AMERICAN THOUGHT, CULTURE, AND NEO-NOIR IN THE ERA OF

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ABSTRACT

The rise of postmodernism, following the fall of modernism after WWII, brought about new modes of thinking, understanding, and living in America. Postmodernity is often neglected or glanced over by historians. Those who mention it do it either in passing or use it as a pejorative, yet it has had huge effects and ramifications on American culture during the second half of the 20th century. By exploring the thought, culture, and film of a postmodern America a deeper connection between history and postmodernism is formed. The transitions from noir to neo-noir films (which mirrors the transition from modernity to postmodernity) offers an avenue into understanding postmodern thought and culture. By using film as an intermediary it becomes apparent how neo-noir films were postmodern artifacts being watched and absorbed by a postmodern society. By linking the changing postmodern thought to culture and film a greater understanding of historical postmodernity becomes apparent.

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INTRODUCTION

It is almost an unspoken practice that any scholastic work on postmodernism should begin with an apology for its complex, convoluted nature. In Peter Rose's experimental short film *The Pressures of the Text* (1983) – the title a play on Roland Barthes' seminal work, *The Pleasures of the Text* (1973) – a man (Peter Rose) facing the camera explains how he hopes to avoid the philosophical jargon usually associated with postmodernism. After his apology he begins to incorporate jargon little by little until his monologue is unintelligible. His speech devolves into gibberish replete with made up words and sounds. Rose is satirizing postmodern tendencies to apologize for its jargon and lingo then immediately imbibe in that exact practice. This may account for one of the myriad ways postmodernism remains anathema to so many people. Jargon, complexity, a reluctance to explain itself, a tenuous relationship with truth, and an abhorrence of metanarratives are just some of the uneasy qualities ascribed to postmodernity. Philosophers and theoreticians whose work could rightly be labeled "postmodern" rarely took the time to give plain, cogent explanations of the term. From the 1970s through the early 1990s the debate over postmodernity took place in the conference halls and publishing presses of academia. Wide swaths of people were left out of the conversation. The general public was left in the doctor's office, feeling the symptoms of postmodernity without knowing the cause while the doctors discussed the diagnosis amongst themselves.

Within the last ten to fifteen years, historians (rightly a few decades behind other academic disciplines) have taken up the mantle of exploring postmodernity. More specifically, they have explored postmodernity as an element of history or as a mobilization of ideas over time. This lies in opposition to historians working in the 1980s and 1990s who incorporated postmodern philosophies of deconstruction and post-structuralism into their work usually to a

point of diminishing returns. One has much more success being a historian of postmodernity than a postmodern historian. Prominent historical works on postmodernity, such as Perry Anderson's *The Origins of Postmodernity* and J. David Hoeveler Jr.'s *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s*, provide coherent arguments for the veracity of postmodernity and how it came into existence by showing clear shifts in thought, culture, and art. The historian of postmodernity is charged with showing that postmodernism exists outside the realm of philosophy; that it is a valid historical period that differs from the preceding period of modernism. That is one of the goals of this project.

For this project, as for those books mentioned above, postmodernism is both the medium and the message. More clearly stated, the goal is to use postmodernism as the guiding light for why events occurred and society changed which, in turn, legitimates postmodernism as a valid historical lens. In both Hoeveler's and Anderson's books the reader can see how the authors legitimate postmodernism and why it can be seen as an agent of historical change. Postmodernism trickles down through the culture affecting many things that go unexplored. Anderson and Hoeveler both explore how the shift to postmodernism occurred on a large scale and while those projects sought to provide an overview of postmodernity my own project has more modest goals.

The marks of postmodernism range far and wide, from philosophy to art to architecture to social movements. In this work, I grant primacy to film, specifically noirs, as a prime agent of postmodernity. Film, more than any other 20th century medium, is indicative of culture and thought. Noir films arose out of the Hollywood system in the 1940s and lasted until the late 1950s. This time period is analogous with the last years of modernism and I claim that we can associate traditional noirs with the last vestiges of modernism. In America, noirs fell out of favor

with audiences in the 1960s until they regained popularity in the 1970s, at which point they were labeled neo-noirs. This trajectory is both indicative of and can be ascribed to the fall of modernism and the rise of postmodernism. It is the goal of this project to historicize postmodernity with the shift of noir to neo-noir. Contained within this dialectic of modernism/postmodernism and noir/neo-noir is a cultural turn, a shift in thought and society that reflects the turn toward postmodernism, an element that this paper seeks to flesh out. In sum, I seek to show how the shift in American culture to postmodernism is best exemplified by the prominence of neo-noir films of the 1970s.

In order for my argument to be fully realized I will deploy three types of historical work: intellectual, cultural, and film history. These three types of historical categories correspond to the three sections of this project. The first section is an intellectual history of how postmodernism came into existence. This section makes use of primary philosophical works that ushered in postmodernity as well as secondary works that pulled in other intellectual threads from architecture and literature. The second section is a cultural history of America leading up to and during the first stages of postmodernity. In this section, because postmodernism is such a wide phenomenon, I pull from all corners of cultural history to better illustrate my thesis: subjects as large as the Vietnam War and Watergate to more specific subjects such as industry in Detroit or the proliferation of national highways. The final section deals with film by starting with a history of noirs and their evolution into neo-noirs. There, I explore specific 1970s neo-noirs and how they both reflected the culture at the time and postmodernism in general. In order to reify an abstract concept like postmodernism all three sections must remain in dialogue with each other. While each part explores a different avenue of postmodernism the project needs each section in

order to work as a whole. The structure is reminiscent of a poem by C.F. Meyer that German

philosopher Martin Heidegger was fond of.[1]

Roman Fountain

The Jet ascends and falling fills
The marble basin circling round;
This, veiling itself over, spills
Into a second basin's ground.
The second in such plenty lives,
Its bubbling flood a third invests,
And each at once receives and gives
And streams and rests.

Each basin works together to form the fountain. Plenty of arguments can be made about which

basin should be on top, in the middle, or the bottom. Each section should work in isolation and

inform the others so the arrangement is less important. Although, for the purposes of this paper I

have placed cultural history in the middle with intellectual history first and the section on film

coming last. The objective is to show how postmodernism is manifested in history and thus how

film reflects that postmodern culture. Postmodernism has clear associations with the arts.

Postmodern literature and film is often how one is introduced to the concept. Exploring their

relationship by placing their sections one after another would produce important parallels and

discoveries. However, because the connection between postmodernism and art is frequently

made already I believe placing cultural history as a bridge between the two will produce more

fruitful results. If postmodernism can truly be legitimated then it should be clear across all three

sections.

The first section is an attempt to ground postmodernism in intellectual history and deals

primarily with thought. In order to move freely about in this section some terms must first be

defined. Some scholars will make radical distinctions between the terms postmodern,

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, [1971] 2013), 36.

postmodernism, and postmodernity. Postmodernity, for the sake of this work, is dealing with the historical period that follows Modernity (roughly the first half of the 20th century), which has its roots in the post-WWII period but does not occur fully until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Postmodernism is a way of thinking, a social process, a cultural movement. It supplies the traits for postmodernity. These traits will be explored heavily in section I and applied in the following two sections. If something is postmodern (e.g. a postmodern film or a postmodern novel) it carries the attributes and aesthetics of postmodernism and usually falls within the period of postmodernity. This account does not claim to be an exhaustive look at postmodernity nor even a top-to-bottom account of how postmodernism filters into the cracks of our society. This is merely an avenue into postmodernism through cultural history. In approaching the topic this way I hope to occupy unexplored historical space. Historical works usually fall into two camps. The first is the Anderson and Hoeveler Jr. camp previously highlighted, which is the total historical account of postmodernism. The second and more common camp is the historical work about a specific topic that pulls in postmodern ideas *ad hoc* to supplement the argument. This work seeks to be right in the middle, one that both explores postmodernism itself and uses it to explain the mobilization of change within the historical period.

This project is an attempt to historicize Postmodernity as a historical period. Debates over the veracity and merits of postmodernism have occurred since its inception. The purpose of this project is not to debate whether postmodernism is an actual occurrence or a philosophical creation. This paper is attempting to prove that postmodernism, if taken as a real phenomenon, can be used to explain the shift in many aspects of post-WWII life. However, it is important to know these arguments exist in fields outside of philosophy. Some historians neglect or purposefully omit mentions of postmodernism within their work. This is likely due to the

negative reputation postmodernism has received through a litany of diatribes against it. My work is not intended to criticize postmodernism but explore its larger implications. I intend to illustrate its importance as a historical marker and lens through which we can gain a better understanding of history.

Between the section on postwar intellectual history and film history lies a section on cultural history. The historical events and themes highlighted occupy the same period as the other two sections. Some topics and themes have roots in the pre-WWII period but mostly the focus is on events leading up to postmodernity (1940s through the mid-1960s) and the time that can effectively be called postmodern (late 1960s onward). Similar to the section on film, this paper will not explore the period past the 1970s. The topics of this section are varied because postmodernism is a large entity with varied influence. Any cultural historical artifact or event could be studied with a postmodern apparatus. In fact, a wide range of historical subjects only strengthens the legitimacy of postmodernity further by showing its extensiveness and disproving claims that it is endemic to certain areas or enclaves of society. Section II deals with topics as large as post-industrialism, the Cold War and suburban expansion to more specific topics of urban architecture in Detroit. Social movements like Women's Rights are essential for discussions of postmodernity as well as more abstract concepts like paranoia. Collecting these varied fragments will illustrate what a postmodern society looks like and how it functions.

Out of this culture, filmmakers recapitulated the ideas of postmodernism through their films, which is the topic of section III. While not as contentious as postmodernism, film, specifically film noir, is not without its controversies. Most questions posed about noir stem from chronological categorization. When did noir begin and when did it end? Did it ever end? How do we categorize contemporary films that share an affinity with the noir style? What about films

that preceded classical noirs but resemble the style? These questions have been answered by a number of scholars and film theorists in a number of ways. For the purpose of this paper it is essential to set up a few parameters going forward. The traditional time frame for noir films is from the early 1940s to 1958 with the release of *Touch of Evil* (1958) by Orson Welles, often deemed the last traditional noir. Film scholar, James Naremore, in his masterwork*, More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*,[2] puts forth a more useful timeframe on traditional noirs. He posits that noir films start to occur more frequently in the early 1940s but the idea of a "noir sensibility" was born in 1946.[3] Rather than indict a certain film for the death of noir, Naremore claims that beginning of the *Nouvelle Vague* (or the French New Wave Cinema) in 1959 marks the end of the traditional noir period. After 1959, the traditional noir sensibility, infused with ideas of postmodernism and acculturated by French cinema, was distorted. The proto-noir films, as Naremore sometimes refers to them, made after 1959 cannot be placed in the same categories as noir films.[4] These films are often referred to as neo-noirs and the delineation between the two is a cornerstone to my argument. This periodization proves useful to this project. More importantly, Naremore's definition inculcates the transatlantic dialogue that occurred between American and French culture in the 20th century. It is no coincidence that both ideas central to postmodernism and films influential to the development of the neo-noir aesthetic are French.

By now, it is apparent that there is overlap in the periodizations of modernism/postmodernism and noir/neo-noir. The timeframe for the transition of noir to neo-

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[2] James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

[3] Naremore, *More Than Night*, 11.

[4] While Naremore's book should serve as the guiding light to most noir scholarship, he only reluctantly uses the term neo-noir. However, the main thrust of his book is trying to show that noir exists outside the prototypical definition of 1940s black and white crime film. His aversion to the term neo-noir is not because he finds it untrue but rather it would have muddled his intent. Throughout his book he clearly shows there is a difference between pre and post 1959 noir films.

noir echoes the timeframe in which modernity transitioned to postmodernity. Each section of this paper will give a historical account of how each of these transitions progressed and glean the essential tenants of these movements with the hope of providing an overarching understanding of how thought, culture, and film can be deemed postmodern. The allusions between postmodern film and thought have been made clear. I am not the first person to remark on the affinities they share. Many film scholars, especially Naremore, maintain that postmodernism is elemental to the development of film during and after the 1960s.[5] While Naremore touts the presence of postmodernity he (and others) rarely devote the time needed to explore the connection between postmodernism, film, and culture. This paper seeks to explore those connections and inspect the postmodern mortar between the bricks of art, culture, and thought.

Historiography

The research conducted for this project includes a wide range of materials from intellectual artifacts to contemporary monographs. Due to the nature of the project the research varies from section to section. Both the first and third sections are heavily reliant on primary source documents with the former being focused on philosophical works in the mid-20th century and the latter using films as historical texts for interpretation. The middle section is primarily focused on cobbling together a cogent example of a postmodern culture through the use of secondary scholarship and a few appropriately placed primary resources such as architectural writings, public opinion polls, and political speeches. My task deviates from traditional history in its use of historical pastiche. Each section is a different type of historical inspection and the

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[5] The mention of postmodernity and its relation to film occurs in Naremore's book along with Edward Dimendberg's book *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* and in Foster Hirsch's *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir*. The connection is only broached at a glance for all three of these film scholars.

sources for each follow suit, thus the historiography follows the same trajectory. First, I will lay

out the sources for section I followed by the sources for section II and end with section III.

Section I is unique in that it functions somewhat as a historiography itself. The purpose is

to show the ideological shift from modern to postmodern. In doing so, I will discuss the major

works that served to condemn modernism and slowly advocate for a swerve away from it

towards what would be deemed postmodernism. The three major works here are Max

Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Thomas Kuhn's *The*

Structure of Scientific Revolutions, and Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A*

Report on Knowledge. These three works were at the forefront of bringing about postmodernity

and their goals, methodology, and importance are all discussed in depth in section I.

A flotilla of secondary works about postmodernity was written after the success and

spectacle of Lyotard's book. The acuity of these books differs greatly but my project could not

have been completed without three specific works. Two of which I have mentioned previously,

Perry Anderson's *The Origins of Postmodernity* and J. David Hoeveler Jr.'s *The Postmodernist*

Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s. Both set a precedent of exploring

postmodernity as a historical trend. Anderson's is a straightforward account of the intellectual

history of the works and thinkers that helped bring about postmodernity. He makes little attempt

to attach it to any cultural or societal parallels. Hoeveler's work is a bit more rooted in history

with discussions of the intellectual works but also their impact on the general discourse of ideas.

The discourse Hoeveler evinces helps propel postmodernity forward gaining cultural

accreditation in the process. Unfortunately, many of the arguments and grandstanding about

these works is done within the confines of academia and Hoeveler makes little effort to venture

outside the hallways of the university. These foibles aside, both books represent a new path of

scholarship on postmodernity, one that views the phenomenon as an actual historical trend. The third work, coming on the heels of notable postmodern works like Lyotard's, aligns both with history and philosophy. David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* is a work of blazing thought about the implications of postmodernity and serves as an attempt to provide the then newly formed idea with some historical backing. These books form a triumvirate of postmodern scholarship and are important landmarks into the process of understanding postmodernity as existing concretely.

While there are a number of books exploring postmodernity from a philosophical perspective there is a paucity of works that include cultural history in their postmodern exploration. It is here where the originality of this project presides. One must look to works on modernity to understand how a project like that might work. Two books that set up a template for how to explore modernism's mobilization within American culture are Lisa Duggan's *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* and Christine Stansell's *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*. The former unites lesbianism, whiteness, proliferation of narratives, and the rise of media publications under the guise of modernity and the latter explores the artists, writers, and social advocates who helped modernize culture by fighting for free speech, sexual liberation, women's rights, birth control, and against censorship. While these two works don't have direct parallels with my own, they did open up a door for the type of scholarship that unites philosophical ideas with tangible elements of socio-cultural history.

Section III makes use of the stable of existing scholarship on film noir, particularly James Naremore's previously mentioned book and Edward Dimendberg's *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. The scholarship on neo-noir is still in its nascent years and thus has a lacuna of

exemplary works on the level of Naremore's or Dimendberg's. For this section, the films

themselves act as the primary text and the exegesis of these texts form the bases of my

scholarship. Overall, there is a lack of historical monographs that focus on film in relation to

cultural history. Certainly a number of scholars include films in their historical works about

American culture, Jefferson Cowie's *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working*

Class and Bruce Schulman's *The Seventies: The Great Shift In American Culture, Society, And*

Politics are two examples of works that include film into the broader scope of American culture.

However, the inclusion of films in these works is to illustrate a point or punctuate an argument.

My own work will illustrate film's essential importance in the 20th century and to the rise of

postmodernity. By the 1970s, it was both a tool of postmodernity and a propagator of

postmodern ideas.

The overall project will shed new light on postmodern thought, culture, and film. The

sections of the paper correspond to those ideas. The goal is to bring about a greater

understanding of postmodernity by making tangible connections and using concrete examples of

how it was at work in American culture. When broaching such a large topic certain ideas are

winnowed for the sake of organization, coherence, and spaces limitations. This is not meant to be

the last word on postmodernity but a hopeful attempt at opening up historical scholarship that

recognizes the importance of postmodernity in post-WWII American culture. Nor should

postmodern culture be only connected to film. This project could easily focus on postmodern

literature, art, or architecture. Film, however, is the consummate medium of the 20th century. As

Don DeLillo writes, "Film is more than the twentieth-century art. It's another part of the

twentieth-century mind. It's the world seen from inside. . . . The twentieth century is *on film*. It's

the filmed century."[6] Ultimately, film can act as the Trojan horse within which we can all hide as we roll it towards postmodern thought and once the horse is inside we can start to explore and understand the biggest intellectual and cultural shift in the post-WWII society.

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[6] Don DeLilllo, *The Names* (New York: Vintage Books, [1982]1989), 200.

SECTION I: THOUGHT

"Aesthetic and cultural practices are peculiarly susceptible to the changing experience of space and time precisely because they entail the construction of spatial representations and artefacts out of the flow of human experience. They always broker between Being and Becoming." – David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity*

Postmodernity, due to its vastness, is difficult to define – contradictions and complexities abound. Within its definition are sub-categories of postmodern aesthetics, postmodern architecture, and postmodern literature. An obvious place to begin is with the word itself. The first instance of the term "postmodern" or in this case "*postmodernismo*" can be traced to the Spanish writer, Frederico de Onís, who used the term in a study of Spanish-language poets published in 1934. De Onís' use of the word relates to an influx of ironic humor and female voices within the modernist tradition of Spanish language poetry. His use of "postmodern" does not carry the same weight and definition as the term did in the 1970s.[7] While both of these traits still factor into a fully formed definition of postmodernism, the concept went through many permutations in the following decades. It is that journey from its nascent stages in the 1930s into full-fledged adulthood in the 1970s that this section seeks to illuminate and by highlighting specific events in its progression the essence of postmodernity will rise to the surface.

An important theme is highlighted in de Onís' use of postmodernism: postmodernism as a reaction against modernism. The word itself, "post"-modernism, specifically refers to a period coming after modernism. The traits that define postmodernism have a relationship, often fraught, with the traits that define modernism. This reaction against modernism developed over a number a years (and will be dealt with later in the section). Part of what makes postmodernity so complex is its inability to function in isolation; one needs a working knowledge of modernity to contextualize it. A number of essential primary documents, written during the period of

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[7] Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 3-4.

modernity, criticized modernism from within. These prescient works helped form a movement

against modernism that led to postmodernity. Therefore, a brief overview of modernism provides

an apt starting point for this section. From there a richer understanding of postmodernism can

unfurl.

A Brief History of Modernism

Modernity, according to sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas, has roots in the

18th century, particularly in the project of Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers sought to

"develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their

inner logic."[8] The drive for scientific and technological advancements along with the quest for

comprehensive knowledge and information about our existence became the main thrust of

modernity. Cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit grew in size and number. Modernity,

often tied to the growing city, was a change in the living experience. The shift in architecture and

art as well as prevailing thoughts all resulted in, as David Harvey states in the epigraph, a

"changing experience of space and time."[9] French poet and critic, Charles Baudelaire, credited

with defining modernity in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" wrote, "By 'modernity' I

mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal

and the immutable."[10] The history of modernism, if we follow it from Baudelaire's words

onward, falls into a troubling pattern. Modernism's commitment to progress through societal

betterment and scientific and technological advancements overextends into elitism and stratified

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[8] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project." in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 9.

[9] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 327.

[10] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (2nd ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 13.

power structures. Somewhere along the way the lower and middle classes were left behind. This paradigm can be applied almost systematically to modern art, literature, poetry, and architecture. Moreover, the pattern is abundantly clear in a litany of historical examples. The short history of modernism presented here follows this paradigm closely and its unsustainability becomes apparent. In the quest for societal, technological, and industrial modernization the wants and needs of the public were forgotten and in extreme cases fervent hierarchies gave way to fascism. Postmodernity developed out of the need to balance the power of society. It was an attempt to negate the destructive forces of modernity across all categories – science, politics, architecture, and art.

The incubation period of modernity can be placed within the 19th century. Harvey, in contrasting modernism and postmodernism, looks for aesthetic markers of oncoming modernity:

> If, for example, we were to look solely at the diffusion of those material practices from which intellectual and aesthetic modernism drew so much of its stimulus – the machines, the new transport and communication systems, skyscrapers, bridges, and engineering wonders of all kinds, as well as the incredible instability and insecurity that accompanied rapid innovation and social change – then the United States (and Chicago in particular) should probably be regarded as the catalyst of modernism after 1870 or so.[11]

Following Harvey's example, certain historical events help define modernity. The Industrial Revolution with its goal of developing industry through technological advancements helped to modernize developed nations. The development of medical practices and scientific discoveries are characteristics of modernism. Any ameliorative attempt to modernize societies on a mass scale brought about the period of modernity. In America, just after the turn of the 20th century, modernism took hold. This period is often called high modernism or late modernism, but I will refer to it as just modernism or modernity. This era was a fusion of the Enlightenment project, progressive political thought and social action, and artistic modernism. By investigating each of

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[11] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 27.

these modernistic categories a clear picture of modernism will take shape along with the rancid elements that led to a strong reaction against it. Art provides a way into this topic because it informs and is informed by the culture from which it is born. My account of modernity (art, poetry and prose, architecture, and culture) is far from exhaustive but sheds light on important events and themes that are apropos to my overall argument.

Modern Art

In 1913, European avant-garde art made its way to American shores. The Armory Show in Manhattan, specifically The International Exhibition of Modern Art brought art works of Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism – artistic movements now ascribed to modernism – to the attention of American audiences. Initial reactions ranged from ecstatic to hostile. *Time* magazine reported that it was commonplace for these impenetrable paintings to be hung upside down thus contributing to the varied reception.[12] The Armory Show featured Marcel Duchamp's work extensively. His work went on to be a paragon of modernist art for decades. The painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), was a centerpiece of the exhibit. People waited as long as forty minutes to see the painting, which was met with shock, astonishment, and laughter. A critical backlash swirled around the painting and Duchamp's work but the staid art conventions had already begun to shift. The distortion and inscrutability in Duchamp's work, present in the work of other modernists like Picasso and Matisse, challenged prevailing aesthetic notions.[13]

Duchamp's works epitomized the avant-garde project, which was, essentially, attempting to remove the blinders from society. The term itself refers to being before the guard or vanguard.

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[12] Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 138.

[13] Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 116-119.

