregor, *The Noble Savage*, Chapter 3.

147. Filene, *Him/Her/Self*, 196.

148. See Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture*, 40.

149. Oakley, *God's Country*, 288-89.

150. *Ibid.*, 401-3.

151. Many, to be sure, would deny that there *is* any parallel. Elaine May, for instance, sees the eighties as irrevocably different from former decades if only for its radical fragmentation and lack of ideological consensus (*Homeward Bound*, 225). If the foregoing pages are not enough to discredit the "happy days" myth invoked by this claim, one need only look at some of the recent cultural studies of the forties (Graebner's *Age of Doubt*, for instance, or Polan's *Power and Paranoia*) to see how much confusion in fact surrounded the very notions which May sees as underwriting earlier stability: gender roles and relations. It is interesting in this regard to note how many parallels there are between Mimi White's analysis of thematic ambivalence in eighties romantic comedies ("Representing Romance: Reading/Writing/Fantasy and the 'Liberated' Heroine of Recent Hollywood Films," *Cinema Journal* 28 [1989], 41-56) and the interpretations of forties films that one finds in such feminist texts as Doane's *The Desire to Desire* and Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir*.

152. For a more detailed discussion of recent developments, see Gaile McGregor, "Television in an Age of Transition: Closet Monsters and Other Double Codings," forthcoming in *The Canadian Journal of American Studies* (March, 1993).