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Gang Wars

Warner Brothers' The Roaring Twenties *Stars, News, and the New Deal*

Paula Rabinowitz

Twenties into Thirties

Late in *The Death of Cinema*, Paolo Cherchi Usai asks: ''Why do humans want to see things again?'' His partial answer might serve as the starting point for any discussion of Hollywood history and its gang wars between stars and studios, often staged in the dynamic interface of New Deal politics and popular narratives; one such example is Warner Brothers' 1939 *The Roaring Twenties*. This film, which follows three World War I veterans into the underworld of crime during the years of Prohibition and Depression, codifies the studio system investment in genre films and their ability to allow us to ''see things again.'' It serves as a case study for my investigation of Hollywood's rendering of history (its own and the nation's) as palimpsest, as allegory, as ''a memory'' – in the words of Mark Hellinger, who wrote the film's original ''photoplay.''

Cherchi Usai posits the existential dilemma we face as subjects in/of history:

> Experience teaches us that loss of memory is as inevitable as anxiety for the future. In the hopes of avoiding both, the maker of moving images fabricates memories or visions of what is to come in the cherished belief that they will exist forever in an eternal present of the spectator's will. (Cherchi Usai 2001: 35)

A film archivist, his manifesto returns to the futility of recording images in the present for future eyes: ''Another catalyst – realising that one has failed to see or was noticing the wrong things the first time – may sometimes appear after a further viewing has taken place for spectators endowed with the faculty of introspection.'' This movement toward interiority is a gesture grounded in the dance between repetition and disappearance – or, in the final words of Cherchi Usai's book, ''an understanding of film history as a cultural artifact'' (2001: 131).

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It motivates the film preservationist; indeed, it drives film studies, because, as he notes, ''[t]he ultimate goal of film history is an account of its own disappearance.''

Cherchi Usai's phenomenological approach to film history insists on reminding us that film is always a partial, incomplete record. Beside the camera missing what lies outside the frame or between frames, the frame itself is imbued with gaps: we blink, we fall asleep, we kiss, the projector jams or flickers, destroying a few frames; in short, at any moment, audiences – individually and collectively – miss something. And digitization only compounds the problem: form can never be fully realized as information. Moreover, every film made in Hollywood's studios began before its actual filming – it was a novel, a story, a script, a sketch, a treatment, an adaptation, a storyboard; it was text and perhaps drawing first.

In this era of continuous remediation and format migration, it's worth having a look at earlier forms of film history – especially those that, as Jennifer Smyth notes, ''reconstruct America'' through historiographic cinema – by attending not only to the artifact of the moving image, but to the writing that goes into and surrounds a movie as well. During the 1930s – Hollywood's golden age – the eruption of history in costumes, plots, settings, and so forth was matched by a sense of the lost past of the medium – only a few years gone – as sound had apparently consigned its visual and kinetic origins to the dustbin; ''He used to be a big shot'' – Panama Smith's comment about Eddie Bartlett, James Cagney's over-the-hill gangster bleeding to death on snow-covered steps, might serve as a prescient epitaph for the industry despite the various big shots Hollywood would produce in that banner year, 1939. *The Roaring Twenties* serves as a recording angel of this self-referential cinematic historiography.

Newspaperman Mark Hellinger wrote the original stories upon which screenwriters Jerry Wald, Richard Macaulay, and Robert Rossen based the script for Warner Brothers' 1939 film *The Roaring Twenties*. The film, which follows the rise and inevitable decline of bootlegger Eddie Bartlett (James Cagney), calls attention to its origins as a written work in a number of ways. Its trailer actually focuses on Mark Hellinger – who is seen and heard describing his memories of the 1920s during his years covering Broadway as a columnist for the *New York Mirror* – more than on the film itself. The movie begins with references to film's debt to the burlesque stage and its connections to Broadway, both through the use of the marquee motif in the credits, which mimics the ubiquitous use of Broadway and movie theater lights illuminating stage and screen stars in many of the decade's movies, and in the long prologue text scrolling by, in which Hellinger reminds us that this is a memory work, shrouded in nostalgia and based on composites of people he really knew (and, by implication, wrote about) (see Figure 13.1).