The allusions to military terminology are not coincidental. Avant-gardism stakes its claims in combating the malaise of society.[14] Modern artists, like Duchamp, were enamored with fighting conformity and the stilted mores of the past. Keep in mind Duchamp's treatment of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, upon which he drew a mustache and goatee on a reproduction of the famous painting.[15] Movements like surrealism, cubism, and Dadaism were created by legions of artists ready to tackle cultural issues. Not just artists but poets, novelists, and architects held these beliefs. They fought for a better society, one with transcendental and eternal values where a more utopian modernism would take hold.[16] Somewhere along the way their artistic screed aimed at hegemonic forces became perverted. In their quest for a better society they disregarded the middle class and the everyperson. At a conference held in San Francisco in 1949, Marcel Duchamp (on a panel that included Frank Lloyd Wright) explained his belief on taste and "aesthetic echo." Taste is likes and dislikes, the difference between what a consumer buys and doesn't according to Duchamp. "While many people have taste only a few are equipped with aesthetic receptivity," stated Duchamp. Art, for Duchamp, was only understandable for a select few.[17] What began as a project to expose the corruption of elitist power evolved, through inscrutable and highbrow works, into the very elitism that modernist art first sought to expose. The modernist aesthetic had evolved, leaving behind the mass public as it was inculcated into high culture.

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[14] Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 95.

[15] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity,* 255.

[16] Ibid*.,* 95.

[17] Robert Genter, *Late Modernism Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1.

Modernist literature and poetry expressed some of the same qualities as modernist art. Modernist literature carries with it similar ideas of a one true and correct interpretation. It is often marked by stream-of-consciousness, impregnable themes and interpretations, and lyrical prose or verse. The exemplar of the modern aesthetic is T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Wasteland* (1922), which contains many allusions to prominent works of literature throughout the Western Canon. Eliot wrote footnotes to his own poem in order to instruct the reader on the correct interpretation. Inherent in Eliot's poem and in modernist thought is the belief in a better society, one that will someday understand his work. The works of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, W.B. Yeats, and Sylvia Plath are often considered modernist. Much like Baudelaire's original construction of modernity, the modernist poet is stricken with the anxiety of modern life. Finding the role of the poet in societal amelioration became the goal of many poets.[18] Yet, much like Duchamp, a work like Eliot's can be constricting and elitist, concerning itself with only highbrow literary references. Modern poetry, while much to the good, highlights the discord between high and low society.

The modernist novel had concerns about modern life throughout its illustrious lifespan as well. The novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway are considered modernist. Fitzgerald set his novels amongst the avarice of the 1920s. Virginia Woolf explored femininity in many of her novels, usually through subjective accounts of modern life. Proust explored subjective time. These novels became tougher to read. The works of James Joyce form the apotheosis of modernistic writings. Throughout *Ulysses*, a novel widely hailed as one of the greatest ever written, Joyce mixes first

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[18] James Longenbach, "Modern Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102.

and third-person with present and past tense.[19] T.S. Eliot touted *Ulysses* for using the myth to explore contemporary life.[20] In his essay, "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," Eliot unabashedly promoted the ivory-tower mentality that led to the fall of modernism. Writing about the negative influence Joyce has had on other writers trying to emulate his style, Eliot wrote, "A very great book may have a very bad influence indeed; and a mediocre book may be in the event most salutary. The next generation is responsible for its own soul; a man of genius is responsible to his peers, not to a studio full of uneducated and undisciplined coxcombs."[21] What started as avant-garde attacks on bourgeois norms developed into mere projections of high culture, or, an encapsulation of the ivory tower, elitist image often associated with avant-garde art. In 1939, Joyce published *Finnegan's Wake,* an experimental and intractable work of fiction with which many nonprofessional readers struggled.[22] In a rapidly improving society there was hope that the projects these artists pursued would be recognized for their genius only in posterity. For modernists, nobody amongst the hoi polloi would be able to understand the genius in their works.

Hemingway and Faulkner form a less caustic and more familiar brand of American modernism – Faulkner's southern gothic style and Hemingway's evolving from terse journalistic tendencies. These two prove particularly important because of their contributions to noir films both in style and in actual production. Hemingway's tough-guy modernism was emulated by many of the protagonists in the stories of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Mickey Spillane. A number of Hemingway's books were turned into noir films in the 1940s and 1950s

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[19] David Trotter, "The Modernist Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74.

[20] Trotter, "The Modernist Novel," 84.

[21] T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth,"1923, http://people.virginia.edu/~jdk3t/eliotulysses.htm.

[22] Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 133.

such as *The Killers* (1946), *The Breaking Point* (1950), and *To Have and Have Not* (1944),

which was co-scripted by Faulkner. Faulkner penned the script for one of the most lauded noir

films, *The Big Sleep* (1946), based on Chandler's book of the same name. Faulkner and

Hemingway, despite the rigor required to read their work, were not as controversial or

impenetrable as Eliot or Joyce. Their dalliances with film form an appropriate axis at which

modernism, thought and film all meet – a relationship that evolved as the culture shifted towards

postmodernism.

Modern Architecture

Architectural modernism provides a key vantage point into modernity by bringing themes

of modernism into the everyday experience. Modern architecture, with modernity being

primarily an urban phenomenon, was deeply connected to urban planning. [23] During the high

time of modernism, the United States saw a large influx of city dwellers often due to

immigration and the migration of African Americans from the South. Detroit's population, for

example, more than doubled from 1910 to 1920.[24] David Harvey contends that both modernism

and postmodernism arose out of our changing experience of space and time.[25] The birth of the

metropolis certainly changed the spatial-temporal experience. The urban plotting displays

qualities of modernism while hinting at a few issues that reoccur in the transition to

postmodernism. Urban planning and the inclination to map out all terrain relates to the

Enlightenment project of seeking total control over nature in the attempt to totalize knowledge.

This cartographic quest, usually undertaken by the government, is, as philosopher Michel

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[23] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 25.

[24] Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, eds., *The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City* (Detroit: Detroit Free Press, 2001), 289. The population in 1910 was 465,766 with the black population at around 1.2%. In 1920, the city's population was 993,678 and African Americans comprised of 4.1% of then population. The city went from the 9th most populated in the United States to the 4th most populated.

[25] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 283.

Foucault highlights, a turn towards surveillance and control.[26] One need only look at Nazi architect Albert Speer's theory of ruin value to understand some modernist ethos. For Speer, buildings contained meaning in perpetuity. He constructed buildings that would decay into grand ruins like that of antiquity. It was architecture that was more concerned with the legacy of the future than the pragmatic needs of the present.[27]

By far the most influential figure in modern architecture was Swiss-French architect, urban planner, and writer Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier. The ideas of Le Corbusier are the epitome of modernization. Streamlining the human experience within the urban area by building factories, hospitals, schools, and state buildings. was the *raison d'être* of his architectural project. Order was the governing principle of the city. "By order bring about freedom," was a common phrase of Le Corbusier.[28] *The Radiant City*, written by Corbusier in the early 1930s, highlighted the lofty nature of his goals. The book laid out a plan for the ideal city, the radiant city, by detailing minute elements of the city such as leisure time, sound, sunlight, and trees.[29] Of course this attempt at total control reached its logical end. Order resulted in homogeneity and what started in earnest quickly soured. For example, students living in Le Corbusier's Pavilion Suisse were forbidden to hang blinds on their windows due to their potential blight on the uniformed aesthetic.[30] The achievement of aesthetic uniformity and total cohesion through one voice, like Corbusier's, discounted the variety of human experience. It is in

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[26] Ibid., 253.

[27] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 56.

[28] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 31.

[29] Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization,* trans. Pamela Knight (New York: The Orion Press, [1933] 1967).

[30] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 36.

Le Corbusier's quest for perfection that the will of the people, in this case students want for shaded rooms, was disregarded.

American architect Frank Lloyd Wright working contemporaneously with Le Corbusier, touched on similar ideas, although his legacy is less contended. He believed in the modernization of society. Take, for example, his article "In Order to Be Modern," which summarizes much of his thought on the place of architecture in modern life. "In this age of Democracy, then – live no longer like the Savage animal Man once was," wrote Wright in 1930.[31] There is a fusion, present in both architect's works, between life and created space. They both had aspirations for the modern city. Similar to The Radiant City concept of Le Corbusier, Wright developed his own Broadacre City, which was a quasi-utopia plan for an entire city from the early 1930s. Wright wrote about the plan for much of his life, often grandiloquently. For example, in his book *When Democracy Builds*, published in 1945, he wrote, "I see clearly that a worth, free, Democratic Life lies before us, if at all, in some such planning as you may find, if you will, in these Broadacre studies of Freedom: the Vision of this Free-City-That-Is-a-Nation; the City that is Nowhere unless Everywhere."[32] Neither Broadacre City nor Corbusier's Radiant City ever came to fruition, forever to remain historical artifacts about how we wished to live.

<u>Modernist Culture</u>

Increasingly historians have explored historical topics dealing with modernism and modernity. The sheer number of works dealing with modernity point to the concept's importance. Parsing out and analyzing the roots and definition of modernity remains essential to understanding the period. One work of cultural history pertinent to the discussion is Edward J.

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[31] Frank Lloyd Wright, *Collected Writings*, ed. Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Vol. 1, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 337.

[32] Frank Lloyd Wright, *When Democracy Builds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 58.

Larson's *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion.*[33] Larson's book explores topics and tangents leading up to the Scopes Trial in Tennessee in 1925. In short, John T. Scopes taught evolution in a public classroom, a criminal offense, and was arrested. Two famed lawyers came to the aid of both sides. Clarence Darrow defended Scopes while three-time presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, led the prosecution. The actual trial occupies the middle third of the book. The first third is devoted to the culture of controversy around evolution and the last third is about the long-term effects of the trial on American culture. Imbedded in Larson's book is a story about modernity versus the atavistic forces trying to keep the country in the past: anti-scientific sentiments, proto-Victorian mores, and fundamentalism. Those who sided with Scopes found themselves in favor of modernization by the inclusion of the newest scientific theory, Darwinian evolution. "Modernists responded to these intellectual developments by viewing God as immanent in history. . . . modernists nevertheless claimed that the Bible represented valid human perceptions of how God acted," writes Larson.[34] Those who opposed Scopes did so with conviction. They opposed the rising tides of anti-religious and atheistic sentiment. The harmful effects of modernization only bolstered their argument. Their pull to a more retrograde society is understandable in the wake of the death and devastation of World War I. Technology created new biological weaponry such as mustard gas, which led to horrific death and decay. Anti-modernists saw the war as "a product of the depravity of the age."[35] Their sentiments presaged the future death and destruction of World War II, one major undoing of modernism. The Scopes Trial, on the heels of WWI, showed a

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[33] Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[34] Larson, *Summer for the Gods,* 34.

[35] Ibid., 35.

backwards pull to an ancestral way of life but the atrocities of WWII resulted in the opposite: a push forward through modernity to postmodernity.

New forms of mass media along with scientific advancements and technological innovations clearly were essential components of modernity. Keeping in consideration David Harvey's idea of time and space as two substrate elements of modernism and postmodernism, we can pivot towards the employment of both new technology and science. While scientists and innovators sought to better our society, businesspeople were searching for ways to make society more efficient. The goal was maximizing time and space potential, thereby maximizing profit.

In 1914, Henry Ford introduced his five-dollar, eight-hour workday for automobile assembly line workers.[36] Ford's contribution to modernism is more than just the all-important automobile, an obvious invention for modernization. His ideology, Fordism, helped form modernistic ideals of worker efficiency and public consumption. Ford constructed many of his beliefs from Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which " described how labour productivity could be radically increased by breaking down each labour process into component motions and organizing fragmented work tasks according to rigorous standards of time and motion study."[37] Russian revolution leaders Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky supported Taylorism, the ideology formed by Taylor's beliefs. Ford utilized Taylor's tract for his assembly line factories, which, in turn, revolutionized production efficiency. The ability to produce Ford automobiles cheaply and quickly allowed prices to be kept low. The automobile was available to the middle class. Harvey concludes, "Fordism also built upon and contributed to

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[36] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 125.

[37] Ibid,125.

the aesthetic of modernism – particularly the latter's penchant for functionality and efficiency."[38]

Where Ford extended past Taylorism was in his labor wages. He believed that if he paid his

laborers a high enough wage they would be able to purchase the products they were making,

thereby allowing them to take part in the very market they helped to create. Ford wanted his

employees to spend their money "correctly" on his automobiles. He went to extensive measures

to make sure of this. In 1916, he organized visits into the homes of workers to determine whether

they were consuming "rationally" or not. The short-lived study factored in alcoholism, family

life, and morality. Not unlike the complete control exhibited by Le Corbusier, the dark side of

modernism was reflected in Ford's attempt at totalized knowledge and control. He placed

enormous weight in the idea of corporate power regulating society and the economy. Harvey

summed up the experiments by stating, "its very existence was a prescient signal of the deep

social, psychological, and political problems that Fordism was to pose."[39] Tellingly, college

students at the end of the 1920s ranked Henry Ford third behind Jesus Christ and Napoleon

Bonaparte in a survey to rank the greatest people throughout all of history.[40]

This short account of modernity reveals the duality of the era. It was a period marked by

new ideas, innovations, and discoveries, but hewn in to the project of modernity was a tendency

to take things to a point of diminished returns. Many segments of modernity begin as something

positive and societally valuable before devolving into something worse. Out of this pattern,

books –written by scientists, intellectuals, philosophers– began to rebuke modernity for its toxic

qualities. Late within the period of modernity, the 1930s and 1940s, an escalation of evil and

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[38] Ibid., 136.

[39] Ibid., 126.

[40] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 161.

harmful events occurred. It is no wonder another popular genre of film in the 1940s and 1950s besides noir was science fiction. Often they were films that explored scientific hubris and cautioned the audience against an uncontrolled pursuit of scientific knowledge epitomized by the mad scientist character.[41] Nazis committed genocide in the name of science and genetics. Technological advancements allowed for more efficient ways to murder mass numbers of people, used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The atrocities of the modern era were becoming larger and more frequent. Even with all of the advancements, of which there were many, do the triumphs of modernity remain largely pyrrhic? Many were discouraged with the state of the globe after two world wars. With all of the atrocities and societal ills in tow, writers sought to expose the dark side of modernity and out of their anemic thoughts on modernism arose the inklings of postmodernity, which in part is a negation of the toxic elements of modernity: centralized power structures, elitism, science and technology as a societal panacea, and an over-commitment to progress that ended in mass murders, war, and fascism.

The Postmodern Turn

The intellectual history that led to the fall of modernism can be traced through a few important works, the publication of which range from the waning years of modernism (1944) to the late 1970s when postmodernism was fully in effect. Myriad books were instrumental in ushering in the postmodern turn from works in philosophy and critical theory to fiction and poetry. The postmodern turn occurred across a number of mediums and the interplay between them is important to understand. Exegeses of elemental works provide a clear arc from the fall of modernism to the rise of postmodernism. This shift in thought would not be possible without

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[41] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 209–25 (New York: Picador, 1966). This is best summarized in Susan Sontag's essay, "The Imagination of Disaster," which details how the plots of sci-fi films reflected the anxiety of the era.

three major works: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectics of Enlightenment*,

Thomas Kuhn's *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, and Jean-François Lyotard's *The*

Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Between the publishing of these works other

postmodern signifiers occurred. Both architecture and literature had a "postmodern turn" that

was both the same and different from the overall cultural turn. I will touch on postmodern

architecture and literature but this is a mostly chronological account. The following paragraphs

will be devoted to highlighting these movements and the role they played in the overall shift

towards postmodernity.

Notions of postmodernity, as introduced earlier, stemmed from the 1930s. It had different

iterations throughout the next couple decades, most notably by famed historian Arnold

Toynbee.[42] However, postmodernity developed partly out of works that bore no mention of the

term. An early essential work for the shift from modernity to postmodernity is Max Horkheimer

and Theodor Adorno's notorious *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[43] Published in 1944 and revised in

1947, during the period of late modernism, *Dialectic* was a major work of critical theory to come

from the Frankfurt School. Written in California, where both authors settled after fleeing from

Nazi terror, the book deals explicitly with American culture. Their work is concerned with a

litany of issues from the history of philosophy, literature, mythology, and cinema. Out of the

work came the famous concept of cultural industry, which is the way mass culture uses

production to sustain its power over society. Cultural industry was and is influential but more

importantly the *Dialectic* was the first book to recognize undergirding fascism of modernity.

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[42] Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 5. Toynbee uses it throughout his expansive work, *Study of History*, in which he declared that the "post-modern age" began with the Franco-Prussian war. Toynbee's definition of postmodernism is an indictment of both the industrial class in the West and the engineering of modern knowledge against the West by Eastern countries. His use and definition of postmodernity never gained much traction going forward.

[43] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Enlightenment, forming the roots of modernity, is the source of many societal ills for Horkheimer and Adorno. The formation of their book is the exploration of elements so inherent to modernity: knowledge and technology. The dialectic occurs between society and those two elements. Out of the dialogue between humans and the pursuit of total knowledge and technological advancements comes homogenization, fascism, barbarism, and ruin. The two lay out their simple premise: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters."[44] The installation of human beings as masters over nature is related to the dispelling of mythology but this is a false dialectic according to the authors. "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology."[45] Humans can become rulers over nature if they can harness all of its power and mystery. This mode of thinking is followed and dissected throughout the *Dialectic*. The conclusions they draw may seem obvious but no less unimportant and amount to a scathing critique of modernist thought, one that paved the way for a new way of thinking.

Some of what Horkheimer and Adorno are doing within the book is less pertinent to this study. First off, the book is work of Marxist criticism. Both Horkheimer and Adorno, along with their Frankfurt School cohorts like Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, often furthered the Marxist cause. Therefore, the derisions pointed at capitalism are particularly harsh and systematic. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is enmeshed in a history of works, stemming from Marx, which attempt to illuminate the unknown forces at work in society by removing the ideological blinders. For our purpose it is best to know where their criticism is coming from rather than where they are trying to take it. The authors are dealing directly with certain sects of philosophical thought and specific philosophers. The *Dialectic* is critical of logical positivism,

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[44] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1.

[45] Ibid., xviii.

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stoicism, and Sir Francis Bacon. Again, while endlessly interesting, these debates they engage in are not the main focus of this paper. Of a greater concern is Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of Enlightenment and following the project to its logical endpoint.

According to the *Dialectic*, the false promise at the end of enlightenment is liberation, for if everyone were to conquer nature and become a master of their world then no one would have mastery over one another. David Held, a scholar of the Frankfurt School, writes that, "liberating reason or enlightenment, like every social phenomenon, expresses the contradiction that it is both itself and at one and the same time something other than itself – a unity of opposites."[46] This "unity of opposites" leaves a void where enlightenment should be. This is how the project of enlightenment leads to fascism, as one individual oppresses his/her idealistic subjectivity onto others. Is not Nazism Hitler's "demythologized" world projected onto the masses? Held pulls a particularly astute quote from a review of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The reviewer comments that enlightenment is "subject throughout history to a dialectic wherein it all too easily gives itself an absolute status over and against its objects, thereby constantly collapsing into new forms of the very conditions of primeval repression which it early set out to overcome."[47] Enlightenment threatened to master the very subjects it initially sought to liberate.

After defining the project of enlightenment, the authors spend time criticizing the ways enlightenment is used to form mastery over others. It is important to keep in mind that Horkheimer and Adorno, both of Jewish heritage and German expatriates at the time, attempted to explain how a man like Hitler could come to power. This question is never stated forthright in the text but pervades its pages subtly. I have highlighted the themes of technology and science

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[46] David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 151.

[47] Ibid.,151. This is quoted from James Bradley's review of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the spring issue of *Radical Philosophy* in 1975.

very heavily thus far and not without reason. For Horkheimer and Adorno, knowledge is sought

because along with it comes power. The masses buy into systems of technological production

and scientific advancement out of fear for enlightenment is "mythical fear radicalized."[48] The

endless pursuit of power through knowledge is how a society gets on a path towards barbarism.

From there, it loops endlessly, "adaptation to the power of progress furthers the progress of

power." The two continued by writing, "constantly renewing the degenerations which prove

successful progress, not failed progress, to be its own antithesis."[49] If Hitler is the incarnate of

these ideas then we can take his abject genetic experiments, pursuit of new weapons of

destruction, and claims of "truth" (especially in regards to anti-Semitic rhetoric) as evidence to

Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis.

The brilliance of the *Dialectic* was in its ability to identify the problems with the modern

period. Horkheimer and Adorno used artifacts of past epochs (the *Odyssey*, Marquis de Sade's

Juliette) to highlight fundamental flaws of how they lived then. The issue they saw in the age of

enlightenment was a shift towards utility. The utility of an act or ideology became the litmus test.

As David Held notes, this usefulness "is assessed in terms of their consequences for some

(variously set) goal or aim."[50] Much of the book is dedicated to showing that inherent in the

enlightenment project were the seeds of totalitarianism i.e. the goal or aim was mastery of all

things in the natural world, humans included. There are two major takeaways from this book.

The first, a topic that will recur in sections II and III, is the installation of doubt and paranoia

toward ruling bodies and structures. Much of this stems from Marxist criticism but Horkheimer

and Adorno instill in the readers a need to understand the silent modes of oppression. Secondly,

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[48] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 11.

[49] Ibid., 28.

[50] Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 153.

the book opens up a new way of thinking. By laying bare the maladies of modernity we can diverge from the false dialectic of enlightenment. The last sentence of the book reads, "Enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment."[51] Enlightened thought, according to the two authors, can be used to recognize the path we are on and break free from it. Postmodernity begins here, by recognizing the need to reroute from the path of modernity. Most interestingly, the book was published in German in 1944 and 1947, but its American publication date is 1972 during the nascent phase of postmodernity thus providing the last nail in the coffin to modernity. From the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a new way of looking at the world was forged.

Another trailblazing work that contains no mention of the term "postmodern" is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[52] The book was first published in 1962, when Kuhn, a trained theoretical physicist, taught at the University of California, Berkeley. The work introduced the concept of the paradigm shift, which is when a new way of thinking is brought about by new research or understanding of something. The work was influential across a number of disciplines. Kuhn, a professor of the history of science, used history and philosophy to explore how ideas (using science as an example) changed over time. Historians saw a kinship with the notion of paradigm shifts as this could be applied to their own understanding of epochal transitions.[53] The *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is one of the most cited books in all of academia. It has been translated into twenty languages and has sold around one million copies.[54]

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[51] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 172.

[52] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[53] Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2-3.

[54] Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn*, 1.

Its influence is vast and from the outset one can see how important the notion of a paradigm shift is for exploring the relationship between modernity and postmodernity. The paradigm shift is the major engagement of the book but Kuhn deals with the telos of scientific achievement as well. Both of his pronouncements are influential in understanding the how and why of the postmodernist turn.

Due to the enormous impact of the book and the term "paradigm shift," the actual mechanics of Kuhn's argument are often glossed over or forgotten. Kuhn doesn't make a complex, verbose argument. In fact, part of the books enduring appeal is its simplicity. According to Kuhn there are different periods of scientific history and each has a dominant mode of thinking or organizing theory, or a paradigm.[55] Scientists, in a given period, create experiments hoping their outcome will conform to the overarching theories that guide the dominant ways of thinking. This is "normal science," according to Kuhn. Or, more clearly defined, "'normal science' is research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements," which form the foundations for further scientific study and practice.[56] Normal science constitutes a majority of the work scientists do. Scientists work to eradicate any misnomers or ambiguities that surround the paradigm, articulating its proponents. Their work is done in service of the paradigm, assisting to bolster its veracity. The paradigm is usually woven into the experiments of normal science.[57] Once a paradigm is in place only a completely alternate paradigm can replace it, thus a paradigm shift.[58]

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[55] Kuhn, *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, 23. A paradigm can be seen as the way modes of thinking adhere to a common directive. A traditional paradigm is a pattern or model like the conjugation of verbs. The example Kuhn gives is Latin verbs with the same endings are usually conjugated the same: *amo*, *amas*, *amat* and *laudo*, *laudas*, *laudat*. Scientific paradigms, however, are less about repetition, "instead, like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions."

[56] Ibid., 10.

Kuhn notes that paradigm shifts often come from outside the mainstream, from the marginalized or those not fully enmeshed in the current paradigm. As anomalies keep mounting on a paradigm the need for a shift becomes more apparent.[59] Like a religious conversion or change in worldview, the paradigm shift offers a new way of thinking about something in the world. Once a paradigm shift occurs, with the new paradigm replacing the old, normal science begins to service the new paradigm. Kuhn intersperses scientific examples throughout the book that help support his thesis e.g. Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and Claudius Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Much like Horkheimer and Adorno, Kuhn argues that we must expose the flawed ways of thinking currently in use. While Horkheimer and Adorno use Marxist criticism and theory to achieve this, Kuhn advocates for research and science. *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* does not just show how paradigm shifts occur but pleads for the necessity of their existence.[60]

The coda of *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* provides an interesting aside to his discussion of paradigms. Similar to the *Dialect*, Kuhn casts a wary gaze towards the work of Francis Bacon, who purported that science was about progressing towards one aim: man's progress from primitive to highly-evolved – a very modernist notion. Kuhn rejects this goal of science:

> But need there be any such goal? Can we not account for both science's existence and its success in terms of evolution from the community's state of knowledge at any given

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[57] Ibid., 27.

[58] Ibid., 77.

[59] Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn*, 2.

[60] The most controversial element of Kuhn's book is his incommensurability thesis, which maintains that two paradigms are incommensurable insofar that they cannot be compared using the same methods. This presents a much larger problem in the history of science than in other fields. For example, after Copernicus' claim that the sun was the center of the universe became a paradigm, all non-heliocentric theories were abandoned, thus the theories from the paradigm before Copernicus' were incommensurable with the heliocentric theories.

time? Does it really help to imagine that there is some one full, objective, true account of nature and that the proper measure of scientific achievement is the extent to which it brings us closer to that ultimate goal? If we can learn to substitute evolution-from-what-we-do-know for evolution-toward-what-we-wish-to-know, a number of vexing problems may vanish on the process. Somewhere in this maze, for example, must lie the problem of induction.[61]

The last sentence was certainly vatic. Much of the postmodern reaction to modernity was about asking questions rather than finding the one correct answer. The modern tendencies were giving way in the early 1960s and before the utterance of "postmodernism," these two significant works have started to reflect a cobbled together semblance of the oncoming postmodernity. [62]

Just as the development of modernism included aesthetic categories such as literature and architecture, so too does the development of postmodernism. Before there was a (more) unified definition of postmodernism – one that included thought, culture, philosophy, and aesthetics – both literature and architecture developed their own concepts of postmodernism in relative isolation from each other. Both categories experienced the changing tides as modernism proved to be failing. Despite a lack of unilateral cohesion in the development of postmodernism across different categories, one can still see how the different threads helped to define what postmodernism is. Postmodern architecture and literature provide fruitful insights when contrasted with their modern counterparts and, thus, provide a better understanding to how postmodernity came about.

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[61] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 171.

[62] Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn*, 318. Kuhn's argument is much more complex than can be detailed here. The book deals with more than just paradigm shifts. Yet, watered down versions of that term are often bandied about to this day. Steve Fuller, in *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Time*, traces the frequently detrimental ramifications the book has had. The notion of paradigm shift has been taken in by many different disciplines and individuals and has been used to explain political shifts and revolutions. While Kuhn's book is essential in tracing the intellectual history from modernism to postmodernism, I certainly do not want to make any claims of using Kuhn's paradigm shift to prove my thesis. It would not be too controversial to claim that the postmodern turn was a sort of paradigm shift and Kuhn's book is helpful in understanding it as such. However, I do not wish to conflate my project with Kuhn's, the interest with Kuhn's book is in its relationship to postmodernity. Fuller sees Kuhn's book as being responsible for historical amnesia. From the incommensurability thesis one can neglect past historical periods due to their irrelevance on the current period. This can result in political inertia as well, according to Fuller.

Unlike postmodern architecture, critics rather than writers defined postmodern literature. Thus the shift from modernism to postmodernism occurred naturally and was only retroactively or, at best, concurrently, recognized as such. The earliest literary critic to postulate a theory of postmodern literature was Ihab Hassan. Born in Egypt in 1925 before moving to the United States, Hassan was a prolific literary theorist. In 1971, he published *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*.[63] Much of what Hassan is doing in the book – understanding the relationship between different literary fields – is irrelevant to this paper.[64] However, the last section of his book, as the subtitle suggests, arrives at what he labels postmodern literature. His *avant la lettre* use of postmodern is vague. Hassan understands the shortcomings of his definition but the discussion of postmodernism is not what it is but rather what it could be. "Wide-eyed, the postmodern spirit sees everything – or nothing. It sees, anyway, that violated being gives rise to the tragedy of literary forms, and dares to wish an end to outrage," he writes.[65] His musings about the potential of postmodernisms are not far off. Hassan correctly recognizes the postmodern tendency to call out against atrocities and wrongdoings. He may not have defined the term in 1971 but he opened the floodgates for others to do so.

Despite the title of Hassan's book, postmodernism is not a large part of his thesis. It is the destination of his research. It is telling that of two reviews published in academic journals in

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[63] Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[64] Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, 6. He uses the death of Orpheus or his dismemberment as an example of how literature has evolved over different periods into a literature of silence. "Vanishing Orpheus leaves behind a lyre without strings; the moderns inherit it," as Hassan writes. The endpoint of this thesis is in the works of Samuel Beckett, who can be seen as a bridge between modernism and postmodernism.

[65] Ibid., 247.

1972, only one devoted space to fleshing out what Hassan meant by postmodern.[66] For most, the

enormity of his assertion went unnoticed. The decade after Hassan's book saw postmodernity

crystalize. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, well reviewed at the time, became known for being

an early purveyor of postmodernity. Hassan published a revised edition of the book in 1982, in

which he expanded on the now wieldy phrase of postmodernism. His revisions point to its

importance and growth in stature. In the new postscript he focuses solely on postmodernism

exploring it in ten points. He provides a chart that explores the differences between modernism

and postmodernism (figure 1).[67] After the graphic clearly outlining the differences between the

two, in true postmodern fashion, Hassan writes, "Yet the dichotomies shift, defer, even collapse;

concepts in any one vertical column are not all equivalent; and inversions and exceptions, in both

modernism and postmodernism, abound."[68] The point being that postmodernism is multivalent

and cannot fit into rigid categories. It remains open. As one is able to surmise from the chart,

many of the postmodernist attributes are just negations or their modern counterparts

(hierarchy/anarchy, determinacy/indeterminacy, form/antiform). Much of Hassan's chart pertains

to literary techniques and aesthetics but it remains important as one of the first attempts at

demarcating modernism and postmodernism.

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[66] The two reviews are Joseph M. Duffy's "Art and Post-Art Consciousness: *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* by Ihab Hassan" in the January, 1972 issue of *The Review of Politics.* Duffy does very little with Hassan's concept of postmodernism other than a few mentions, he keeps his focus on the other parts of the work. Duffy, Joseph M. "Art and Post-Art Consciousness." *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 1 (January 1972): 110-13. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1405887. The review that discusses the postmodernism in depth is from famed literary critic Edward Said, titled, "Eclecticism and Orthodoxy in Criticism" appearing in the spring, 1972 issue of *Diacritics*. Said sees Hassan's entanglement with postmodernism as part of his overall project which is tracing the language of silence and also place the trend historically. As Said writes, Hassan is trying "to identify a tradition he calls the post-modern (which goes spiritually, if not always temporally, beyond Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence and others) that chronologically begins with Sade." Said, Edward W. "Eclecticism and Orthodoxy in Criticism." Diacritics 2, no. 1 (1972): 5. doi:10.2307/464918

[67] Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. 2nd ed. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 268.

[68] Ibid., 269.

Modernism	Postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance/Happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/Totalization	Decreation/Deconstruction
Synthesis	Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Paradigm	Syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Root/Depth	Rhizome/Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against Interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
Lisible (Readerly)	Scriptible (Writerly)
Narrative/Grande Histoire	Anti-narrative/Petite Histoire
Master Code	Idiolect
Symptom	Desire
Type	Mutant
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/Cause	Difference-Differance/Trace
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinancy	Indeterminancy
Transcendence	Immanence

Figure 1. Hassan's Modern/Postmodern Chart. Image Source: http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/HassanPoMo.pdf

One of Hassan's examples of a postmodern work of literature is Thomas Pynchon's third book, *Gravity's Rainbow*, a paragon of postmodern fiction.[69] Published in 1973, written amidst Cold War paranoia, the book exemplifies many of the shifting dichotomies of Hassan's chart. The book defies any concise summary as narrative tangents and character asides are numerous. The main thrust of the book concerns an American soldier, Tyrone Slothrop, stationed in Europe

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[69] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Books, [1973] 2006).

during the waning years of WWII. Slothrop, a womanizer, realizes that at every location he reaches sexual arousal with a woman a rocket hits that very spot only days after. Slothrop travels around Europe to solve this mystery looking for information on secret German V-2 Rockets that seem to be at the root of his problem. Pynchon uses elements of noir along with a noir setting.[70] As Slothrop travels through war-torn Europe, Pynchon waxes on the relationship between modernization and destruction. The sprawl of the novel, which includes hundreds of characters, creates a feeling of mass chaos, entropy, and paranoia. Slothrop goes further down the wormhole in search of more knowledge and he begins to lose himself. Surreal dreams, tarot card readings, and stories of sentient light bulbs fill the last section as the book ends in a haze of utter confusion.

Gravity's Rainbow is famous both for its postmodern themes and techniques. The inchoate postmodern aesthetics Pynchon employed were a mix of highbrow and lowbrow, paranoia, incredulity, simulation, decentering, irony, and pastiche.[71] Understanding the use of these techniques is important in tracing the development of the postmodern aesthetic but a larger concern is contextualizing the book within postmodernity. The story, if reduced to its basic components, is about a man in search of an answer in an entropic world, one governed by chance and randomness rather than order and control. Among the book's themes are the theory of *brennschluss*, a German loanword, which is when the rocket runs out of fuel at its apex and its

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[70] Noir techniques are essential for Pynchon as a novelist. Novels like *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Inherent Vice*, and *Bleeding Edge* all revolve around a central mystery that one person is trying to solve. The latter two books are even about private investigators, a noir character staple. The former is a postmodern take on noir as the reader occupies the place of the protagonist rather than an objective outsider. The main character and the reader are both placed adrift in a vast ocean of information and left with the quixotic task of unraveling the mystery for themselves.

[71] McHale, Brian. "Pynchon's Postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 97–109. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of the postmodern literary techniques. Others include alterity, *bricolage*, intertextual playfulness, and metafiction. Using pure aesthetics to delineate between modernist and postmodernist art is troublesome as no technique is mutually exclusive to a certain period.

downward trajectory is no longer controlled by science or mathematics but by forces of gravity, random weather patterns, and chance. The narrative trajectory of the novel as well as the title, *Gravity's Rainbow*, reflects this concept.[72] It epitomizes Hassan's idea (per his chart) of the shift from modernist design to postmodern chance. In all, Pynchon devotes much space to modernized weaponry used in hopes of annihilation and the ideology of WWII. He used history to refract the state of the world at the time he was writing. Personally, Pynchon opposed the Vietnam War. He felt the paranoia of the late 1960s and early 1970s due to Vietnam, the Cold War, and the age of nuclear annihilation.[73] His use of historical elements constitutes the most probing and satirical sections. One of the novel's best jokes is the anachronistic epigraph used to begin the final section: "What? – Richard Nixon."[74] In the Slothrop character, Pynchon translated the feeling of trying to understand one's place in the world. The obsessive pursuit of the answers to his problems leads towards chaos and entropy. The novel's *dénouement*, which becomes increasingly surreal, can be interpreted as Slothrop's descent into madness. The relentless quest for knowledge over the universe results in a fractured self. The notion of the fragmented self, while being difficult to measure historically, arises continually throughout postmodernity. It is a prominent narrative in postmodern literature and film, thus reflecting the culture it came out of.

Pynchon is one of many writers considered to be postmodern. Donald Barthelme, John Barth, Don DeLillo, and William Gaddis are all prominent early examples. Like literature, postmodernity inundated every sector of the art world. One only has to look at the poetry of John Ashbery, the art of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, and the architecture of Robert Venturi.

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[72] Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, 2nd ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 9.

[73] Steven Weisenburger, "Gravity's Rainbow" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 45.

[74] Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 629.

Architecture forms an interesting case study into burgeoning postmodernity. Venturi, especially

in his book *Learning from Las Vegas: the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*,[75] led the

charge in forming a postmodern aesthetic in architecture. First published in 1972, then revised in

1977, the book, written in collaboration with Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, pilloried

modernist architectural notions. Venturi et al. take heed from Las Vegas, a postmodern city if

there ever was one, in giving people what they want. If Las Vegas is the epitome of giving

people what they want, as Venturi notes, then the same rationale can be applied to suburbs

especially a place like Levittown.[76] "One does not have to agree with hard-hat politics to support

the rights of the middle-middle class to their own architectural aesthetics," writes Venturi, "and

we have found that Levittown-type aesthetics are shared by most members of the middle-middle

class, black as well as white, liberal as well as conservative."[77] Venturi aimed at moving

architecture away from the ivory tower of modernism and back into the hands of the populous.

Venturi was very much a provocateur, going so far as to call Disneyland an "American

utopia," but his ideas gained traction in the architectural world.[78] Architects began to incorporate

Venturi's ideas and architectural scholars took notice. In 1977, cultural theorist and architectural

historian Charles Jencks wrote *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*.[79] The book, an

exploration of postmodern architecture, began with an elegy for modernism.[80] July 15th, 1972 at

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[75] Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, and Robert Venturi, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977).

[76] J. David Hoeveler Jr, *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 92.

[77] Brown, Izenour, and Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 155.

[78] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 60.

[79] Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1977).

3:32 PM is the time of death Jencks assigns to modern architecture in his passionate first section,

entitled "The Death of Modern Architecture." At this time, in St. Louis, dynamite took down the

Pruitt-Igoe urban housing developments. These buildings, developed by the Congress of

International Modern Architects, adhered to Le Corbusier's three principles of "sun, space, and

greenery." By the late 1960s, the crime rate among the buildings spiked and the building

decayed. The project of architectural modernism, carried forth by Le Corbusier, Wright, and

others, had failed. Out of the ashes of modernism rises postmodernism. In the final part of the

book, Jencks works towards a summation of postmodern architecture. One notion Jencks

borrows from Venturi is the notion of "the difficult whole." "It is considerably more difficult,"

writes Jencks, "to design works which unify disparate material than to unify already

homogeneous meanings and styles . . . an inclusive architecture brings much more of our

personality and behavior into focus." Jencks believes ugliness, deterioration, and banality can be

incorporated into a structure without succumbing to bleakness.[81] "The difficult whole" is an

apposite distillation of postmodernism in general – a theme that crops up in Pynchon's work, the

scandals of the 1970s and many neo-noirs. Another more aesthetically focused category Jencks

highlighted is what he terms adhocism but what may be termed *bricolage*.[82] Adhocism is

"various parts, styles or sub-systems (existing in a previous context) are used in a new, creative

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[80] Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 7. The term post-modern was still in its nascent phases. Jencks, from the outset, illustrates the controversy over the term even in 1977. "The phrase 'post-modern' is not the most happy expression one can use concerning recent architecture. It is evasive, fashionable and worst of all negative – like defining women as non-men."

[81] Ibid., 90.

[82] *Bricolage* comes from the French verb *Bricoler* which means to tinker or roughly to do odd jobs around the house. It is the French equivalent of D-I-Y or Do-It-Yourself. The aesthetic terms takes its cues from the nature of using various elements to fix things around the house or patch things up. A work of *bricolage* brings many disparate elements into the fold to form a work.

synthesis."[83] Besides its use in postmodern architecture this foreshadows the creation of neo-noir

in section III. One last key assertion Jencks proffers is multivalent architecture or architecture

that can be interpreted, read, understood in many ways. Postmodernism claims no strict

adherence to any orthodoxy, there is no correct path, no one right answer.[84] In summation,

Jencks beautifully recapitulates the relationship between architecture and society: "The pre-

eminent role of the architect is to articulate our environment, not only so we can comprehend it

literally, but also so we can find it psychologically nourishing, create meanings we hadn't even

imagined were possible."[85] The structures of a postmodern society were taking hold.

By the late 1970s, the pivot towards postmodernism was complete. The art world had

been one of the first to recognize this shift. In 1979, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard

published a book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which crystalized the

postmodern turn, lending it credibility in the intellectual world by collating its separate strands.[86]

Lyotard, borrowing the term from Hassan, was notable for being the first philosopher to employ

postmodernism.[87] It was the first work to treat postmodernity as a "general change of human

circumstance," according to Anderson.[88] The book remains the most well known purveyor of

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[83] Ibid., 92.

[84] Ibid., 96-99.

[85] Ibid., 99.

[86] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condtion: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Vol. 10. Theory and History of Literature. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[87] Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 24. Anderson points out that notes 1, 121, and 188 in Lyotard's endnotes section all draw from Hassan's works. Anderson also points out that the other field that helped galvanize postmodernity, architecture, went sorely overlooked by Lyotard. Not only did he overlook architecture, the only artistic medium he didn't write on, some of his notions of postmodernity ran counter to architectural postmodernity. Lyotard addressed these discrepancies in *The Postmodern Explained*, published in 1992. His overall point is that even the values of postmodern architecture are not analogous with his own, they still relate to the idea of being "post"-modern or after modernity. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985,* trans. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992),74-76.

[88] Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 26.

postmodernity and it is often incorrectly thought of as the beginning of full-fledged

postmodernism rather than Lyotard summarizing tangible societal movements.

The Postmodern Condition is a slippery work of philosophy, dealing more with language

and science rather than culture and art. It rarely deals directly with the issue of postmodernism

but approaches it transversely by showing how knowledge has changed in a postmodern society.

In the introduction, Lyotard provides one of the key phrases associated with postmodernism: "I

define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives."[89] A metanarrative, a dense concept,

simply stated is a framework that is applied onto experience or knowledge or society in general.

For example, society progressing towards a utopia is a metanarrative. Every epoch of history has

metanarratives, modernity had plenty, but postmodernity is defined by uneasiness towards them

– a questioning of metanarratives. From there, the thesis is clear. "Our working hypothesis,"

writes Lyotard, "is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the

postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age. This transition has

been under way since at least the end of the 1950s."[90]

The rest of the work adheres closely to philosophical work rather than a cultural critique.

Yet, Lyotard does highlight elements that have occurred in works previously. For one, he begins

to deal with the rising swell of technological innovations and commodified information.

Information becomes a currency, once held only by the government but now in the hands of

corporations. The formation of cultural paranoia and anxiety towards power structures become

apparent in Lyotard's writing. Take, for example, one hypothetical he posits:

> "Suppose, for example, that a firm such as IBM is authorized to occupy a belt in the
> earth's orbital field and launch communications satellites or satellites housing data banks.
> Who will have access to them? Who will determine which channels or data are

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[89] Ibid., xxiv.

[90] Ibid., 3.

forbidden? The State? Or will the State simply be one user among others? New legal issues will be raised, and with them the question: 'who will know?'"[91]

In the society as sketched by Lyotard, where information is a commodity, truth becomes a performative aspect. Postmodernity is marked by a tenuous relationship with truth. Everything is questioned. In Lyotard, one can see that the postmodern society is not radically better or improved from the modern society. There is a vein of self-questioning involved. It is a pluralistic society that is more inclusive of gender and race, but societal ills remain. Racism, sexism, abuses of power, governmental corruption persisted in postmodernity. Instead of searching for the one true answer or solution the focus shifted to asking the right questions. Lyotard was one of the first to write about this shift. The age of postmodernity was in motion and *The Postmodern Condition* was the first to recognize it as such.

The writings on postmodernity are fruitful after Lyotard. The primary flag bearer of postmodernity became American philosopher Fredric Jamison, who aligned himself with postmodernity in its early stages. He wrote the foreword for the English translation of *The Postmodern Condition* and continued writing about postmodernism throughout the 1980s. Although they occur in the decade after the chronological limits of this work, his writings are no less important. In 1991, Jamison published his most famous book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Other than Lyotard's, this work is perhaps the most famous work on postmodernity. Jamison untangles the skeins of postmodernity, albeit with a Marxist lens. His writings have influenced the way we think about postmodernity. He, like myself, sees the question of postmodernity as both "an aesthetic and political one."[92] This notion is critical

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[91] Ibid., 6.

[92] *Fredric Jameson, The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 21.

going forward. The fusion of the aesthetic and the political is the goal of sections II and III of this thesis.

Summarizing postmodernity or postmodernism is to risk going against its very nature. The distillation of key elements essential to postmodernity, however, is a worthwhile endeavor and necessary going forward. Taking from primary and secondary documents, cultural artifacts and trends, we can glean not a complete list of postmodernisms but a list of the most essential components of postmodernity, which are: (1) the decline of the urban center in a post-industrial era; (2) development of paranoia and suspicion especially towards ruling entities; (3) an incredulity towards modernistic notions of progress, amelioration, and a disbelief in one true answer; (4) and the fragmentized sense of self. Important postmodern ideals, hopefully, have risen to the surface in this section besides those highlighted. They should not be cast aside because they will reverberate throughout the rest of the paper. In an effort to keep this project contained and allow neo-noir films to be the Trojan horse that leads us into an understanding of postmodernity I have limited the list. From here, we are ready to explore cultural history in the era of postmodernity.

SECTION II: CULTURE

"'What?'- Richard Nixon" – Thomas Pynchon

The abstract vines of philosophical thought have often coiled themselves around the

tangible institutions present in American society. The manifestation of these (often European)

ideas goes back to the country's inception with thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and John Calvin

helping to shape the laws and Constitution. Historian Richard Hofstadter writes that the

Founding Fathers infused the Constitution with Hobbesian and Calvinist thought and rhetoric.[93]

Or, look at the ensconcing of Freudian thought in American culture in the mid-20th century.

Freudian psychoanalytics were particularly detrimental to women, which shifted the framework

from effect to cause, so instead of an abusive husband being asked how to prevent further abuse

he is asked "why did this happen?"[94] The mobilization of philosophy within American culture

has a longstanding tradition. The age of postmodernity is no different. Section I focused on the

abstractions of postmodernisms, section II is primarily concerned with how they were absorbed

within the socio-cultural realm and how they manifested in daily life. Lyotard would call this

reification or bringing something into being, turning a concept into an object. This is the focus of

Section II.

The age of postmodernity is vast and illuminating, responsible for large cultural

developments and events while miring the secluded enclaves and remote geographies within its

coils. This presents its own difficulties for scholars of postmodernity, as writing about something

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[93] Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York and Toronto: Vintage Books, [1948] 1989), 5. Hofstadter, pulling this thought from Horace White, writes that the constitution was of course founded on experience rather than political theory but the drafters, "men of affairs, merchants, lawyers, planter-businessmen, speculators, investors," had Calvinistic notions of evil and Hobbesian ideas of human selfishness. My own initiation to this idea came from Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116.

[94] Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 147.

that is essentially borderless is nearly impossible. The only way for books dealing with postmodernity (and modernity) is to approach it tangentially under the guise of another subject. My own work is of this ilk. This section will remain in constant dialogue with section I to illustrate that the cultural history can be seen mirroring the essences of postmodernism. This allows for a wide array of topics. By dealing with large events (Vietnam, Watergate) and subtler themes (suburbanization, urban decay) a richer tapestry of a postmodern society will develop. The section begins with a brief history of Detroit, which serves well as a microcosm of the fall of modernity and the rise of postmodernity in American society. From there the focus turns to the late 1960s and 1970s, the high tide of postmodernity. The section, while in communication with section I, keeps an eye towards section III as well. The exploration of noir and neo-noir cinema is an opportune inroad to an understanding of postmodernity. In order for this to resonate one must understand how inextricable movies and culture are, especially in the 1970s. Therefore, the topics of this section inform the topics and themes of the neo-noir films presented in last section. The following is not a complete picture of postmodern America but a way in and through the harmony of all three sections the sweep of postmodernity will be apparent.

The Fall of Modernism: A Brief History of Detroit

From 1910 to 1920, a period that included Henry Ford instituting his five-dollar, eight-hour workday, the population of Detroit more than doubled. By 1920, the city rose from the 9th to the 4th most populated in the United States. Industrial production rose to $900 million in 1916, up from $600 million in 1915.[95] The automobile industry – now with Dodge, Oldsmobile, Chevrolet, and others competing with Ford – was thriving, as was the city. Henry Ford, with his assembly line production, revolutionized efficiency. Fordism was the ultimate modernist symbol

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[95] Arthur M. Woodford, *This Is Detroit: 1701-2001* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 99.

and Detroit a modernist city. Cars were affordable enough for the very workers who made it to then purchase one. It was a blue-collar town of industry. Thomas Sugrue, author of *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*,[96] wrote, "Detroit embodied the melding of human labor and technology that together had made the United States the apotheosis of world capitalism. Visitors flocked to the Motor City to marvel at its industrial sites."[97] Sugrue goes on to write, "Detroit's brooding horizon of factories and its masses of industrial laborers became icons of modernity."[98] Detroit, in the early years of the 1900s, was America's "arsenal of democracy."[99] It represented everything that was good about American democracy: booming industry, low unemployment, urban prosper, modernized technology. Detroit had many low-rise housing districts that were only a short commute from the factories that employed many blue-collar workers. The city was sprawling and spacious, other than the factories and smokestacks, only church steeples were visible in the Detroit skyline.[100] But this boomtown that once boasted the highest blue-collar wages became desolate, racked with poverty and racial tension in the post-industrial era. Millions of jobs were lost after WWII.[101] Where did it go wrong? Sugrue's book correctly highlights the notion of Detroit's elite turning their back on the common people, a symptom that progressed along with the decades. In short, Detroit displays the lesions of white male hegemony, the downfall of the city, industry, architectural modernism, and the inability of modernity to forge onward in a postmodern America.

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[96] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2005).

[97] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 17.

[98] Ibid., 17.

[99] Ibid., 3.

[100] Ibid., 20-22.

[101] Ibid., 3.

The "arsenal of democracy" remained prone to the general vicissitudes of America's fortunes. The Great Depression hit Detroit just like every other American city and with its reliance on major industry it was one of the first cities to feel the effects of the Depression. Banks closed and demonstrations ensued. A protest of the Ford factory led protestors to offer Henry Ford with a list of demands for better working conditions and union recognition. The protested ended with tear gas, fights, and four marchers shot dead.[102] The National Industrial Recovery Act, a piece of FDR's New Deal, allowed workers to organize. Out of this grew the United Automobile Workers (UAW), a major development within the automotive industry.[103] These were turbulent times but the city remained resilient and while Detroit felt the Depression early it was one of the first cities to bounce back. The mobilization of industry with U.S. involvement in WWII helped bolster Detroit's economy. The auto industry was called upon to produce America's military equipment: tanks, aircraft engines, pontoons, missiles, etc. By 1944, the city had war contracts valued over $12.7 billion. Manufacturing increased by 40% in Detroit from 1940-1947.[104] Those who stayed home worked hard to produce for the nation and rationed goods to help conserve for the war effort.[105] It was here when Detroit earned its "arsenal of democracy" nickname, an appellation that seems misjudged upon deeper inspection.

Despite being the epicenter of northern industry and integral to the war effort, the seeds of demise were already embedded into Detroit's city life. Following WWII, Detroit suffered a housing shortage due to limited production during the depression and WWII. The ability to find new skilled labor and the shortage of available housing posed a problem for many Detroiters but

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[102] Woodford, *This Is Detroit*, 122-123.

[103] Ibid., 144.

[104] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 19.

[105] Woodford, *This Is Detroit,* 150-155.

mostly for Detroit's growing African American community. Federal housing was erected to quell homelessness in densely populated areas of Detroit. The housing complexes like Paradise Valley sheltered many poor African Americans during and after the war. Overcrowding and sicknesses permeated the poorly named building.[106] The post-war housing market was inextricably linked to the economy and Detroit suffered four recessions between 1949 and 1960. Sugrue notes that the auto industry was prone to shifts in demand and thus "weathered recessions badly."[107] The small vagaries in the market's need for automobiles gouged Detroit's industry in the form of layoffs. Detroit's population of working-aged citizens increased between 1947 and 1963, yet the city lost a staggering 134,000 manufacturing jobs. As the post-industrial age congealed the denizens of Detroit felt the twin blows of decaying job and housing markets.

The post-war history of Detroit can be told through the plight of African Americans. Sugrue does much to reconstruct the history of African Americans in the city by showing the exploitation of black workers and the rise in racial tensions that led to rioting. The oppression of minorities recapitulates modernist notions of elitism and singular control. The system was rigged in a litany of ways against African Americans. For example, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) often refused loans to perspective black homebuilders seeking to build near white neighborhoods.[108] Those with the power went to great lengths to keep black enclaves from growing. Racially tinged neighborhood covenants helped to enforce racial segregation. Within black-only areas, African Americans renters were prone to price gauging and mendacious landlords who required weekly or biweekly payments and evicted tenants who couldn't meet the rigorous payment plan. By 1960, the median monthly rent for African Americans was $76 while

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[106] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 36-41.

[107] Ibid., 126.

[108] Ibid., 44.

rent for whites was only $64.[109] Rapacious real estate speculators exploited the racial community

gap by selling one house in a white neighborhood to a black family resulting in an exodus of

white homeowners out of the area due to racial antipathies. Sometimes all it took was paying a

black woman to walk with a stroller through a white neighborhood to cause white homeowners

to abandon the area. The real estate agents, or "blockbusting brokers" as Sugrue refers to them,

could make commission on selling the whole neighborhood of former white homes to black

applicants.[110] The general difficulty in navigating the housing market for African Americans

drove a deeper wedge into the racial divide. The inability to procure and keep housing drove up

the demand and, thus, the prices. It was a malicious cycle, one that kept many African Americans

in impoverished sections of Detroit. Even as organizations like the NAACP fought against racist

covenants, defeating them in court, whites found alternate ways to secure exclusivity.

Realms of industry and employment offered the same grim situation for African

Americans. Hiring practices in the automotive industry were discriminatory. Many plant

managers believed allowing black workers onto all white production floors would disturb morale

and productivity. Some companies, like Chevrolet and Dodge, had all black sections of the work

force but, again, it stayed largely homogenized from the 1940s through the 1960s. Even when

hired, the dirtiest and more dangerous jobs were often relegated to black workers.[111] Some white

managers resorted to pure racial profiling to fill unskilled labor positions with black workers.[112]

The practice of hiring black workers began during WWII amidst a boom in factory growth.

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[109] Ibid., 54.

[110] Ibid., 195.

[111] Ibid., 98-100.

[112] Ibid., 99. An auto company official, once asked about why he placed African Americans in the dangerous paint room, responded with, "Yes, some jobs white folks will not do; so they have to take niggers in, particularly in duce work, spraying paint on cars." Asked about the danger it poses to the black workers, he answered, "It shortens their lives, it cuts them down but they're just niggers."

Many automotive companies, Ford especially, started hiring African Americans for more menial or grueling positions. Twelve percent of Ford's workers were African American by 1940.[113] Some of Ford's tactics for attracting black laborers to unattractive positions were suspect at best and exploitative at worst. Ford hired prominent black figures as liaisons to the black community in order to recruit more workers. Ford offered money to black churches, appeared at services and maintained friendships with black clergy members to bolster his image in the black community.[114] These methods would not be seen as suspect had black workers been treated fairly, but as it stands Ford used his money and clout to manipulate the job-hungry black community, exploiting its need for blue-collar jobs to maintain production efficiency within his automotive plants. Sugrue points to the cognitive dissonance many African Americans faced in the automotive industry; on the one hand the jobs were grueling and dehumanizing but, on the other, they provided stable jobs that offered a relatively high standard of living. The seeds of unrest embedded in this issue would lay dormant as long as Detroit's auto and housing industries were thriving, which was soon not to be the case.[115]

As America entered an era of post-industry, deindustrialization left Detroit in dire straights, the causes of which will be discussed later, and people of all races felt the repercussions. The post-industrial, postmodern era marked a shift towards a suburban America. Detroit certainly contributed to this phenomenon. The total population from 1950 to 1970 dropped by over 300,000 people, yet the African American population increased by the same amount over the same period. The percentage of African American citizens, 16.2% in 1950, was

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[113] Ibid., 25.

[114] Ibid., 25-26.

[115] Ibid., 105.

44.5% in 1970.[116] Many white Detroiters could afford to move out of the city, a luxury not as easily achieved for many black city dwellers. The rise in black population during a time of hardship served to magnify deep-seeded racial issues. As the Civil Rights Movement gained national traction, Detroit became a primary location of political activity. Martin Luther King led the "Walk to Freedom" in downtown Detroit in 1963.[117] The federal government, understanding the gravity of Detroit's plight, allocated over $42 million for poverty programs.[118] Yet, even civil rights organizations, fearing little was being achieved in Detroit, grew impatient.[119] By the late 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement began to radicalize, racial tensions were at a fever pitch. Avenues of non-violence seemed to be exhausted.

At 4:00 in the morning, on July 23rd, 1967 police raided an unlicensed bar. More than eighty officers rounded up the patrons as a mob of black onlookers began to form. Around two hundred people began to chide the officers before an unknown spectator hurled a glass bottle at a police car. Within the next few hours looting had begun throughout the city. Detroit was ill equipped to handle mobs, only having 193 policemen on duty during the low-crime period of Sunday mornings. Primarily white businesses were the targets of looting. By almost 8:00 AM the mob had reached three thousand members. Despite pleas from prominent black members of the community, the riot progressed. By the afternoon, the National Guard was commissioned and firefighters called in. The 1967 Detroit Riots had begun.[120] The riots escalated in the advancing hours and days. Midnight to 5:00 AM on July 24th proved to be the most violent of the whole

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[116] Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, *The Detroit City Almanac*. 289.

[117] Woodford, *This is Detroit*, 178.

[118] Ibid., 179.

[119] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 265.

[120] Van Gordon Sauter, and Burleigh Hines, *Nightmare in Detroit: A Rebellion and Its Victims* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1968), 1-21.

affair. Multiple casualties had occurred and police, as the sweltering heat began to rise, were given orders to shoot to kill if fired upon.[121]

Issues of governmental bipartisanship complicated the organized containment of the riot. Political machinations hindered unilateral coordination between Jerome Cavanagh, Detroit's Irish-Catholic, Democrat mayor, Michigan governor and potential Republican president nominee, George Romney, and Democratic president Lyndon Johnson.[122] Besides exposing issues of political bifurcation, the riots prompted widespread instances of police brutality, especially against black citizens.[123] By the time the riots had been quelled on Thursday, July 27th, five days after they began, forty-three people had been killed, over seven thousand arrests were made, and more than $50 million in looting occurred.[124] This was the one of the most costly and violent race riots in the history of the United States. The Detroit Riots were indicative of a shift in America towards self-questioning. The Civil Rights Movement brought race to the forefront of American discourse. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were household names. The Women's Movement began and media outlets like CBS and the *New York Times* began to report on the "trapped housewife."[125] Youth and counterculture movements began to eschew the traditional modes of American life. Christianity experienced a huge revitalization while others turned to so-

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[121] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 193.

[122] Fine, *Violence in the Motor City*, 171.

[123] Ibid., 277-280. The most notorious example is the Algiers Motel Incident, in which police officers held black bystanders in a room and played a "knife game" where they threw knifes at their feet. The white officers eventually shot and killed three black men, leaving their bodies in the motel room.

[124] Woodford, *This is Detroit*, 181.

[125] Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

called "new age" beliefs. Everywhere in America people were questioning who they were and what they stood for.

Many were left looking for answers in the wake of the riot. The racial chasm was unlikely to dissipate and poverty remained rampant. The rioting and the Civil Rights Movement showed that white leaders could not intransigently impose their agendas on the masses without backlash. The modernist myth of one solution to every problem had been challenged and disproved. Gone were the days of Henry Ford manipulating black community members. Yet, that didn't stop some people from trying to do this same thing. No member of the Detroit brass in the 1960s held the same clout as Henry Ford, thus any large-scale renewal efforts after the riots were unlikely. The only one with the name recognition and cultural cachet to enact an extensive restoration was Ford's grandson, Henry Ford II. In 1971, in the vestigial years of modernity, Ford proposed his plan to revitalize Detroit: a $350 million riverfront sky-scrapper bluntly named the Renaissance Center.[126]

Ford's ambition and goals were apparent from the start. The building – the future home to businesses, restaurants, convention halls, entertainment spaces, and a hotel – was to be built in Detroit's downtown in hopes of reinvigorating the area. The fact that the building, which ultimately cost $377 million, was privately funded diminished some of the overall wrongheadedness of the project.[127] For this massive undertaking Ford turned to prominent architect John Portman, an architect of flashy, grandiose, and immediately recognizable designs. Born in 1924, Portman was trained at Georgia Institute of Technology while architectural modernism was still rife. He was reared on notions of the ameliorative powers of urban planning

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[126] Woodford, *This is Detroit*, 217.

[127] Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn*, 82. A total of fifty-one corporations contributed to the financing of the building, which shows the invest these companies (Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, and B.F. Goodrich) were willing to make in the city.

stemming from Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. For Portman, the architect was immensely important in the betterment of society. Portman became renowned for his mix of baroque modernism and futurism. Hotels that featured glass elevators that face inwards towards large ground floor atria replete with forestation, interior facing cantilevered balconies, botanical transoms, and faux bodies of water.[128] Besides actual architectural construction, Portman wrote about architecture. "The battle for modern architecture has now been won. The important issue today is the design of the environment," he wrote in his 1976 book, *The Architect as Developer*, "Architects must redirect their energies toward an environmental architecture, born of human needs and responding to vital physical, social, and economic circumstances."[129] Amongst other things, Portman wanted buildings to "enliven the human spirit" and spoke of cities in terms of a "coordinate unit."[130] Like Wright and Le Corbusier, there is nothing outwardly harmful about Portman's architectural philosophy. Besides some self-aggrandizement and delusions of grandeur, Portman was genuinely interested in bettering cities through architecture. His project in Detroit, spearheaded by Henry Ford II, had genuine goals of helping the city but that was not enough to protect against the backlash.

Commissioned in 1971, the groundbreaking in May 1973 saw construction get off to an inauspicious beginning. Archaeologists discovered the building site sat on the oldest section of Detroit. Over twenty thousand artifacts were found corresponding to life between 1820-1850. Building resumed after the archeological dig was completed a full year later in May, 1974.[131] Construction of the building finished in 1977, at which point it received some pointed criticisms.

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[128] Ibid., 81-82.

[129] Jonathan Barnett and John Portman, *The Architect as Developer* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), 60.

[130] Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn*, 83.

[131] Woodford, *This is Detroit*, 218.

Despite receiving criticism for hiring a flashy architect like Portman in the first place, claims of elitism were levied at the project. The building's inward-facing design that focused everything towards its own interior beauty seemed to have its back turned to the city. Instead of focusing attention on the city it claimed to be reinvigorating, as was the impetus of the project, the building only called attention to its own grandiosity and aesthetic flourishes. Some took issues with the building's pretentiousness and avarice especially in a city that had fallen on such hard economic times. Others felt it was trying to isolate itself from the rest of the city. A critic from *Newsweek* used a metaphor of a "snobby rich kid shying away from lower class neighbors."[132] The building posed a threat to the diversity and variety, both in the way that it pulled business from local shops and in the way it "imposed a controlled environment." J. David Hoeveler likens the building to a fortress with its slate gray coloring and fortified walls forming "a protective barrier against the unstable world outside" – the last fortress of modernism.[133]

Portman, responding to detractors, leaned into this criticism by saying that if people felt it was a fortress then he was only responding to the public's need for protection against unsafe cities.[134] Portman presaged some of the backlash before it occurred. In *The Architect as Developer*, published a year before the Renaissance Center was completed, he wrote, "In Detroit, under the enlightened leadership of Henry Ford, business has recognized that its public responsibility calls for staying in the city and working for solutions, not for turning its back and running."[135] Predictably the building did not revitalize the Detroit community. It was used like any other building, albeit with penchant for alienating guests with its labyrinth interior. General

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[132] Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn*, 83.

[133] Ibid., 83.

[134] Ibid., 84.

[135] Barnett and Portman, *The Architect as Developer*, 133-134.

Motors purchased the complex in 1996 and spent $750 million to renovate the complex by reconstructing a more visitor-friendly entrance and developing the parking lot into a district with new shops, restaurants, and housing.[136] Despite Portman and Ford II's beliefs to the contrary, the Renaissance Center was not a response to what the people of Detroit needed. They placed a monolithic, business-like bandage over a gaping wound, a solution that not coincidently would further their own economic status. The world was changed in the 1970s. More people had voices. The Women's Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Chicano Rights Movement all occurred in the 1960s. The old institutional powers were being questioned. Essentially, the Renaissance Center provided a modernist answer a postmodern question of how do we deal with the ills in our society?

Detroit has long served as a cautionary tale of the dark side of the American Dream. A once thriving industrial center faltered leaving many without the necessary means of life. The sundry causes of Detroit's decline are too complex to parse out here although a few have been highlighted tangentially. The short history of Detroit provides the arc of flourishing and failing modernism and the rise of postmodernism in a microcosm. By 1971, when the Renaissance Center was being touted as Detroit's redeemer, postmodernism had set in across America. No doubt countless other large cities or small regions would resemble the same modernism to postmodernism trajectory. Detroit, however, best exemplifies it. Fordism and large industry were integral components of modernity. They both showcased America's rapid modernization processes that resulted in a more efficient society, one with automobiles and readily available consumer goods. Stitched into the project of modernity was (amongst others) labor exploitation of minorities and urban decay. Histories of other metropolises and smaller cities would show the

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[136] Woodford, *This is Detroit*, 248.

same shift from industry to consumerism and the mistreatment of minorities, but the Detroit example both magnifies these traits and shows the *coup de grâce* of modernist reasoning in the Renaissance Center. The Center laid at the confluence of modernist thought and reasoning and modernist architecture. Its failure, other than the notion that one center could not fix the deep wounds in Detroit's society, is ingrained in the failure of modernity. The critical backlash to the building, especially to the modernist architectural trappings, indicated the inability of a select few to forcibly treat societal issues and the proliferation of assorted voices now being heard. That is the legacy of postmodernism: the ability to provide questioning (often without providing a definitive answer) from a multitude of perspectives. The history of Detroit in the 20th century is the mobilization of this notion and it best reflects the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

Urban Decline - Suburban Boom

Detroit's 20th century decline can be read, among other things, as a decline of the American city. The population drop in Detroit paralleled other cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, which saw their population drop for the first time in the 1960s.[137] Kenneth Jackson, author of *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, points to the inability of many cities to incorporate new land for growth and development.[138] Any chances to develop utopian urban centers like Corbusier's Radiant City or Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City dried up when annexing new land became unfeasible. The decay of the city is somewhat of an optical illusion according to Jackson.[139] The historic urban centers of cities declined due to class or racial divides and an inability to circumvent annexation laws but the area around the

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[137] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 139.

[138] Ibid., 148.

[139] Ibid., 155.

cities, the suburbs, flourished after WWII.[140] The rise of the suburb is linked to the fall of the city

and people like Jackson use entire books to explore this relationship. The decline of the city and

the decline of modernity are coterminous, thus the rise of the suburb occurs *pari passu* with the

rise of postmodernity. The exploration of this relationship is not only integral to the

understanding of postmodernity but it forms a major theme amongst many neo-noir films.

Contained within the shift away from urban life was the coming of a post-industrial

society. Post-industry and post-industrial have been terms used in other parts of this work

without much explanation. Daniel Bell was an early prognosticator of this idea with his book,

The Coming of Post-Industrial Society, published in 1973. Bell's ideas were important for other

scholars in the following decades.[141] It is a complex idea that can be taken at face value. It

signals a move away from an industrial means of production and way of life. Post-industrialism

should not be conflated with oncoming postmodernity, but they do not occur in isolation of each

other. An alteration in how jobs were being done and where they were being done certainly alters

how one experiences space and time. There are many overlapping characteristics. For example,

an introduction Bell gives works well as both an introduction to post-industry and

postmodernity: "A post-industrial transformation provides no 'answers.' It only establishes new

promises and new powers, new constraints and new questions – with the difference that these are

now on a scale that had never been preciously imagined in world history."[142] Post-industrialism

certainly claimed Detroit as a victim because jobs moved outside the city and away from hard

industry all together.

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[140] Ibid., 150.

[141] He is cited in numerous books on post-war America including Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic,* David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, and Perry Anderson's *The Origins of Postmodernity*.

[142] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), xxii.

As the decline of Detroit displayed, the decline of the city had roots prior to WWII and was heavily tied to race. Slums now speckled the urban geography and the inability to renew the city to its past, modernist glory remained an issue for citizens and local politicians alike.[143] Urban historian and scholar, Robert Beauregard, explores in his book, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, the myriad editorials, books, and journal entries. marking the decline of the city. Out of these voices arose stories of post-war decline and the idea of a "negro problem" in cities. Beauregard is quick to point out that we did not abandon our cities but tried to renew them and imbue their regeneration with optimism. For, as he correctly points out, just as there can be no postmodernism without modernism there can be no suburbs without the city.[144] By exploring the personal declarations during the period the voices espousing the decline of the city rise to the surface. Works of sociology, editorial letters, and magazine reports all commented on the belief that the city was in decline. Issues of race, slums, dilapidation, and parking were contributors to the downfall.[145] By the 1970s, the city reached a period of outright crisis. Businesses began to leave the cities in droves, feeling it was no longer financially prudent to be in the city. The decade preceding the 1970s saw the majority of manufacturing jobs shift to outside of the city. By 1963, central cities only held 48% of the nations manufacturing jobs.[146] As businesses left buildings became abandoned. By 1970, Chicago had 150 structures being

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[143] Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 115-117.

[144] Beauregard, *The Voices of Decline*, 115.

[145] Ibid., 105-108. *U.S. News & World Report* ran an article about the street congestion and parking and *The American Magazine* published a report of the poor state of downtown buildings in Chicago in the late 1940s. Books like Miles Colean's *Renewing Our Cities* (1953) and Raymond Vernon's *The Changing Economic Function of the Central City* (1959) both explored the fall of the city in some capacity. Through the harmony of these voices, Beauregard shows the public's perception of the city after WWII.

[146] Ibid., 151-152.

abandoned each month, Detroit had ten per week, and cities like Baltimore, Boston, and

Philadelphia had vast areas of unused housing.[147]

The exodus from the cities meant that people had to settle somewhere. Already by 1954,

an estimated nine million people more had moved to the suburbs than the previous decade.[148] In

the next two decades suburban identity codified. Jackson highlights some commonalities shared

in suburban life: Suburbia remained more spacious and less dense than the cities. Space one was

one of the main attractions of suburban living. Another characteristic was architectural

homogeneity. Jackson particularly points to the ranch style as staple of a suburban house.

Suburbs also allowed for racial and economic exclusivity. Many suburban developments both

consciously and subconsciously procured a racially and financially homogeneous zone, usually

middle class whites.[149] The suburban phenomena ran congruently with the desire for

homeownership, a distinct aspect of the American Dream and the suburban experience became a

distinctly American one. By 1980 America had over 86 million dwelling units and over 57

million of those were single family plots that included yard space, or, plainly stated, two-thirds

of American dwellings by 1980 lay in suburbia.[150]

The most notable and perhaps egregious example of an American suburb was Levittown,

NY. As the housing market became the bedrock of post-WWII American economy, houses were

built for less and cost less. The demand for affordable housing increased. Following the war,

there was a need for between 3.5 and 5 million new homes to be built.[151] Housing construction

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[147] Ibid., 154.

[148] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 238.

[149] Ibid., 238-241.

[150] Ibid., 7.

companies tried to emulate the automotive industry's manufacturing model in hopes of achieving similar efficiency, but uncontrollable environments with different plot layouts, hills, valleys, and other incongruities kept house makers from achieving automotive assembly line efficiency. The first to achieve nearly the same productivity was William Levitt and his construction company inherited from his father, Levitt & Sons. The company began, under the leadership of Abraham Levitt, as a mail order factory for standardized cabinet assembly parts. William shifted the direction of the company into loftier grounds with the help of his brother Alfred, a former Navy construction worker from where the hasty construction techniques were adapted. They started making houses like they made kitchen cabinets: quickly, cheaply, and by-the-numbers. "As in your car, the parts in a Levitt house are standardized; each part will fit any house of the same model," stated Alfred Levitt. By the 1950s, Levitt & Sons was the biggest name in real estate. William Levitt graced the cover of *Time* magazine in July, 1950 which carried the title: "For Sale: A New Way of Life."[152]

A good day for Levitt & Sons resulted in erecting more than thirty houses. They grew their own timber, cut it into lumber, and made their own concrete. The company was vertically integrated. The peak of their production resulted in Levittown, NY just twenty-five miles outside of Manhattan. Originally a town exclusively for veterans it was eventually open to all occupants, provided they were white. Levittown entailed over 17,000 houses and 82,000 residents. Each house had the same sized living-room with a fireplace, one bath, two bedrooms, and built in potential to expand vertically or horizontally. The successes of Levittown were in the marketplace. The "Cape Cod" units sold at around $7,990 (roughly $85,000 today, inflation

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[151] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 122.

[152] Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 131-134.

adjusted), which placed them much lower than similar houses elsewhere. Buyers disregarded initial urban planning gaffs such as a lack of schools, churches, and trees. The houses sold quickly and people waited in line up to four days for a plot. One day in 1949 over 1,400 contracts were drawn up. For decades other suburbs modeled their creation on Levittown.[153] William Levitt, after the two brothers broke up, went on to spread his Levittown plans across the nation by building a "Levittown" in Puerto Rico and France.[154]

If the market dictated the success of Levittown (the only measure of success that mattered to Levitt & Sons) then the criticisms came from outside the economic realm. On a fundamental level, the suburb was not entirely planned out. Besides the lack of schools, churches, and trash removal, Levitt & Sons failed to integrate Levittown's road system with the state's highway system. In general, the Levitts avoid as much governmental oversight as possible, often shirking union regulations when possible.[155] Detractors felt it was an urban planning disaster. Architectural critics levied much scorn for the "cookie-cutter lots" and the general homogeneity of the project. That homogeneity is the key issue when discussing Levittown, as it essentially became a one class, one race community. Even into the 1960s, not one African American lived among Levittown's 82,000 residents. Questioned on this, William Levitt stated, " We can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two."[156] Levittown intensifies all the traits of a post-war suburb both good and bad. However, it is unbecoming to call Levittown a postmodernist construction (or a modernist one) as if it signified

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[153] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 234-237.

[154] Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 138.

[155] Ibid., 134-137.

[156] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 236-241.

all postmodern traits. But it was a harbinger of oncoming postmodernity and it signaled a shifting

way of life away from a primarily urban orientation of time and space.

David Harvey's understanding of postmodernity as a shift in the way we experience

space and time is relevant to the topic of urban vs. suburban life. Included in his understanding is

a tendency to "disengage urban space from its dependence on functions," which is a highfalutin

recapitulation of this paper's argument.[157] Besides a disengagement from urban space, the other

major postmodern shift is a compression in the way people experience space and time, or the

way far off spaces seem more immediate and time feels compressed. Harvey points to sub-

contracting and outsourcing as ways companies expedited the normal assembly line process. The

prime example is how amplified lines of communication placed people in connection with each

other quicker than ever before.[158] It seems paradoxical that as cities were declining people felt

less space between themselves and others. The national highway system proved a major arbiter

of this space compression. The Interstate Highway Act became law in 1956 and it provided over

42,000 miles of highway of which 90% was paid for by the government. At the time, President

Eisenhower stated that other than improvements to infrastructure the law was needed in order to

provide evacuation routes away from the major cities that were key atomic targets. The focus on

interstate highway systems received criticisms for diverting too much money away from cities.

The government spent 75% of expenditures for transportation on highway systems and only 1%

on urban transit. The outcome, as Kenneth Jackson points out, was America's ownership of the

worlds greatest highway and road systems and one of the worst urban transit systems.[159] The

government had, whether it wanted to or not, aided in the proliferation of suburbs. As the pivot

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[157] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 302.

[158] Ibid., 284-285.

[159] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 249-250.

towards suburbia took place the highway systems made it plain to see why the space felt

compressed. Due to poor metro transit it might have been easier for two suburban families to

connect in the 1970s than two families living in the city – a paradoxical notion in keeping with

the complexities of the era.

One casualty of the shifting culture, caught between the urban decline and the suburban

boom, was the drive-in theater. The 1960s and the 1970s saw drive-in theaters in decline. The

rise in fuel prices for cars and a shorter six-month viewing season contributed to the decline.

Rising land value brought on by the suburban influx served as the primary cause of the demise of

the drive-in. By the early 1980s, the United States had the most theaters in thirty-five years (over

18,000) but only 2,900 or so were drive-ins, which was down from the over 4,000 drive-ins that

operated in the late 1950s. The increasing theaters were often built into shopping centers now

spread across the country, whose empty nighttime parking lots provided a perfect house for the

primarily night time activity of movie-going.[160] Shopping malls became a staple of the suburban

experience as drive-in theaters became a quant relic of a different era.[161] Whereas drive-ins often

showed second rate or "B" pictures, malls frequently had the latest and greatest. It just so

happened that as theater numbers rose the quality of films met the new demand. The cinema of

the seventies presented a new avenue into the American zeitgeist. It was a cinema that showed

the society as it was: changing.

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[160] Ibid., 255-256.

[161] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 266. The shopping center became a cultural touchstone in America. While its inception indicates the new suburban sprawl that occurred in the period it allows displays harmful effects in keeping with the culture. Lizabeth Cohen points out that suburban shopping centers were placed in areas where public transportation would unlikely go to and a car was needed. This furthered the racial and class divide as inner city occupants were more likely to not have access to the transportation needed to frequent these shopping centers, thus they became, like suburbia itself, a homogenous zone of white middle class and further stratified an already divided country.

Paranoia and Suspicion in the New World

Suspicion and paranoia had long been a part of the fabric of American society by the postmodern age. Undoubtedly they grew in prominence as the world began to globalize and they took on a mass character rather than an individual one. Certainly specific historical occurrences have produced paranoia and suspicion among wide swaths of American citizens. World War I, the Palmer Raids and the Red Scare of the late teens and early 1920s, and a weakening economy all provided the opportunity for the American public to develop some suspicion and paranoia. The 1940s, with rise in nuclear arms, the beginnings of the Cold War, the end of WWII, and the discovery of the Holocaust led historian William Graebner to call the 1940s the age of doubt.[162] In 1947, W.H. Auden published his famous poem "The Age of Anxiety," providing the era with apt sobriquet. The noir films of the 1940s and 1950s dealt extensively with paranoia, suspicion, anxiety, and doubt. Films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) exemplified the paranoid noir film, a topic dealt with in Section III, with its take on McCarthyism and a Cold War apocalypse, respectively. By the time postmodernity began to germinate these qualities were a staple of American society but a new form of paranoia and suspicion arose – paranoia towards the government and ruling entities. Much of this developed from the fallacious rhetoric given to the public by people in power, politicians especially. Exploring that chasm between the message the public was given and the actual events that occurred, what is sometimes termed as a credibility gap, is the focus here. Watergate and the Vietnam War provide the greatest instances of rhetorical injustice for the American people. While these large topics are difficult to broach I will only focus on exploring the suspicion that grew out of the gap between what was said to the public and what actually occurred.

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[162] William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

Historians are still exploring the multitudinous effects the Vietnam War had on the American public. In an era fraught with civil unrest it became a major rallying point or a contentious issue for a culture beginning to recognize the rifts and fractures within itself. The Vietnam War lasted longer than anyone had hoped taking the lives of many American soldiers as well as many Vietnamese soldiers and citizens. It distracted from LBJ's domestic policy, led to violent protests, and became a prolonged quagmire that entangled multiple presidents. The nadir of the political deception surrounding Vietnam occurred during the Nixon years, whose dubious historical reputation only compounded after Watergate. That said, Nixon was not the only president to mislead the public over Vietnam. His deception came at a time when the public felt no longer trusting of the government, a shift that occurred slowly throughout the sixties and reached its pinnacle after Watergate.

Early in his presidency, John F. Kennedy ordered the number of military personnel in South Vietnam to triple from 3,000 to 9,000. Two years later, in 1963, that number had risen to over 16,000 and included helicopters and fighter-bombers. Kennedy's ramping up of arms was called Project Beefup and was kept as confidential as possible from the public. The confidentiality protected against an obvious violation of the Geneva Convention (according to which military personnel should not exceed 700) and from galvanizing the public against a protracted foreign war. Christian Appy, prominent Vietnam War historian, declares that the foolishness of this endeavor produced a "credibility gap" before that term came to vogue. One anecdote has a journalist sitting with an American officer overlooking the Saigon River in December of 1961. The journalist saw a large American aircraft approaching replete with helicopters. The journalist, surprised by the show of arms, pointed to the ship and expressed surprise at its arrival, to which the in-the-know military officer replied, "I don't see nothing."

The government continued to deny any military increase in Vietnam despite evidence to the

contrary. Yet the fallout was nowhere near the level it would reach during Nixon's tenure. *Life*

magazine published a story that included pictures of napalm in use with accompanying text that

stated bombing was only being used to flush the Vietnamese enemies into the open. There was

no mention of firebombing villages or soldiers.[163] The relationship between the press and the

government was of a different era, one in which the press kept quiet about President Kennedy's

extramarital affairs.[164] It was an era when the press was still willing to go along with the

narrative that the government proffered. Along with Project Beefup, the government kept private

certain elements of the settlement of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The narrative had JFK appearing

strong as Nikita Krushchev backed down whereas in reality JFK agreed to remove missiles from

Turkey if the Russians removed missiles from Cuba. JFK and other officials feared appearing

weak to the public. In fact, JFK even publically chided UN ambassador Adlai Stevenson for

supporting a *quid pro quo* resolution to the crisis.[165] It was still a time when those in power

controlled the narrative and public image, but this era was coming to an end.

The late 1960s marked a period of radicalization. The Civil Rights Movement, feeling

inert and loosing a figurehead when Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968, resorted to

more violent practices. The Women's Movement began to balkanize following disagreements

over the correct course of action. The Haight-Ashbury community had failed. The Manson

murders occurred. Presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy had been assassinated just under five

years after his brother's assassination. The radicalization was not endemic to the United States.

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[163] Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (New York: Viking, 2015), 42-44.

[164] David Farber, "The Torch Had Fallen," in *America in the 70s*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 13.

[165] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 77-78.

France experienced a near revolution in May 1968, which was sparked by many student and worker protests. In Vietnam, the Tet Offensive began in late January 1968. Up until that point government officials, President Lyndon Johnson included, conveyed to the public that the war was being slowly won, but the Tet offensive shattered the illusion that the US was in control in Vietnam.[166] The war became more and more unpopular. Thousands protested the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August of 1968. The tumultuous year ended with the election of Richard Nixon who reached the White House on a platform of "law and order."[167]

Along with his pledge of law and order, Nixon made vague promises of ending the Vietnam War honorably on the campaign trail. This seemed less and less possible as the war waged on. The inability to end the war without escalating forces and appeasing the wishes of the American populace formed a Gordian knot. Nixon attempted to cut the knot by splitting the difference. On television he pointed to an area of Cambodia that housed "military sanctuaries" for North Vietnamese soldiers. Nixon lied by saying America never attacked this area due to its location in a neutral country. However, Nixon had been heavily bombing Cambodia in secret and cross-bordering operations had been executed since the early 1960s. Nixon made it known to the public that bombing these sanctuaries would allow for a clean withdrawal and eventual defeat of Vietnam. Nixon's plan to invade Cambodia was not only a lie to the American public, it incited mass protests from all corners of the nation, from students to church parishioners. A petition protesting the decision from the U.S. State Department received two hundred and fifty

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[166] Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*, 211-212.

[167] Ibid., 228.

signatures.[168] Nixon's attempt to placate the public and win the war at any cost only resulted in greater disharmony between what was being said and what was being done.

The rhetorical discord manifested itself at home in the public lives of the American people. In April 1970, when Nixon announced that he would in fact be expanding the war, many peaceful protesters turned to more advanced measures. College campuses became epicenters of vehement dissent and aggravated protest. Books were burned and ROTC buildings bombed. The aggressive dissent was countered with more police and military presence. It was only a matter of time before tragedy struck. On May 4th, 1970, four students were killed at Kent State at the hands of the National Guard.[169] On May 14th, two black students were killed at Jackson State College after state troopers and police fired into a crowd of black student protestors.[170] Americans disagreed on how to respond to these events. A Gallup poll conducted after the Kent State affair stated that 58% of people felt it was the protestors' fault.[171] Nixon took the majority to heart. He doubled down on the patriotic rhetoric and advocated for the working class, "silent majority" who supported the war. Nixon fostered the bifurcation of the world into Vietnam supporters and dissenters. He went to increasingly extralegal lengths to discredit ardent protestors: wiretaps, tax audits, spying, and threats.[172] Nixon further drove the wedge of discord into the middle of the American public resulting in a fragmented psyche that perhaps never repaired itself.

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[168] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 88-89.

[169] Ibid., 189-190.

[170] Ibid., 202.

[171] Ibid., 189.

[172] Ibid., 206.

The historical gallimaufry of Vietnam, credibility gaps, and domestic dissension only worsened when Daniel Ellsberg published the *Pentagon Papers*. While the information in the book is quite revealing, perhaps just as essential is the way it formed a lynchpin between past and present actions. Ellsberg, a former Pentagon official, leaked the papers and documents to the *New York Times*. The documents proved what many had believed true, that American leaders had been misleading the American public about their actions and intent in Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers dealt with U.S. involvement in Vietnam since the 1940s but stopped during LBJ's presidency. Ellsberg's documents, important for many reasons, had two major effects. One, they confirmed the public's increasing paranoia toward the government and its fallacious handling of Vietnam rhetoric and policy. However, instead of sequestering the retrograde damage to the legacies of JFK, LBJ, and Eisenhower, the main target of mistrust was the regime currently in power. The second outcome was the way Nixon handled the publishing of these papers, which did not touch on his administration's actions in Vietnam. Nixon, perhaps feeling the rising tides of suspicion as well and worried about the secret Cambodia bombings, did everything he could to prevent the publication of Ellsberg's documents. When the Supreme Court overturned Nixon's order to block the papers allowing them to be published Nixon responded maliciously. He ordered a group of "plumbers" to plug leaks in the government and went to extreme measures to discredit Ellsberg, like breaking into his psychiatrist's office for damning evidence against Ellsberg's mental health.[173] Nixon's act proved to be the tip of the iceberg.

The long, complex story of the Watergate scandal unfolded from 1972 to 1974. The sequence of events began with a break in of the Democratic National Committee in June of 1972 and ended with the resignation of President Richard Nixon in August 1974. The time in between

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[173] George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975,* 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 241-243.

was marked by political machinations that spiraled out of the initial event. It would take years to untangle the matted skeins and threads of contingency. News media made details of scandal readily available to the American public as they were discovered. The race to uncover the scandal is detailed in the famous 1976 film, *All the President's Men*, based on a book by the two reporters who uncovered the story for the Washington Post, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. The sequence of events is detailed in theirs and many books. However, exploring the way the information was released, the public's reaction to that information, and effect on the public's relationship to media and the government remains pertinent. Public opinion polls help illustrate a picture of growing suspicion towards the government and the office of presidency in particular.

For such an immensely important historical event, Watergate took a while to gain credence with the public. It had little effect on the 1972 election in which Nixon was reelected. In September 1972 only 52% of people polled responded that they had heard or read about Watergate. Media scholars argue that there is an issue threshold in the public, or a coverage requirement for an issue to become widely known. At the time, Americans were caught up in Vietnam, SALT treaties, and foreign relations, especially in China. The media's coverage was integral to how the story unfolded and Watergate was an issue that needed a lot of attention, which it did not receive in the early period. Of the three major television networks only NBC assigned a reporter to the issue full time. Newspaper coverage was uneven before the 1972 election. The scandal had not hurt Nixon in most publications as seven out of ten newspapers supported him for reelection. Another major shift from the early period of low exposure to the national headlining scandal was the way the media reported on it. Nixon's strategy was to belittle the scandal but the media ended up doing it for him in the early stages. They reported on the issue as if there were two sides rather than a scandal that needed to be uncovered. Initially this

made it easier for the public to dismiss the incident.[174] Americans were not used to seeing the president as a corrupt figure and it took time for that façade to wane but the inconsistencies began to mount.[175]

As information about the nascent scandal slowly began to trickle out to the public and the primary players were recognized, it became apparent it led back to Nixon. The official White House recordings became the key piece of evidence. The recording system, Nixon claimed, was installed at the recommendation of LBJ who told Nixon he found it easier to write his memoirs from a fully recorded tenure.[176] At the time, sixty hours were released to the Watergate Special Prosecution Force and only twelve and a half hours were made available to the public. The tapes the public received were edited not in a way to redact crucial information but to cover up the heavy cursing Nixon used. Some words were shortened, like "goddamn" to the more innocuous "damn," while others were replaced with "expletive deleted." The tapes showed the different personas he used with different people for example Nixon clearly showed a penchant for swearing, something his own mother corroborated, but many White House officials did not recall Nixon as being particularly vulgar. Others politicians recalled numerous instances of Nixon's foul mouth throughout his political career.[177] Of course, swearing was not an impeachable offense yet Nixon's public image suffered greatly. The more information that was released the more the incongruities became apparent. The Nixon administration assumed nobody would pour over the transcripts nor did it assume they would be published with commentary. The

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[174] Gladys Engel Lange & Kurt Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion: The President, the Press, and the Polls During Watergate*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 27-37.
[175] Lang and Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion*, 42.

[176] Fred Emery, *Watergate: The Corruption of American Politics and the Fall of Richard Nixon* (London: Times Books, 1994), 34.

[177] Anthony Summers, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York: Viking, 2000), 350-351.

administration, of course, was wrong on both accounts and the books went on to become

bestsellers.[178] Eventually the public, at a 2-1 margin, rejected the tapes that Nixon released as

being indicative of the truth.[179] Nixon was losing the battle of public opinion.

A shrewd politician like Nixon, coming off a landslide reelection victory, understood that

retaining public opinion was essential, which became increasingly difficult as time went on.

More information came to light, the "Saturday Night Massacre" occurred, and the search for the

missing eighteen and half minutes from one of the white house tape continued. Assessing public

opinion became an integral cog into how far the investigation and indictment of Nixon would go.

The number of people supporting impeachment or resignation rose, as did the number who felt

Nixon was complicit in the scandal.[180] The polls showed that whenever Nixon sought to explain

himself he seemed to be covering something up and suspicion spiked among the public. While

support for impeachment in 1974 usually ranged between 40-60%,[181] the nation was more

resounding in wanting a full investigation of Watergate for it was clear they had lost faith in an

honest resolution of the affair.[182] Nixon was loosing the long battle for public opinion. Operation

Candor, a play to turn the tide of disapproval, did little to change public opinion. This period

marked Nixon's use of the phrase "I am not a crook," which became an object of media

ridicule.[183] The House Judiciary Committee held televised debates about impeachment in July of

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[178] Lang and Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion*, 124.

[179] Ibid., 126.

[180] Ibid., 310.

[181] Ibid., 313.

[182] Ibid., 135.

[183] Ibid., 118-120.

1974 when it recommended impeachment.[184] Before that could happen, Nixon resigned in early

August of 1974 leaving the office of presidency to Gerald Ford and a nation unsure of past,

present, and future and unsure of itself.

The Self in the Age of Fracture

When we speak of the self in history it is often a metonym or a composite pieced together

from different materials. Historians can pull beliefs from personal diaries and take it as a widely

held opinion. Or the historian can look to popular opinion polls that speak to what the majority of

people felt. Alternatively, historians look to art to help make sense of the abstract world. When

Binx Bolling, from Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, wanders the streets filled with despair only

finding solace and meaning in the movie theater then we take this as some approximation of the

American experience. Providing historical proof that selfhood became fractured or fragmented is

difficult to do. Life does not unveil itself like a narrative. Tyrone Slothrop, who became so

obsessed with truth his consciousness literally fragmented, is only a fictional representation. Yet,

there are historians and historical factors one can look to and see the potential undermining of the

self in the postmodern era. Daniel T. Rodgers' book, *Age of Fracture*, explores the many ways

Americans faced a fracturing society and how that manifested itself in the culture.[185] Besides a

fracturing culture, Americans faced an ever-weakening community, which is best explored by

Robert Putnam's seminal work, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American*

Community. These, along with the films of the period discussed in section III, point to some sort

of tumult for the self. The people living in the 1970s, famously dubbed the "Me" generation by

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[184] Emery, *Watergate*, 449.
[185] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011).

writer Tom Wolfe, dealt with a changing society marked by numerous controversies, which no doubt had tangible effects on the individual denizens of a postmodern America.

Part of Daniel Rodgers' argument in *Age of Fracture* is detailing the litany of controversies and rifts that occurred from the 1970s onward. Throughout, he details the macro and micro shifts in American politics often by focusing on the patterns of rhetoric. He uncovers the theoretical underpinnings of political action by devoting ample space to, amongst others, John Rawls and his revolutionary book, *A Theory of Justice*. At time of Rawls work, 1971, there was a larger trend of individual disassociation from community life and civic action, a topic dealt with more directly in Putnam's book. More topical is his work on the fracture that occurred in the women's liberation and feminist movement, once a burgeoning force, now tainted in the eyes of the public. Rodgers' attributes some of this to the popularity of the movement. Many women now had voices and it splintered the direction of the movement. The animosity housed in the public arena surely mirrored the perplexities felt by individual women, or as Rodgers' writes, "every bit of women's ontological certainty was being held up for question."[186] African American studies became ensconced in college curricula throughout the nation and a cast of highly exulted writers, particularly female writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou, received widespread attention. However, these new avenues were still at odds in a country where racism had not eroded in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Racism was not just found at rallies or lynchings but in the everyday in hiring practices and stereotyping.[187] The twin forces of progress and regression marked the era.

Through Rodgers' systematic process of highlighting the rifts in varied societal enclaves the moniker "the age of fracture" becomes warranted. Rodgers coyly undergirds his book by

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[186] Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 164.

[187] Ibid., 115-119.

making casual mention of postmodernity as perhaps synonymous with the age of fracture. Like most other historical works mentioning postmodernity, Rodgers' use of the term is underexplored and used only to contextualize his topics within a larger frame. His clearest allusion is in a chapter titled "Wrinkles in Time." Here, he chronicles the argument over constitutional originalism. Rodgers' understanding of postmodernity comes directly from David Harvey's idea of postmodernity as a compression of space and time. The postmodern aesthetic, as Rodgers' states, is "the play of time – time wrenched from history's strata, sliced and recombined, twisted and tumbled all over itself."[188] For Rodgers this explains how a document as old as the Constitution could traverse time to become a contested issue. Rodgers summarizes the postmodern by stating, "selves became more flexible and less unitary, time horizons shrank, artistic forms that had been radically separated in space and time collapsed into each other, attention moved from structures to surfaces."[189] While Rodger's himself did not explicitly state it, it is clear throughout the book that his mentions of postmodernity are not meaningless. Postmodernity, or the experience of living in postmodernity, results in a feeling of fragmentation whether through the compression of time or the sheer volume of juxtapositions of high and lowbrow, politically correct and sacrilegious, and private and public. The age of fracture, spread across specific communities and topics, is a public manifestation of millions of private individuals experiencing a fragmentation of self. The age of fracture is postmodernity writ large.

Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone,* struck a chord with the public upon its release in 2000. It became a *cause célèbre* that expanded outside of the realms of academia. The book, a work of sociology, detailed the collapse of American community life. Its popularity can be attributed to its quantification of a feeling that many Americans had. Putnam developed the

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[188] Ibid., 230.

[189] Ibid., 9.

concept of social capital, which deals with social networks (pre-internet), reciprocity, and trustworthiness. to measure the actual decline of the community. Social capital, according to Putnam, "greases the wheels" for community advancement, it allows citizens to solve collective problems, and it widens the awareness of the interconnection between individuals.[190] Putnam included many charts and graphs showing the decline (and potential resurgence) of social capital and devoted much space to parsing out what the decline means for our society.[191] Some striking discoveries arise from Putnam's research. For instance, major changes follow the influx of political strife of the 1960s and 1970s. Since the mid 1960s, 15-20% of people claimed to be less interested in politics, 25% were less likely to vote, and a staggering 40% of people were less inclined to participate in political party actions or political and civic organizations of any kind.[192] The statistics run parallel to a time when people were feeling a political malaise and a general disillusionment and mistrust towards the government.

The coup of Putnam's book is the way his methodology inculcates the individual in decline of the community. It is a view of the declining community from the ground up through individuals rather than a top down, theoretical approach. The inclusion of interconnectivity between individuals as a key component of social capital makes the decline in social capital all the more alarming. The break down in the social fabric led to a feeling of distrust not only of the government but of fellow community members as well. A telling study shows a steep decline in people who answered "Yes" to "Do you think people in general today lead as good lives – honest and moral – as they used to?" Between 1965 and 1976 the number of those who said yes dropped

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[190] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 288.

[191] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 415-424. The appendixes prove particularly useful to understanding Putnam's methodology, especially a section titled "Measuring Social Chang."

[192] Ibid., 46.

from over 40% to just over 30%.[193] The waning confidence and trust people placed in one another is measurable, for Putnam, in numerous ways. They range from the amusing (decrease in the obeying of stop signs) to the troublesome (increase in murder crimes).[194] What all this methodological posturing points to is the crisis of the self as the statistics that Putnam gathers only arise from the individual. Americans, from the mid-1960s onward, experienced new realms of distrust, alienation, and societal displeasure. The society had fractured and worse, following Vietnam, race riots, gender strife, and Watergate, optimism was in short supply.

As the 1970s came to a close with the din of upheaval persisting, President Jimmy Carter gave a speech that was both a political oddity and completely in keeping with the times. The Crisis of Confidence Speech (sometimes called the Malaise Speech) culminated after consulting with a variety people during a retreat to Camp David. At the time of speech, July 15th, 1979, the nation was in the midst of an energy crisis. In addition, the scars of Vietnam and Watergate went unhealed and an economic downturn left Americans feeling a general malaise. In the speech Carter's language was quite telling. He used phrases like "growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives," and "the erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and political fabric of America." He addressed the deep effect the assassinations of JFK, RFK, and Martin Luther King had on society and how deep the wound of Vietnam really was. He spoke plainly about the growing gap between the public and the government and of the actual limits of the American dream. It was a feat of honesty from an office with a recent streak of dishonesty. Carter then proposed two different paths for Americans, one of which leads to failure and one to restoration. He left it up for the public to decide: "we can seize control again of our

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[193] Ibid., 139.
[194] Ibid., 143-145.

common destiny."[195] Carter diagnosed the bifurcation and fragmented feelings many Americans displayed. The speech itself is a curio when compared to most presidential addresses. Historian William Graebner wrote that the speech, as a political act, was a mistake but was a striking work of cultural analysis. Carter's popularity waned in the spring of 1979 but the Malaise Speech saw his approval ratings jump eleven points.[196] The approval spike points to the resonance the speech had with Americans whose feelings of malady and fracture only increased in the previous decade and in the final moments of the 1970s, with postmodernity in full swing, individuals all the way up to the Oval Office recognized the feeling of fragmentation.

There are four key components of postmodernism discussed at the end of section I: urban decline, paranoia and suspicion towards the institutions of power, fragmented sense of self, and incredulity towards notions of progress and amelioration. Each of the first three has been dealt with in a specific subsection, however the latter has not been dealt with explicitly. That said it should be evident throughout this section why a disbelief in the metanarrative of social progress especially any utopic propensities became outmoded. The 1970s served to quell mounting hopes of gender or racial inclusivity following the forward thinking 1960s. Urban centers like Detroit were in decline while those who held power offered inadequate solutions. The Vietnam War delivered a blow to supposed American military prowess, which was only restored after the Gulf War, and Watergate furthered the gulf between the government and the American public. The skepticism toward the path America was on was all but confirmed by Jimmy Carter in his Malaise Speech. On an individual level, Robert Putnam's book contains a litany of studies

[195] Jimmy Carter, "The 'Crisis of Confidence' Speech: President Carter's Address to the Nation (1979)," in *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America,* ed. Beth Bailey et al. 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 295-297.

[196] Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 21.

showing how Americans had lost faith in the community, the political system, and each other. Clearly Lyotard's belief of postmodernity being based on an incredulity towards metanarratives was not unfounded. Urban decay, rise in paranoia, and the fragmentation of self augur for feelings of that incredulity, which permeated through society and was a constant theme in neo-noir films, the focus of section III.

SECTION III: NEO-NOIR

"Come on, Harry, take a swing at me the way Sam Spade would." – *Night Moves* (1975)

Cinema, the seventh art, stands separately from the other mediums due to its relative newness. Film became integral to the modernization of the world. Many countries had prominent film industries in the first half of the 20th century from Germany, to France, and Russia, but by the 1940s, influential French critic André Bazin acknowledged that America outpaced even his home country as the world leader in cinema.[197] The time leading up to and during WWII brought about important cinematic developments. Russian formalists taught the world about montage and the Kuleshov effect; German expressionism experimented with mise-en-scène and lighting; and during the war Italian filmmakers melded politics and aesthetics to form Italian neorealism. An argument could be mounted that many of cinema's greatest developments grew out of political turmoil, unrest, or change. Russian film flourished after the Revolution, German film felt the vagaries of a tumultuous first half of the 20th century with German expressionism gaining prominence during the interbellum, and Italian neorealism used on-location sites and non-professional actors to combat the realities of a wartime and postwar Italian economy. This rule proved no different in America as noir films, one of America's greatest contributions to world cinema, developed out the pessimism, decay, and existential dread of WWII. Noir films and their neo-noir offspring are particularly fecund subjects for forming a relationship between film and culture. Exploring that relationship is the task at hand in section III and using filmic trends to explore the way art echoes, reverberates, and mirrors the cultural trends. Moreover, the trajectory from noir to neo-noir recapitulates the trajectory from modernism to postmodernism as neo-noir films are artifacts of a postmodern society.

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[197] André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," ed. and trans. Hugh Gray, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 28.

James Naremore, whose book *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* is the seminal

work on noir, writes, "film noir belongs to the history of ideas as much as to the history of

cinema."[198] Naremore's book gives us the notion that noir is not just a genre or style but more of

a category or phenomena, one that was retroactively applied by academics, critics, and

filmmakers.[199] Giving noir the credence it deserves allows it to resonate the way an artistic

movement would, something akin to the way dada, surrealism, or impressionism reflect the

culture they grew from. The concept of the noir film was born from a French critic Nino Frank's

essay, "*Un nouveau genre 'policier': L'aventure criminelle,*" in August of 1946 and Jean-Pierre

Chartier's, "*Les Americans aussi font des films 'noirs,'*" which was published three months

later.[200] The French played a crucial role in the creation and understanding of noir in two

particular ways. First, due to Nazi occupation they were not able to see American films during

the war. When they caught up with the films after the war they saw new patterns of dark crime

films, which led to the noir appellation. Secondly, France had a sophisticated film culture with

sundry publications that treated cinema as an art form.[201] They had publications and a culture

surrounding film that hoped to elevate it'd status in the art community. After its creation, noir

has been written about extensively over the last seventy years, earning a place in the cultural

discourse.[202] It has occupied different aesthetic and politic meanings throughout its lifespan, both

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[198] Naremore, *More than Night*, 11.

[199] Ibid., 9.

[200] Ibid., 15-16.

[201] Ibid., 13.

[202] Noir has been a popular subject for film historians as it has tangible ties to the culture and represents a substantive category or movement in cinema. Scholars have often compartmentalized different parts of noir for study like Wheeler Winston Dixon's *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*, J P. Telotte's *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir*, or Foster Hirsch's *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*. These examples and others all provide different paths into noir, although none are as informative as Naremore's book.

in its first permutation from the 1940s to the end of the 1950s and when it reappeared as neo-noir in the late 1960s.

Noir films are recognizable to most as black and white films from the 1940s and 1950s, laden with shadows and oneiric atmospheres often dealing with crime elements or private detectives set in the seedy underbelly of a city where pessimism and decay pervade. They often feature byzantine plots and flashback structures, with femme fatales and leading men riddled with existential dread and facing a moral dilemma. Other attributes, like costume and production design, are distinct in noir films. Some films contain more of these qualities than others and often the quintessential noirs contain many of those listed above. The borders of noir are not stringent; anywhere from sci-fi parables like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to the gothic horror of *Cat People* (1942) are considered within its confines.[203] Prominent examples of noir are *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Out of the Past* (1947). Plenty of other films are pointed to as paragons of the noir phenomenon and the complete list of noir films is exhaustive. *The Film Noir Encyclopedia* is devoted to cataloguing these films. Books like that and countless others give noirs the time and energy they require to be fully understood. I will not spend too much time categorizing noirs but positioning them within the culture.

Noir is a product of circumstances – both artistically and culturally – that are worth exploring. Some cultural factors for the influx of noir films were new representations of violence during WWII, which resulted in new realistic portrayals. Another reason was a rising crime rate in America bringing both fictional and nonfictional accounts of crime into the public's attention.[204] Naremore points to less obvious causes like the institutionalization and promotion

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[203] Naremore, *More than Night*, 9.

of psychoanalysis in American life.[205] Certainly noir films were responding to the issues

prevalent in American society but they were also shaped by their production and the film

industry at that time. The most significant element of noir film production in the studio system

was the Production Code Administration (PCA), which regulated films to fit the production

code, more commonly known as the Hays Code. The PCA was enacted in 1934 and while it may

have been named after William Hays, the president of the Motion Picture Producers and

Distributors of America (MPPDA), the actual film regulation and censorship ran through Joseph

Breen. Breen's focus was on vulgarity and morality in film, two issues closely align with noir.[206]

The code was predicated on a system of checks and balances. Films were given some leeway for

sex, violence, and immoral behavior so long as they were evened out with depictions of good

acts. If a character committed bad acts he/she would receive some sort of comeuppance. The

audience should not sympathize with immoral behavior and "evil and good are never to be

confused throughout the presentation," stated the code.[207] Noir films were not immune to the

censorship but famed film theorist Christian Metz argues that noirs derive meaning from this

censorship from probing the interstices of what is not shown. It is what Metz calls the

"peculiarity of censorship" which allows the meaning to get through despite censorship, "like the

sluices you sometimes see at the mouths of rivers, where the water gets through one way or

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[204] Ibid., 40.

[205] Ibid., 40.

[206] Clayton R. Koppes, "Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration," in *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s*, ed. Thomas Schatz, History of the American Cinema 6 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997), 262.

[207] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 174.

another."[208] Often censorship pertained to sex or the omission of sex. One example is in *Out of the Past*, when main characters, played by Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer, escape a storm and begin to dry each other off leading to a passionate kiss. The two lovers slink below the frame and the storm blows open the front door representing the Greer character's openness to Mitchum's sexual advance or a vaginal euphemism.

Aesthetically, noir takes its roots from a wide variety of sources. Paul Schrader's essay, "Notes on Film Noir," published in *Film Comment* in 1972, is one of the most famous attempts at a sort of noir genealogy. Schrader cites the previously stated war and post-war disillusionment and the post-war realism as factors. In terms of style, German expressionism with its chiaroscuro lighting, obscure camera angles, off-kilter symmetry, and eerie sets were major influences. Many European directors, like German director Fritz Lange, migrated to the United States to make a number of noirs. Lighting played a key role for Schrader as many noirs were lit to simulate night and shadows were allowed to be obtrusive, often covered half of an actor's face adding to the theme of moral duality. Schrader correctly alludes to the hard-boiled writing tradition from the likes of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Mickey Spillane as sources for noir. The work of these writers often formed the source material and some of those mentioned even worked as scriptwriters on varied noir films. Finally, a key point in Schrader's essay deals with time. Noirs often used narration that makes it feel as though one is talking romantically or forlornly about the past. Noirs, for Schrader, play with time and make illusions to the past in order to escape the hopelessness of the present and future, which is a particularly telling indictment of the era.[209]

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[208] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 254.

The cultural cachet noir received is in part attributable to their ability to represent popular sentiment and pervading modes of thought.[210] Dominant philosophical strains of the era often made their way into these films, much like the way they enter culture. Both Naremore and Schrader wrote about the dependency noir had on psychology and psychoanalysis, which followed the rise of Freudianism in American life. Noir is perhaps most strongly associated with existential philosophy, the philosophy *du jour* in Europe during the noir peroid, which states that "man is condemned to be free,"[211] and that "man is nothing but what he makes of himself."[212] These sound more like credos spoken by a lonely noir detective than philosophical declarations. The parallels between existentialism and noir are numerous: fatalistic notions, dalliances with surrealism, immense alienation, forlornness, foggy exteriors, and dark streets. Think of Henry Fonda's character in Hitchcock's noir thriller, *The Wrong Man* (1956), who is wrongly arrested at a street corner for a crime he didn't commit when Albert Camus writes, "at any streetcorner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face."[213] The influence of existentialism cut both ways. Camus was said to be inspired to write the existential masterpiece, *The Stranger*, after reading James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which was adapted for the 1946 noir film of the same name.[214]

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[209] Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," *Film Comment*, Spring 1972, http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1069028.files/Schrader%20on%20Notes%20on%20Film%20Noir.pdf.

[210] Some of this cachet is latent because, as Naremore argues, noir is actually a postmodern category that was retroactively applied by the culture at large (viz. film culture). Unsurprisingly, the Nino Frank essay did not receive mainstream notoriety. Naremore believes that noir is a retroactive category. That said these films were well received by the public and made money, which is perhaps the truest measure of their cultural status.

[211] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998), 23.

[212] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion*, 15.

[213] Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 10-11.

Camus isn't the only writer to have direct contact with noir. Nino Frank often took close

friend and modernist writer James Joyce to the movie theatres. In America, modernist writers

like Hemingway and Faulkner had close ties with noir films with the former's work being

adapted more than once and the latter working on scripts for films like *The Big Sleep*. Noir's

overlap with modernism did not go unnoticed. Edward Dimendberg's *Film Noir and the Spaces

of Modernity*, the central argument of which will be discussed later in the section, certainly

makes the allusion explicit. Even Naremore devotes a chapter to parsing out some of the

connections between the two. "If modernism did not directly cause the film noir, it at least

determined the way certain movies were conceived and appreciated," he writes.[215] It is important

to note that noir should not be considered the apogee of modernist art. It does not have the same

qualities of modernist painting, poetry, or fiction, nor does it reflect all tropes and themes of

most modernist works, although some similarities do occur. Noirs, like modernist novels, mess

with linear structure and probe subjectivity. A better approximation is viewing noir as depicting

a modernistic world or a milieu steeped in modernity. Overall, the modernist culture, political

atmosphere, and prevailing intellectual styles created the fabric that noir films were spun from

and it was the prominent noir players – from Faulkner to Chandler to directors like Howard

Hawks and Nicholas Ray – who distilled these entities into artistic expression.

Noir films remained in vogue for nearly two decades with studios continuing to fund and

make the films. This fruitful period produced a number of significant films that remain important

for both film and cultural history. Among these films, a few stand above the rest as being

aesthetically and culturally important and as harbingers of the forthcoming neo-noir category.

Joseph H. Lewis' *Gun Crazy* (1950) is about a man who has a gun fixation. He meets an Annie

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[214] Naremore, *More than Night*, 23.

[215] Ibid., 41

Oakley-like femme fatale who begins to convince him to rob banks with her. While initially exhilarating, the bank robbing begins to catch up with the two lovers and the film takes a predictable turn. *Gun Crazy* is noted for containing a scene where the two rob a rural bank while the camera stays in the back seat of the car never following them inside only patiently waiting for them to return. The scene was an influence for the *Nouvelle Vague* directors that came just after the noir era and the film, which overtly conflates sex and violence, was a major influence on *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), a film that could be considered the dawn of a new age in American cinema.

A number of other noirs remain notable both for their artistry and for their historical importance, a crucial later period noir is Robert Aldrich's independently produced *Kiss Me Deadl*y (1955), written by A. I. Bezzerides and adapted from a Mickey Spillane novel. Spillane was a famous hard-boiled writer but considered more lowbrow than Chandler or Hammett. He trafficked in vulgarity and his protagonist, Mike Hammer, was a violent xenophobe and misogynist. Like a Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe but stripped of most redeemable qualities, the Hammer character and Spillane's books in general were deemed to transgressive and controversial for Hollywood. Bezzerides' script and Aldrich's treatment of the Hammer character is somewhat revisionist, in part to pacify the censors and in part because the two, both liberals, had some contempt for the character. The film itself is about Hammer (Ralph Meeker) getting caught up in a Cold War plot dealing with nuclear annihilation. Hammer, after picking up a wandering woman, gets kidnapped and beat up. The rest of the film concerns Hammer trying to understand why this happened and obtain some sort of vengeance. The labyrinth plot, in keeping with noir tendencies, contains a small box that contains what one character calls "the great whatsit." The film is steeped in Cold War obsession with Bezzerides and Aldrich exchanging the

drug-dealing criminals in the book for the mad scientist archetypes in keeping with the era's

paranoid qualities. In keeping with the Aldrich and Bezzerides critical distance from the source

material, many of the Hammer character's usual accouterments are swapped for modernistic

trappings. In the film, Hammer drives a foreign car and lives in a swanky modern apartment.[216]

The movie ends at a lonely beach house with a fight over the contents of the box, which turn out

to be radioactive elements. These elements begin to reach critical mass when the box is open and

as Hammer and his love interest escape the nuclear elements explode causing the house to erupt

in flames. An alternate ending for the film implies that Hammer and his paramour perished in the

nuclear explosion that signaled the beginning of the apocalypse.[217] The film marked the

beginning of the end for film noir and serves as metaphorical dismissal of modernity due to the

critical distance it takes from all the modernist symbols in the film. *Kiss Me Deadly* takes on a

similar critical framework as Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in imagining

the end of modernity.

The end of the 1950s brought about the end of the classical noir period. Orson Welles'

Touch of Evil (1958) is often cited as the last noir, however Naremore's cleanlier periodization

extends the era to 1959 and sees the beginning of the French New Wave as bookend to the noir

era.[218] The decline in noir popularity is attributable to varied causes like a culture shifting away

from the traumas of WWII, the rise of television, and the decline of movie viewership leading to

a weakened Hollywood system.[219] Artistic inertia played a role as prominent noir directors

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[216] Ibid., 151-153.

[217] *Kiss Me Deadly*, directed by Robert Aldrich (1955; Criterion Collection, 2011), DVD. The alternate ending is presented as an extra scene on the DVD for *Kiss Me Deadly*.

[218] Naremore, *More than Night*, 27.

[219] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 285-287.

moved on to different subjects and people became overly familiar with noir narratives.[220] The

French intellectuals played a big role in the end of noir as well. The writers at *Cahiers du

Cinéma*, the prominent French film publication that was responsible for the critical and

intellectual backing that elevated noir's status, had lost interest in noir at the end of the 1950s.

The writers – Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, and Claude

Chabrol – had begun film careers of their own and their work would form the French New Wave.

These critics turned directors, especially Godard, Truffaut, and Chabrol, had spent the previous

years watching and reviewing American noir films and used that influence to create their own

films.[221] The best example and one of the first *Nouvelle Vague* films is Godard's *Breathless*

(1960), in which the main character played by Jean-Paul Belmondo roves around aimlessly,

steals a car, and shoots a policeman all on a whim. The Belmondo character is obsessed with

Humphrey Bogart and tries to imitate his actions, a consummate sign of a fragmentized self. If

the film sounds like a noir it only behaves that way on the surface. The film is bathed in natural

light rather than dark shadows. The plot begins as a thriller but diffuses as it contains a twenty-

three minute scene around the midpoint of Belmondo and his American girlfriend (Jean Seaborg)

just talking in her hotel room, a scene that would never be made in Hollywood. Like any good

artist, Godard is hard to classify. He uses both postmodern and modern techniques. His early

period of filmmaking is marked with noir-like pastiches from *Band of Outsiders* (1964) about

group of young Parisians attempting to rob the money from a wealthy family's home to

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[220] Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 209.

[221] There was an immediate impact of noir on French Cinema (among many other countries) before the New Wave began and plenty examples of French noir. Jean-Pierre Melville is a director so influenced by noir that he ended up making an American noir film in New York, *Two Men in Manhattan*, a film I will discuss further on in the section. Like Melville, Jules Dassin also worked in American noirs directing films like *The Naked City* (1948) and *Night and the City* (1950) before he was blacklisted. He returned to France to direct the French noir *Rififi* (1955). Other examples range from *Touchez pas au Grisbi* or *Don't Touch the Loot* (1954) to noir precursors like Jean Renoir's *La Nuit du Carrefour* or *Night at the Crossroads* (1932).

Alphaville (1964), a sci-fi noir with a prototypical noir hero named Lemmy Caution. Other films like Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) and some of Claude Chabrol's thrillers reflect the noir influences. Even the New Wave's most complex director, Jacques Rivette, used some noir trappings in a film like *Duelle* (1976). The French New Wave capitalized on the inherent coolness of noir films with their detached heroes and casualness towards crime. The importance of film noir in France displays the sheer gravitas that noir had accrued but, more importantly, this transatlantic dialogue that begins with noir then floods French cinema eventually comes back to the United States to form the beginning of neo-noir, a series of films influenced by both noirs and the *Nouvelle Vague.*

Back in the United States noirs had fallen out of favor with the public and few were made throughout the first half of the 1960s. One important exception is Samuel Fuller, a former crime reporter and WWII veteran, who began as a screenwriter notably for Douglas Sirk's noir film *Shockproof* (1949). He began making his own films and wrote and directed some classical noir period films in *Park Row* (1951) and *Pickup on South Street* (1953). Yet, the iconoclastic Fuller never kept in step with mainstream cinematic trends, so by the 1960s he was still directing noir films that fall into the indeterminate void between the classical noir period and its rebirth as neo-noir in the late 1960s. After a string of war films in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Fuller wrote and directed *Shock Corridor* (1963) about a journalist who poses as a patient in a mental ward to uncover an unsolved murder at a mental institution. The film draws from Fuller's experience working for a newspaper and depicts a journalist so focused on winning the Pulitzer Prize that he eventually occupies the very insanity he pretended to have to infiltrate the asylum. The next year Fuller wrote and directed *The Naked Kiss* (1964) about a prostitute that moves to a new city. The film has the odd feeling of being caught between two cinematic eras as it has the rhythms, look,

and miasma of a noir film but treats the subject at hand with the vulgarity and vigor of a neo-noir. The film opens with the female prostitute beating up a client and ends with her newly found love interesting being exposed as a pedophile. The *Cahiers* group lauded Fuller's gritty films and he even played a small role as himself in Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) where he says to the protagonist (played by Belmondo), "film is like a battleground."

With the influence of Samuel Fuller, the French New Wave, and the entirety of film noir in tow a new group of directors began to approach the topics, stories, themes, and tropes of noir films once again. Alain Silver and James Ursini posit that neo-noir began with *Point Blank* (1967), a John Boorman film staring Lee Marvin as a hard-boiled criminal seeking revenge on his partner who double-crossed him. The film is based on a Donald Westlake novel, under his pen name Richard Stark, which follows in the tradition of Chandler and Hammett.[222] Another key development came with David Newman and Robert Benton's script for *Bonnie and Clyde.* The two were enormous fans of French New Wave cinema and wrote the script with a hope of Truffaut directing it. After some discussions with the authors, Truffaut turned the project down but passed the script to Godard who met with the two in New York shorty after. Godard madly went about doing the film but dropped it as quickly as he picked it up.[223] Finally, it fell to Arthur Penn to direct the film and what resulted was a new Hollywood film that had a cool, detached feeling, a propensity to show extreme violence, with New Wave sensibilities and noir subject matter. The movie sparked both adulation and virulence among audiences and critics. Bosley Crowther, chief film critic for the New York Times disdained the film, reproaching it whenever he could, yet the culture and the film world galvanized behind the picture. Crowther, then in his

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[222] Alain Silver and James Ursini. *American Neo-Noir: The Movie Never Ends* (Milwaukee, WI: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2015), 11.

[223] Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 63-68.

early sixties, was behind the times and the same year *Bonnie and Clyde* was released the *New York Times* released him from his duties as chief film critic.[224] The dawn of a new era had begun.

What is neo-noir? The differences between noir and neo-noir are so slight that many scholars barely differentiate the two. Neo-noir is treated as an appendage of noir and noir monographs often tack on a chapter about neo-noir at the end of the book. Naremore handles neo-noir as a continuation of noir but does give it its due diligence as a separate entity. The poet John Ashbery, in his Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, and National Books Critics Circle Award winning book, *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975), wrote a poem entitle "Forties Flick."[225] The poem, written amidst the high time of neo-noir cinema, illustrates the slight difference between noir and neo-noir within its two stanzas. The first stanza illustrates noir with its plot and detail driven lines, Venetian blinds (a common symbol in noir films), and femme fatales, while the second stanza shows the self-awareness and self-referentiality of neo-noirs and the way they deconstruct the noir category to probe for meaning both in and outside of the narrative:

Forties Flick

The shadow of the Venetian blind on the painted wall,
Shadows of the snake-plant and cacti, the plaster animals,
Focus on the tragic melancholy of the bright stare
Into nowhere, a hole like the black holes in space.
'In bra and panties she sidles to the window:
Zip! Up with the blind. A fragile street scene offers itself,
With wafer-thin pedestrians who know where they are going.
The blind comes down slowly, the slats are slowly titled up.

Why must it always end this way?
A dais with woman reading, with the ruckus of her hair
And all that is unsaid about her pulling us back to her, with her
Into the silence that night alone can't explain.

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[224] Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*, 370-371.

[225] John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait In a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 5.

Silence of the library, of the telephone with its pad,
But we didn't have to reinvent these either:
They had gone away into the plot of a story,
The "art" part—knowing what important details to leave out
And the way character is developed. Things too real
To be of much concern, hence artificial, yet now all over the page,
The indoors with the outside becoming part of you
As you find you had never left off laughing at death,
The background, dark vine at the edge of the porch.

Of course, the biggest difference is noirs are a product of modernity and neo-noirs a product of postmodernity. Both offer a vision of America in an artistic mirror. Neo-noir however adds elements of consciousness; there was no need for the French to retroactively define it. Besides a changing culture, neo-noirs came out of a changing film industry. Attempting to cash in on the success of *The Sound of Music* (1965), many production companies mounted expensive musicals only to suffer major losses at the hands of poor box office returns. The late 1960s saw a major recession for Hollywood, which resulted in a major change in terms of content.[226] Studios began giving more power to individual artists to make films the way they saw fit. This was the result of a number of factors but chiefly among them was a shifting demographic of younger filmgoers who were more interested in gritty films from stylish directors than inert musicals and the growing culture of film criticism and film reportage.[227] A key development out of the new rash of film writing was the auteur theory, which came from the writings of Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc and brought to American audience by Andrew Sarris.[228] What the auteur

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[226] David Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam*, 1970-1979, History of the American Cinema 9 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 9.

[227] Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 67-68.

[228] The idea had its beginnings in Astruc, a writer and director associated with *Cahiers* and the *Nouvelle Vague*, who wrote a piece originally titled "*Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo*" or "From Pen to Camera and from Camera to Pen." In the essay he compares the camera to a pen, which begins the metaphor of the director as the auteur or author of the film, and the camera is his/her pen. Bazin wrote about the phenomenon and continued its development, as did Truffaut. It was coined for American audiences by critic Andrew Sarris in his essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962."

theory posited was that the director was the author of the film and responsible for the film's artistic flourishes. Of course, the theory is controversial and there are many important roles in the filmmaking process besides the director but for our purposes it is very wieldy, especially when thinking about the autonomy given to the directors in the 1970s, many of whom made outstanding neo-noir films. In the light of the auteur theory, giving the director license over artistic direction of a film allows the film to operate in a wider cultural context and allows the films to be artistic expressions representative of the society the artist inhabits.

The 1970s are somewhat of an oddity in the whole of American film history. A new generation of filmmakers was given the power to make the films they wanted and what resulted was a golden age of filmmaking – a Hollywood renaissance.[229] These filmmakers, many of whom had attended film school, were privy to and utilized the entirety of film's history. Of course, not every film made was a neo-noir and of the handful of neo-noirs made only a few are aesthetically and culturally significant. The following three subsections adhere rhythmically to the previous section i.e. they pertain to urban decay and suburban boom, paranoia and suspicion in the postmodern era, and self-fracture. Strewn throughout these subsections and the films themselves are notions of a disbelief in societal amelioration, the salvation of oneself, and general incredulity of metanarratives. For the sake of clarity and scope, I will only focus on a number of neo-noirs that are either pertinent to the exploration of postmodernity and/or culturally significant. There are other films that will be mentioned and plenty of neo-noirs that will not be. The ensuing films are Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974), Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975), John Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976).

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[229] Cook, *Lost Illusions*, xvii.

The Spaces of Postmodernity

Part of the lasting appeal of noir is the complex relationship of past and present. Noir was born a nostalgic entity, pining for a different time even from its early years. Nostalgia, of course, comes from the Greek words for to return home (nostos) and a pain or sorrow (algia). So, what home did many noirs ache to return to? Edward Dimendberg maintains that the core city is the object of noir's nostalgia. The essence of noir, for Dimendberg, is nostalgia and fear for "the loss of public space, the homogenization of everyday life, the intensification of surveillance, and the eradication of older neighborhoods by urban renewal."[230] For many urban theorists, the urban center has almost ameliorative powers akin to the Greek agora – a space for communal living.[231] The core helps combat alienation and solipsism as it brings community front and center.[232] As showed in Section II the end of modernity, which aligns with the noir period, began the decline of urban spaces. Populations for major cities began to fall in the decades following WWII. It is understandable why the idealized city center would be the object of nostalgic sentiments in that period. Often noir plots were labyrinth mysteries that went deeper and deeper into the city's squalid center in the search for resolution. One could posit that these disillusioned protagonists are looking for a return home to a harmonious urban center that is no longer there. It has become a relic of a bygone era and the now dilapidated urban space is the center for decay, crime, and sorrow. Think of plot of *D.O.A.* (1950) in which an everyman accountant in Banning, California shows up to a police station in Los Angeles saying he has been murdered. In flashback he travels from Banning to San Francisco with its thriving beat culture where he is poisoned. He then goes

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[230] Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, 7.

[231] Ibid., 109-111. Dimendberg points to the 1940s and 1950s writings of Joseph Hudnut, Henri Lefebvre, and Sigfried Giedion to illustrate the importance of the urban city and the nostalgia for a time before its decline.

[232] Ibid., 113.

to Los Angeles, going further into the city's center of crime and decay to find the answer to his mystery that only ends in his death.

The thesis of Dimendberg's book pertains to centripetal and centrifugal forces in film noir films. Both categories deal with the anxieties of urban life but with different perspectives. As Dimendberg writes, "the former elicits the agoraphobic sensation of being overwhelmed by space, fears of constriction, or the fear of losing one's way in the metropolis," while with the latter anxieties, "hinge upon temporality and the uncertainty produced by a special environment increasingly devoid of landmarks and centers and often likely to seem permanently in motion."[233] Dimendberg's work is heavily theoretical, probing the abstract spaces of noir films for meaning. Often he neglects to give drawn out examples of each force. That said, one can almost feel the centripetal forces in something like *The Big Sleep* or *The Maltese Falcon*, two city set films where the protagonist is spiraling further into the murky center of an urban space. The key trait of the centripetal force is in keeping with the noir splintering of time between past and present. Dimenberg writes, "the psychic hazards of dwelling in an urban space whose historical mutation yields real spatial gaps and temporal voids between the modern as 'yet-to-come' and the urban past as 'yet-to-be-destroyed.'" One need only think of the put upon Phillip Marlowe or Robert Mitchum's character in *Out of the Past* to understand the pull between the two.

In the centripetal noir, *D.O.A.* for example, the characters move further into the urban center to prove he is not invisible and he still exists whereas in the centrifugal noir characters feel the opposite way. The centrifugal force, for Dimendberg, represents a shift in how we experience the space around us. Shopping malls and suburban developments blot the centrifugal space, which is now discerned with "the redeployment of surveillance mechanisms away from

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[233] Ibid., 172.

the bodies of citydwellers toward the automobile" and "the proliferation of electronic media."[234] It is an outward pull from the urban center to suburbs and edge cities. The concomitant result to that outward pull is a preternatural feeling of escape often through the use of newly minted national highway system. Dimendberg recognizes the nationwide highway production, Federal Housing Act, successful atomic bomb testing by the Soviet Union, growth of mass media, suburbanization, mounting anti-urban notions, transcontinental flights, and population shifts as historical markers signifying the shift from centripetal to centrifugal forces.[235] The parallels are so apparent that it is impossible not to note the kinship between centrifugal forces and liminal postmodernity. Centrifugal forces could be a way into understanding the shift in American space and population discussed in section II and it is more than mere coincidence that the shift from centripetal to centrifugal for Dimendberg aligns with the shift from decaying modernism to fledgling postmodernity.

Much like his sections on centripetal, Dimendberg spends more time with theory and abstractions on centrifugal forces than with listing out examples of noirs that fit the paradigm. Certainly the historical markers he lists show a chronology present in his thesis. Centripetal conforms to mostly 1940s noirs while centrifugal represents late period noir films mostly of the 1950s. Of course, as has been proven throughout this study, contradictions to this paradigm exist. There are centrifugal noirs in the 1940s and centripetal forces present in noirs of the 1950s, they just constitute a minority. Two of Dimendberg's more potent examples come from the pen of A.I. Bezzerides whose stint as a truck driver perhaps made him privy to the artistic fecundity of the national highway.[236] The two most influential scripts by Bezzerides, the previously discussed

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[234] Ibid., 176

[235] Ibid., 177-181

Kiss Me Deadly and the Nicholas Ray directed *On Dangerous Ground* (1951), are good examples of centrifugal force. *Kiss Me Deadly* begins on a highway road at night when Mike Hammer picks up a stranded woman that sets off the central mystery. As the films moves along hitting noir plot points and tropes and critiquing modern enlightenment and urban modernity there is a pull away from the city to the boundaries of the space. The ending, imbued with knowledge of successful Soviet atomic testing, takes place on a beach near the Pacific Ocean, the literal end of the United States territory. The original ending had Hammer and his love interest escaping the burning house (caused by unstable radioactive material) by going further into the ocean, about as far away as one can get from urban life. *On Dangerous Ground* focuses on an urban detective haunted by years of dealing with the scummy underworld of the city peopled with low-life thugs. After multiple occurrences of unnecessary uses of force on criminal suspects, Jim Wilson (Robert Ryan) is transferred to a pastoral hamlet to help search for the murderer of a young townswoman. The film certainly is one of the few noirs to incorporate snow into the plot as the majority of the film is set in a blind woman's home (Ida Lupino) high up in the snowcapped mountains. After searching for the suspect on the women's land, Wilson discovers that the murderer is the mentally disturbed brother of the blind woman who is only trying to protect her kin. Again, the centrifugal pull is felt on the films protagonist who only sees the error in his ways and discovers compassion away from the decrepit city.

Dimendberg confines his thesis mostly to a Naremore-influenced period of classical noir, ending with the beginning of the French New Wave in 1959.[237] Within that period, he sets 1949 as the demarcation point between centripetal and centrifugal inflicted noir films. Part of his

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[236] Ibid., 197.

[237] The two writers, Naremore and Dimendberg, concurred on each other's works as both mentioned one another's help and support during their respective research and writing phases in the acknowledgement section of both books.

reasoning is the proliferation of televisions, only eight thousand homes have televisions in 1946 but by 1949 the number is close to one million. New media alters the way we experience the world. After 1949, noir films frequently make use of the centrifugal characteristics described previously (nonurban settings, highways, etc.) and while Dimendberg ascribes reasoning to his categories he is mostly following historical patterns.[238] It makes sense that noirs films would leave the dense urban centers in the 1950s as significant portions of the population were doing just that. Essentially, Dimendberg is creating an abstract theory of space to accompany a quantifiable cultural phenomenon and uses film noir to put the theory into practice. There certainly is a kinship between his work and what this project is seeking to do. The biggest issue with Dimendberg's work is that he doesn't take it past the classical noir period. Although one can forgive him for trying to keep his project more manageable, he barely mentions any neo-noir films other than a short section at the end of his book. The historical factors that allow Dimendberg to posit the centripetal-centrifugal trajectory do not stop in 1959. As was shown in section II suburban influx, urban decay, and transnational transit all continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which is to say they were prominent themes in the neo-noir films from the aligning period. Ultimately, Dimendberg's belief in a centrifugal force in post-1949 noir films can be ably stretched to the neo-noir of the 1970s.

Within the stable of neo-noirs are a number of films that illustrate centrifugal force, urban decay, and suburban/edge city boom. The best example of all three ideas – and the apotheosis of the neo-noir film in general – is Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*. While some neo-noirs shirk visual reproduction of classical noirs but still evoke a similar spirit, mood, or content (e.g. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, *Night Moves*, *The Long Goodbye*), *Chinatown* revels in the visuals of old Hollywood, with ornate set decoration, meticulous details, and a majestic gold hued

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[238] Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, 210.

palette. The film is set in Los Angeles during a severe drought in the late 1930s. Notably, it is the only neo-noir discussed here that is not set in the present. The genius of Polanski's film and Robert Towne's script is the way it takes noir tropes and themes and elevates them into cultural criticism. It is the perfect encapsulation of the second stanza of the Ashbery poem, particularly the lines "The 'art' part—knowing what important details to leave out/And the way character is developed. Things too real/To be of much concern, hence artificial yet now all over the page." The "art" part of *Chinatown* is in its leaving out narrative time compressions insofar as it does not contain persistent flashbacks or non-linear storytelling. Yet, by setting the film in the past it becomes a dialogue about the present. Traditional noir time truncations and flashbacks served to tell the audience something about the character or evoke a feeling, but *Chinatown* lifts the time compression outside the narrative framework so that it is a movie set in the past but about the present, that is the "art" part.

As artwork reflecting the culture, *Chinatown* is an expansive work. Pertinent to this section is its dealings with the city and suburbs. Private Detective J.J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) becomes embroiled in a nefarious plan to divert water from the city to the surrounding plots in the valley, thus making the new landowners rich. Gittes is pulled into a complex familial situation between Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway), her missing husband and chief engineer at the Department of Water and Power, Hollis Mulwray, and her heavily connected and quasi-omnipotent father, Noah Cross (John Huston). Cross is the puppet master pulling all of the strings. He killed Hollis Mulwray after Mulwray opposes the scheme to divert water away from the city, during a drought no less, and into the valley. Cross and other unnamed associates use their pull at the Water and Power department to poison the water being sent to the land surrounding the city forcing the landowners (like the orange grove owners depicted in the film)

to sell their unusable land cheaply. At this point, using recently deceased elderly people as a

front, they buy the land that will soon be worth millions when they incorporate the valley into the

city and are able to divert water to it making it fertile.[239] The scheme is reminiscent of what some

real estate agents did in mid-century Detroit when they sold a house in a white neighborhood to a

black family causing the whole neighborhood to move out and allowing the real estate agent to

collect a neighborhood's worth of commission.[240]

The convoluted plotting of classic noir remains in *Chinatown* but it is the central

metaphor that elevates the film above mere homage. Gittes used to work in *Chinatown* as a

police officer where he was instructed to do "as little as possible" and ended up hurting someone

he was trying to protect. Chinatown is both a metaphor for the chaos and entropy that keep things

out of our control and for past traumas that still affect us. Chinatown lies to the north of

downtown Los Angeles and there is a pull to the area both as way of Gittes confronting his past

and as a centrifugal force pulling away from the urban center. The push out of the urban center

has real world equivalents at the time *Chinatown* premiered. During the 1970s, Los Angeles city

population only increased by just over 400,000 people, miniscule compared to the four million

person increase between 1940 and 1960. In 1940, Los Angeles accounted for 40% of California's

total population whereas it dropped from 35.2% in 1970 to 31.6% in 1980.[241] Dimendberg

offhandedly remarks that *Chinatown* has a nostalgia for the old metropolis of classical

Hollywood, but the city yearned for is gone, ravished by avaricious oligarchs and corrupt

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[239] Naremore, *More than Night*, 207. Towne based this on a real life occurrence of this very issue in Los Angeles around a similar period when the film was set.

[240] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 195.

[241] "20th Century Statistics," accessed December 4th, 2016, https://www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec31.pdf

businessmen.[242] Yet, the nostalgia remains and it makes logical sense that he is pulled from the urban center to Chinatown. Gittes return home of sorts is filled with pain and sorrow as *Chinatown* has a notoriously nihilistic ending. The film ends with the camera pulling back into the sky from the streets showing that the evil was not contained to just Chinatown, but everywhere.

Chinatown is about the pull away from the city central, whereas *Taxi Driver* is all about the decay of the urban city. If classical noirs were purporting the decay of the city during the waning years of modernity then *Taxi Driver* shows that decayed city thirty years later ravaged by crime and pollution. The script for *Taxi Driver* by Paul Schrader, who penned the previously mentioned essay on film noir, was influenced by the ascetic, minimalist films of Robert Bresson films and the existential writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, particularly *Nausea* and *The Stranger* which both feature main characters alienated from modern society.[243] Naremore contends that Taxi Driver is a "deeply conservative" film for its beliefs about sex and guilt and about the "absolute evil of modernity."[244] The latter belief places it firmly in the postmodern camp, as criticism of modernity is inherent in the project of postmodernity. Part of that evil arises from the city and Scorsese shot the city as an inferno. Opening with a taxi rolling through the chthonic city grid, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) comes off the city streets and as he goes into the taxicab station to request a job he walks through smoke as if coming out of hell. The Bickle character is a appalling figure somehow elevated to antihero status in contemporary culture. He

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[242] Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, 257-258.

[243] Paul Kouvaros, *Paul Schrader*, Contemporary Film Directors (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 40.

[244] Naremore, *More than Night*, 35. Naremore writes about the films kinship with modernist works like Eliot's *Waste Land* and Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*. He believes the nighttime portrayal of the city suggests the soul of a Dostoyevsky nightmare. The last connection is particularly apt especially as it pertains to Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* which is not only an ur text for existentialism but features a character so similar to Bickle that they could be from the same genealogy.

speaks of the dirty, fetid avenues filled with vile people. During the first half of the film Bickle, while still trying to charm a middle-class political strategist, finds the future populist presidential candidate in his cab. The candidate asks him what is the one issue that he wants to see dealt with and after some probing Bickle responds that he wants the streets and the city cleaned up. The second half shows an alienated Bickle dumped by his WASP girlfriend and disillusioned with government ability to clean up of the urban space. The film ends with a fit of vigilantism as Bickle busts up a prostitution ring, killing multiple criminals and pimps, to save a teenage prostitute from a life of drugs and sex-for-money.

The city in *Taxi Driver* is presented from the view of a disillusioned madman who inhabits it. We are kept so close to the Bickle character, seeing the city from only his view that the audience begins to believe his misanthropic ranting. *Chinatown*, on the other hand, allows us to gain a bigger picture of what the world is like and while it may not rival *Taxi Driver*, it depicts a grim world indeed. These two films paint a barren picture of what urban centers had become and gives artistic cause to why so many sought the safe harbor of suburbia to the wretched din of urban life. Whether it is a centrifugal force pulling people away from the city or perhaps the decay of the city pushing people to find alternative spaces to inhabit it remains noteworthy that urban decay and exodus was imbedded into the artistic project of these neo-noir films. These two, perhaps the most prominent and certainly most well known of the neo-noir cycle, articulate historical and cultural trends happening concurrently. They help solidify the relationship between postmodern thought, historical fact, and artistic expression by showing a harmony between the three: the postmodern film incorporating postmodern trends of historical fact.

Paranoia and Suspicion in the Age of Postmodernity

The postmodern treatment of paranoia and suspicion, crudely stated, differs from the modern treatment in where the feelings derive from. Cold War annihilation, for example, began in late modernity and remained the cause of paranoia for many people across multiple decades. While the Cold War remained an issue well into postmodernity, the crescendo of Cold War paranoia remained a relic of late modernity, which occurred simultaneously with noir films. The successful Soviet atomic bomb testing in 1949 led to an onslaught of noir films that were tangentially about nuclear paranoia (*Kiss Me Deadly* being the prime example). Paranoia became a key theme in the classical noir cycle either for its association to nuclear annihilation, urban decay, or a femme fatale related demise. The criminals were often foreign and threats came from outside the borders of the United States. The postmodern turn shifted the object of paranoia to the powerful institutions and controlling entities in our life. Neo-noir films followed suit, pivoting the paranoia of individuals and foreigner intrusion to a broad paranoia of governmental corruption and hierarchical chaos. The antagonist became a nebulas corrupt authority that was protected by a hierarchical structure of governmental bureaucracy. The 1970s American audience understood an evil far greater than Peter Lorre's ethnic ambiguity. Paranoia was perhaps the prominent theme in neo-noirs and dealt with in a majority of them. Here, *Chinatown* and *Taxi Driver* serve as examples of this shift as well as *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, *The Parallax View*, and *The Conversation*. Paranoia presents itself in three different ways among these films. First is the hierarchical corruption of powerful entities explored in *Chinatown* and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie.* Second is the translation of paranoia inducing occurrences of Watergate and Vietnam into films like *The Conversation* and *Taxi Driver*, respectively. Lastly,

the shift in where Americans aimed their suspicion from the noir to the neo-noir era is exemplified in comparing the narratives of journalist films from each period.

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie is similar to *Chinatown* in its dealing with Chinese characters as a plot mechanism and a stand in for otherness as it pertains to the main character. The film, directed by John Cassavetes, actor and patron saint of American independent cinema, is different from the other neo-noirs because of its independent, non-studio production. Cassavetes used his money from his acting career to help make singular, auteurist films cheaply, which allowed him to retain control over his work. *Chinese Bookie* revels in its low budget, post-Hays Code milieu. The film focuses on Cosmo (Ben Gazzara), the mid-level owner of strip club who loses big at a card game with high-level gangsters. To pay his debts, the gangsters demand that Cosmo kill a rival Chinese bookie. From there Cosmo has no choice and the rest of the film is about retaining his relationship with the women (and men) who work for him at the club, his surrogate family, while he plummets deeper into the criminal underworld to avoid losing everything. Cosmo's apparent military experience resurfaces as he depicted as a calculated and tactical killer. He dispatches the Chinese bookie only to have the original gangsters come after him. In order for him to keep his "family" intact he has to eradicate the different levels of corrupt power and emerge on the other side unscathed. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* presents the world as one artist saw it. The low budget, hand-held techniques only further the gritty, real world aesthetics. The protagonist as strip club owner begins as pervasive and controversial but ends up being about a middle class business owner trying to provide for his workers and family amidst the chaotic, hierarchical corruption.

The corruption at play in *Chinatown* is well documented and Noah Cross (no one cross) remains a looming figure of rampant power. Gittes learns that it is Cross who is pulling all of the

strings, in fact, other than a few still photos Cross does not appear for the first hour of the film. In that regards he is not unlike Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in the British noir masterstroke, *The Third Man* (1949). As his presence in the film increase, Gittes begins to learn that everything connects back to Cross: he killed Hollis Mulwray, he duped landowners into selling their land cheaply, he diverted water away from the city during a drought, and he had a child with his daughter. Personal atrocities aside, Cross is both in and above the government. He and Hollis Mulwray ran the Department of Water and Power and he has enough bureaucratic sway to have the city incorporate his new land in the valley so it has access to city water. Gittes, once he figures all of this out, asks Cross what could he possibly do with more money, what else could he buy? Cross responds, "The future, Mr. Gittes. The future." Cross is a projection of the American fear of bureaucratic corruption and abuses of power not unlike those committed only a few years prior by Richard Nixon. Gittes, on the other hand, is portrayed as a man with rising class mobility. Stuck between both low and high class clients, he dresses well and enjoys the notoriety he receives but is prone to foul language and crude jokes. This combined with Polanski telling the story only from Gittes perspective (a tactic he borrowed from Raymond Chandler) amounts to a feeling a viewer identification with Nicholson's character which is certainly by design however Gittes (and thus the audience) suffers a fate never bestowed upon a noir protagonist: at the end of the film he is powerless in the face of corruption and uncheck power to restore any moral order.[245]

The second way that neo-noirs reflect the paranoia and suspicion of the era is in their use of real world equivalents. The most obvious example is Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* in its allusions to Watergate, despite the director maintaining that the film had been

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[245] Foster Hirsch, *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 153.

planned long before that occurred.[246] Coppola based the story on Michelangelo Antonioni's art

house sensation *Blow-Up* (1966), which featured a photographer who may have accidently taken

a picture of a murder. *The Conversation* is about Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), an audio

surveillance expert (a profession with growing importance), who may have recorded evidence of

a future crime while listening to the conversation of two secret paramours. Even if due to plain

kismet, the film was as timely as ever, being released in April of 1974, a mere four months

before Nixon's resignation. The film makes allusions to some sort of political malfeasance as

one character brags that his audio surveillance device was used to spy on a presidential

candidate; "twelve years ago I recorded every telephone call made by the presidential nominee of

major political party. . . . I'm not saying I elected the president of the United States but you can

draw your own conclusions Harry, I mean he lost." Even disregarding the real world allusions

the film is about suspicion of the control governmental and corporate entities have in our

personal lives and the suspicion of being under surveillance. *The Conversation* is a neo-noir in

that it is exploring a new avenues of surveillance and private investigating in the way it

incorporates technology of the postmodern era. After Caul records the evidence of a future

crime, at the behest of a powerful businessman, he feels an obligation (likely due to past

traumas) to prevent further atrocities. Caul refuses to give evidence to the businessman he was

hired by in hopes of thwarting retributive actions. Eventually, the recording is taken from him

and he ends up being unable to prevent the crime, albeit in a different manifestation than he

originally thinks. *The Conversation* hits on the fearful note of the omnipotent, ambiguous

corporation asserting in private lives and the climax of the film, which is the climax of 1970s

paranoia and suspicion, finds Caul tearing through his apartment, ripping up floorboards,

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[246] *The Conversation*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1974; Lions Gate, 2010), DVD.

smashing religious tchotchkes and personal items to try to find a surveillance device planted by the corporation that may or may not exist.

Another film that deals with historical events both real and allegorically is *Taxi Driver*. The reality is in the portrayal of an ex-marine following the Vietnam War who is most likely dealing with some sort of post-trauma. The violent nature Travis Bickle develops results in an aborted assassination attempt of a populist presidential candidate and the killing of a pimp and his associates. The film is drenched in a post-Vietnam war milieu with both candidates for president appealing to the fragmented nature of the public; the populist Charles Palatine has the slogan "We Are The People" while his opponent, Goodwin, has the slogan, glimpsed only in the background, "A Return to Greatness." While these constitute the tangible aspects, the allusions in the text are noted by philosopher Slavoj Žižek and occur in the relationship between Bickle and the teenage prostitute named Iris (Jodie Foster). Bickle forces his way into her life in a nonsexual capacity and aims at rescuing her from her situation despite her constant plea that she does not want to be rescued. Žižek posits that this mimics the United States entanglement in Vietnam and the ensuing Vietnam War insomuch as it is a parable about helping someone who does not really want our help – a metaphor for U.S. foreign intervention.[247] The film ends after Bickle finds an effective outlet for his societal rage in the eradication of lowlifes resulting in his exultation as a hero.[248] *Taxi Driver* presents a man suspicious of society and the American dream and his disbelief in amelioration through political action results in him taking action for himself.

The final evidence of a shift in paranoia and suspicion in the age of postmodernity is the transition in meaning and themes in noir films about journalism. Classical journalist noirs

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[247] *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes (2012; Zeitgeist Films, 2014), DVD.

[248] There is an argument to be made whether he survives his wounds during the shootout. The film's coda may be all a projection of his inner desires either from his hospital bed or the afterlife.

include *Ace in the Hole* (1951), the Bogart staring *Deadline USA* (1952), *Park Row* (1952), and *Two Men in Manhattan* (1959). *Ace in the Hole*, directed by Billy Wilder and staring Kirk Douglas, is about a smarmy, alcoholic reporter kicked out of his high profile job in New York and relocated to a small paper in New Mexico. Shortly after a man is trapped in a local cave and picking up the story Douglas' Chuck Tatum manipulates the townspeople into keeping the man stuck in the cave so he can create a media circus around the event, restore his name, and reacquire his job in New York. Tatum looses control of the spectacle he creates and Wilder uses the film to explore careerism and ethics of journalism. *Deadline USA*, is perhaps the most forward thinking of the newspaper noirs as it has a corrupt businessman embroiled in politics as its antagonist. He is trying to cover up a wrongdoing that is being reported on by *The Day*, a newspaper about to be bought and shut down, currently ran by Humphrey Bogart's Ed Hutcheson. While it does explore the corrupt businessman it does so in a plot driven way and does not explore the larger cultural significance of this figure. The criminal, Tomas Reinzi, is treated like an Al Capone character and ultimately the movie is about the need for pure and honest newspapers. In a similar vein, *Park Row*, written and directed by Samuel Fuller and drawing from his time as a newspaperman, is about a group of men who start a small oppositional paper to the large, disreputable paper they used to work for. Fuller's film is about maintaining allegiance to the truth and what it means to be do good journalism. Finally, *Two Men in Manhattan* presents an interesting case as it sits firmly in a void between periods, its feet in multiple camps. It is written, directed and starred in by famed French director, Jean-Pierre Melville who was a major influence on the French New Wave, yet it is set and filmed in New York City. It works well as a fulcrum between classical noirs, French New Wave, and the beginnings of neo-noir. The film begins to display the shift in focus of journalism noirs as a

reporter and a photographer search for a missing French diplomat. It begins to analyze the corruption of politicians, albeit only in their private lives, but eventually transitions into a critique of journalistic ethics. Overall, the suspicion and paranoia in the journalist noir films from the classical era are aimed at the journalists themselves. The concern of the audience rested on the laurels of the journalists in the film. Are journalists just out for themselves or are they helping the public in finding the truth?

The suspicion and paranoia the audience is supposed to feel completely shifts in the neo-noir cycle. The ethical actions of the journalist or a publication are no longer in focus. It is the journalist in the neo-noir era that is elevated to a quasi-private detective as they search for truth in a rapidly immoral world. What they are often searching for is governmental, bureaucratic, and corporate abuses of power and the journalist at the center follows his/her own paranoia and suspicion to rooting out corruption and chicanery. Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* offers the best example of this shift. Warren Beatty plays a reporter who is trying to uncover the truth behind an assassination of a senator in a film that draws both from Watergate and JFK's assassination. In the film, Beatty's Joe Frady character learns that an ambiguous Parallax Corporation is killing off anyone that could potentially trace the senator's assassination back to them. Frady gets closer and closer to discovering the truth and further into the lion's den before the Parallax Corporation takes extreme measures to both discredit and silence him. Another Pakula film, although not considered a neo-noir but is a part of his aptly named "paranoia trilogy" along with *The Parallax View* and *Klute* (1971), is *All the President's Men* (1976) about Woodward and Bernstein's investigation into the Watergate scandal. The journalist neo-noir film adroitly shows the shift in the object of paranoia, Americans were no longer as worried about the journalists who gave them the news but, on the heals of the misinformation given to the public

on the Vietnam War and the Watergate spectacle, it was the subterfuge of corporations and governmental agencies that caused postmodern anxiety.

Selfhood and the Neo-Noir Protagonist

Art, especially a medium as popular as film, is one of the best ways to explore historical fragmentation of the self, which typically is a difficult topic to pursue through traditional historical channels. The overarching argument to be made is that the vicissitudes and self-disassociation felt by the protagonists, often the audience's surrogate, is the auteur's statement of what it was like to live at that time. The primary way that neo-noirs manifest self-fracture is their self-consciousness. They are concerned about their own history and commenting on their noir predecessors in the way they reapply and disregard noir themes and tropes. On a macrocosmic level, neo-noir's relationship to noir functions in a similar way as postmodernism does to modernism: it grows out of and is critical of its predecessor. Which is all to say that the self-fractured protagonists in neo-noirs are contrasted with the classic noir heroes. It is an act of shortsightedness to believe that only neo-noir characters represent inner uncertainty, as noir protagonists are known for tortured and existential personas. However, noir characters usually restored some sort of order in their world and the needle in their moral compass rarely wavers from true north. The neo-noir character, as it will be shown, is set adrift in an immoral and contradictory world much to the detriment of their personal psyche. Two films, Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, illustrate a noir self-consciousness that places its heft on the protagonist's inner balance. In both films the characters actions are in relation to how the same character would act thirty years prior showing just how much has changed with the coming of postmodernity.

Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*, while not as well known as *Taxi Driver* or *Chinatown*, is perhaps the most American of the 1970s neo-noirs. It stars Gene Hackman as Harry Moseby, a retired NFL football player turned private investigator. A past-her-prime starlet hires Moseby to track down her 16 year old stepdaughter who has run away. The starlet, named Arlene Iverson, can only have access to her daughter's trust fund when she is living with her. This sends Moseby on a transnational search from Los Angeles to a film set in New Mexico down to the Florida Keys and back again. The film hits traditional noir beats with femme fatales and character machinations. The ingenuity of *Night Moves* comes in the treatment of Hackman's character and his dissolving relationship with his wife who he discovers is having an affair. The film contains an extended scene of the two arguing early in the film that is extremely foreign to the noir genre and feels closer to a melodrama. When Moseby does return the stepdaughter (who was living in Florida with her stepfather) to her mother he closes the case so he can work on his marriage with his wife despite continued unease. The girl turns up dead shortly after, killed during some stunt work on a film set in New Mexico. Moseby investigates the footage of her death to look for foul play, which echoes the Zapruder film and America's penchant for thanatological films. By adding in such a complex relationship into the film it becomes more about the Moseby character than the mystery he is trying to solve and the pull between work and his personal life threatens to undue him. His wife wants him to drop his P.I. firm because she feels neglected and he believes the teenage girl died because he had to attend to his personal life. Divorce became a prominent theme in American films in the 1970s likely as a reflection of the divorce rate doubling from 1965 to 1975 and the creation of no-fault divorce laws.[249] Usually divorce was the sole subject broached by a film (*Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), for example), but Moseby begins to fracture feeling the pull between the job and personal life. Putnam, in *Bowling Alone*, remarks upon the

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[249] Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 294.

effect of divorce on the familial unit, civic engagement, and religious commitment. It quite

obviously has harmful effects on social capital.[250] Noirs often portray tumultuous relationships

between the protagonist and the femme fatale character, but *Night Moves* rewrites the private

investigator as being in a struggling marriage with a woman who is not involved in the central

mystery (although Moseby is tempted by other women) and the conflict between personal and

public life lies at the center of the character, the film, and American life in postmodernity.

The Long Goodbye, directed by the iconoclast Robert Altman and written by Leigh

Brackett (who co-wrote *The Big Sleep*), is the neo-noir most concerned with its noir past.

Whereas *Chinatown* treats noir with reverence, *The Long Goodbye* uses noir as a playground,

thumbing its nose up at its sacredness. Adapted from Chandler's novel of the same name,

Brackett updated the setting to contemporary Los Angeles replete with communes, yoga, and an

aversion to smoking cigarettes by everyone except Marlowe (Elliot Gould, an inspired against-

type casting choice) who uses every surface available for his strike-anywhere matches. The film

starts with Marlowe helping his friend Terry Lennox escape to Tijuana. After Marlowe is picked

up by the police and questioned about abetting a man wanted for murdering his wife he is hired

by Eileen Wade to find her alcoholic, Hemingway-esque novelist husband, Roger Wade. Altman

balances the film with comic touches and abrupt violence, pithy rejoinders and deep

conversations. It is filled with allusions to Hollywood. It opens with a shot on a wooden

engraving of Hollywood and features a security guard that impersonates famous Hollywood

actors. Early in the film Terry Lennox is reported dead much to Marlowe's chagrin. As Marlowe

continues to spend time with Roger and Eileen he sees a connection to Terry Lennox and his

murdered wife who lived down the street from the Wades. Marlowe discovers that Roger had an

affair with Terry's wife, which Terry reacted to with a burst of rage that ended with her death. It

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[250] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 277-279.

is suggested that Eileen and Terry were also having an affair. By the end of the film Marlowe knows Lennox is still alive. He visits him in Tijuana and in a move that Bogart's Marlowe never would have done, shoots and kills his friend Lennox after being provoked. Leaving the scene he passes Eileen on her way to be with Lennox and the film closes with a jubilated Marlowe walking down the street without a care in the world.

The Long Goodbye, with its sun-kissed hues and layered sound design, looks and sounds nothing like a noir film but its source material and plotting (until the last scene which was rewritten from Chandler's novel) is quintessential noir. It is a film full of contradictions. James Naremore writes about his concerns about the films overall message and questions what Altman is trying to satirize: is it dangerous masculinity, Los Angeles culture, or Raymond Chandler books? The American public was unsure of what to make of the film at the time of its release and, due to an ad campaign that promoted it as a thriller, did poorly at the box office.[251] The legacy of the film should lie in those contradictions. It is a film that captures the fractured ontology of the era and pull between two disparate forces. The New Age, Jewish Marlowe is contrasted with the classic Marlowe and his actions are updated accordingly. The film contains classical noir flourishes (adultery, inane policemen, seedy gangsters) while keeping a cold distance from the overall rhythms of noir (the opening section is all about Marlowe going to buy food for his cat). Ultimately, the film is the crucial postmodern film reflecting the pull between past and present, noir and neo-noir, modern and postmodern. Altman honed in at the fractured psyche so many Americans felt by focusing on the sundry contradictions inherent in society and leaving the film's overall message ambiguous.

The end of the 1970s brought the end of the New Hollywood era. Big blockbusters began to grow in spectacle and Michael Cimino's financial disaster *Heaven's Gate* (1980) all but ended

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[251] Naremore, *More Than Night*, 203-205.

the auteurist led studio film. Neo-noirs, like postmodernity, continued past the 1970s. The two, as it has been shown, are intertwined. The advent of neo-noirs reified a postmodernity society with its dialogue between past and present much the way postmodernity functioned as a critique of modernity. Neo-noirs echoed a postmodern space and time compression through centrifugal forces pulling characters outside the urban center much like the real exodus of citizens migrating from city to suburbs occurring in the same time period. Thematically, neo-noirs offer a direct line to a new form of American paranoia and suspicion in a Watergate era whether it was through the technological surveillance or a feeling of being abandoned by a government that ceases to care for the public's concerns. Perhaps this is best exemplified by the shift of classic journalism noirs that focused on newspaper ethics and ambition to the neo-noir journalist who plans to expose a grand conspiracy machinated by a large corporation or government. Amidst this paranoia and space-time compression is a self-fracture felt by the public and best exemplified in cinema. Again, much like in section II, I have not heavily discussed the fourth key takeaway from postmodernity: incredulity towards narratives of amelioration. However, that belief is more apparent than ever in the cinema of the 1970s especially in *Chinatown*, which originally had a happier ending until Polanski rewrote it, *The Parallax View*'s defeatist attitude towards corporate power, the pervading surveillance in *The Conversation*, the Brechtian nihilism of *The Long Goodbye*, and the false sense of hope in *Taxi Driver*. If major artistic movements usually come out of cultural traumas or shifts then the New Hollywood era, rival only to the noir period for America's greatest contribution to world cinema, is related to the postmodern turn. It grounds the abstract shifts in the cultural at large as people continually went to see these art films in theaters throughout the country. It was a postmodern society watching itself.

EPILOGUE

The idea of America watching itself comes from André Bazin. His essay, "*La Politque des Auteurs*,"[252] written in the late 1950s, while ruminating on the idea of the auteur theory probes into the genius of American studio films. Bazin writes, "The American cinema has been able, in an extraordinarily competent way, to show American society just as it wanted to see itself; but not at all passively, as a simple act of satisfaction and escape, but dynamically, i.e. by participating with the means at its disposal in the building of that society."[253] Perhaps that is the best summation of the importance of American film. The Hollywood system, not unlike architecture, is both popular and industrial. Its ability to continually be spontaneous, often stemming from the artists who create it, even within the confines of capitalism allows it to be such a wieldy societal and historical yardstick.[254] Using that measuring device, the starting point of this project is that the apogee of American studio filmmaking in the 1970s aligns with the start of postmodernity. Everything thereafter is an attempt at understanding that relationship. The films of the 1970s, following Bazin's mode of thinking, not only reflect the postmodern society as it was but were instrumental "in the building of that society."

One of the fundamental purposes of this project is to rescue both postmodernism and film-as-historical-artifact from what I see as a misreading by historians. The misreading of each occurs in opposite directions. Often postmodernity is used by historians as a grand structure in which to rationalize specific societal trends or behaviors. Its inclusion is usually tacked onto the end of a chapter or placed in the introduction. For most, postmodernity constitutes some nebulas

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[252] André Bazin, "On the Politique Des Auteurs," in *Cahiers Du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. James Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

[253] Bazin, "On the Politique Des Auteurs," 251.

[254] Ibid., 251.

abstraction that can come down from on high and be tied around a cultural trend like a bow. It wraps around it but is never mixed with the contents within. Others see it as a pejorative that is shorthand for the sort of byzantine, self-serious meta-referential works of the era. Throughout this paper I have displayed the various ways it augmented cultural trends and is inextricable from the historical period. The shift in thought from modernism to postmodernism brought about a shift everywhere else and it did not occur separate from society but came from within society itself. The only logical way to write about postmodernism is to understand it concretely rather than allowing it to remain in the abstract. Much like Bazin's understanding of American cinema, postmodernism is not happening passively but it is a reflection of the society-at-large and responsible for the building of that society. Historians, on the other hand, often treat cinema as the cultural dustbin in which they can sweep loose scraps of historical themes and loose ends into. It is a quick way to summarize a point when a prominent film incorporates prominent historical trends. Of course, I am guilty of this as well and besides, using a popular medium like film as historical evidence is much to the good. But, by linking film equally with cultural trends and popular thought it is allowed to function as more than a shortcut to unite historical themes. The films that function now as signifiers of a postmodern society acted, upon their creation, as enzymes supplementing the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Film acts as one of many ways towards an understanding of historical postmodernism. In theory, one could look at architecture or literature or rhetoric and trace its connection to the postmodern shift. Film, however, due to its popularity at the time of the turn, is the best way into understanding postmodernity. It works from above and below, collecting the societal scraps and forming them into an artistic statement that both explains and propagates postmodernity. Following Bazin's thinking: it is a postmodern society projecting just how it wants to see itself and more than its

aesthetic flourishes or critical adulation that should be the legacy of the neo-noir films made in a fully operational postmodern society.

If that is the legacy of neo-noir films then the legacy of postmodernity is more complex. Part of this project has been to rescue postmodernity from the scorn and vitriol it receives coming from many directions. Another goal is to develop a deeper understanding of how postmodernity is connected to concrete historical occurrences and trends. But what is the goal of postmodernity itself? The obvious answer is that it seeks to correct the wrongs of modernity: elitism, singular voices of power, improper use of science and technology, and in worst cases, fascism. Most of the accomplishments of postmodernity are through the negation of those maladies insomuch as the postmodern society is attuned to rooting out these evils through elevated levels of corporate and bureaucratic suspicion and a general allergy towards false narratives of betterment. Postmodernity's primary successes are in negation but it often fails to offer the world much else, giving rise to the contempt it receives. Its primary byproduct is uncertainty and if societal trends, even if they are harmful, are reverted back to nothing then what are we left with? Certainly it is easier to live in a state of knowingness than unknowingness, uncertainty, and mystery. In fact, one could attribute recent political trends in America to a relapse back to a modernistic idea of power and government. Living in the uncertain times of postmodernity is fraught with anxiety, paranoia, and self-fracture. One need only think of J.J. Gittes at the end of *Chinatown*, paralyzed by shock and unable to act as the camera pulls back from the horrors of the Chinatown streets revealing how small this is in the scope of the world. Yet, there is something positive, even optimistic about that ending. Much in the way that Horkheimer and Adorno's book, about the fascism and the terrors of the epoch, ends with a hope of being able to break through the false dialectic of enlightenment just by being aware of its

existence. In breaking down the barriers of enlightenment and modernity we are left limitless, which produces uncertainty and dread, but that limitless is overwhelmingly liberating. And that is to be the legacy of postmodernity: the liberation from harmful and oppressive forces. Following the path Horkheimer and Adorno, the public must steel themselves against the pernicious elements of modernity and seek refuge in the logic of postmodernity. It takes knowledge and understanding to reside in the uncertainty of postmodernity. There is no better place for that education to begin than at the cinema.

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