Thinking, in the context of 1939, about the 1920s and the ways Americans forget history, Hellinger writes in the screen crawl: ''I pray that events, as dramatized here, will be remembered [. . .] [as they] actually occurred. Bitter or sweet, most memories become precious as the years move on. This film is a memory – and I am grateful for it.'' Over the credits, a musical medley plays themes from ''I'm

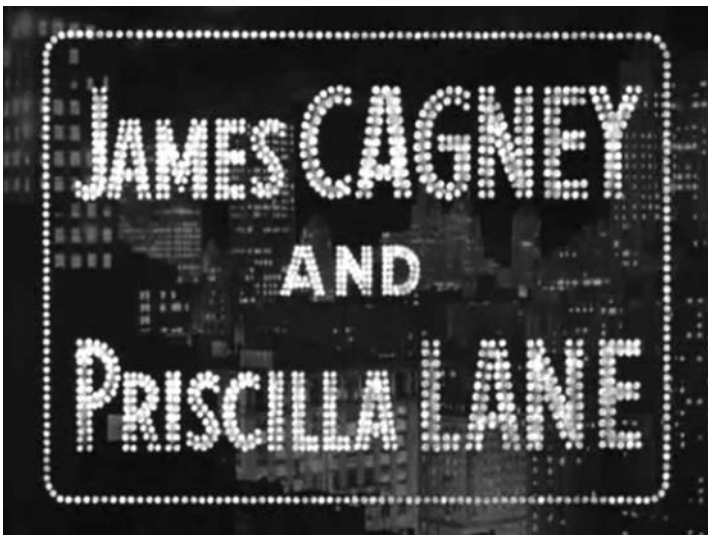

Figure 13.1 Hollywood stars' names in lights superimposed on a stylized New York skyline. Screen capture: *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

Just Wild About Harry,'' scored by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle for the 1921 Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*, and from ''My Melancholy Baby,'' a song first performed by William Frawley in 1912, which became a hit during World War I. Both songs, along with others that were popular during the Jazz Age – for instance ''If I Could Be With You'' and ''Dancing with Tears in My Eyes,'' both recorded in 1930 by torch singer Ruth Etting – dripped with the collective nostalgia generated by popular culture and dispersed via mass media – film, radio, magazines – and were sung intermittently throughout the film by the two female performers who propel the romantic melodrama (see Figure 13.2).

In fact, almost a decade before, Hellinger had published a collection of extremely short elegiac essays, gleaned from his columns, that focused on the lowlife and underside of Prohibition-era New York (which were especially centered on Broadway). *Moon over Broadway* follows a day in the life of the Great White Way, peering into the lives of its denizens, some who have made it, most who have not. A linked story collection, it begins in a baggage car of the ''State of Maine Express'' carting two caskets from New York City back home to rural Maine, and concludes by reversing direction as it follows a young woman from country to city. This final allegory of ''True Love'' features a ''Tabloid Newspaper'' tale of a beautiful innocent girl who ends up performing in a New York burlesque (Hellinger 1971: 312). In the longest sketch, ''Characters of Broadway,'' which fills the book's middle, readers are offered a series of portraits to ''consider''; these include ''Jack'' the racketeer, who won't cross the street in the rain without his rubbers, ''Mildred,

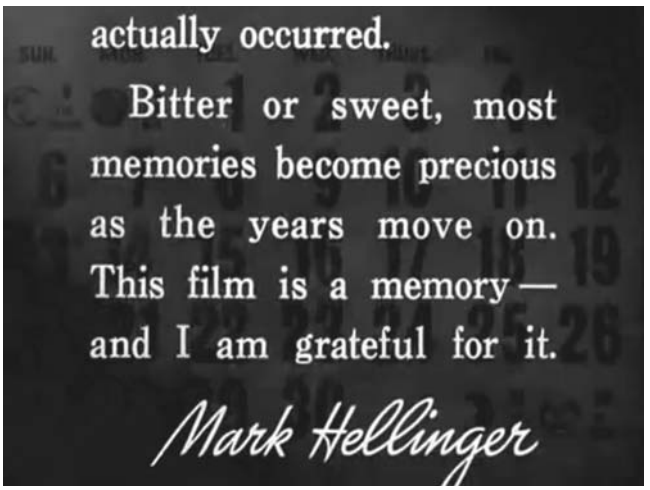

Figure 13.2 Mark Hellinger's prologue superimposed over a calendar. *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

the cigarette girl at the Guinan Club,'' who poses as both a society woman and a chorus girl, and myriad violinists and singers and press agents and reporters and minor movie stars and gangsters of various ethnicities and races – all now mostly washed up, all who've ''brought back memories'' that cannot be fully expressed (272). Broadway is just the sort of ''mixed'' urban zone, Sean McCann notes, in which hard-boiled detective writers situated their stories in order to achieve an ''intimate cosmopolitanism'' (McCann 2000: 68). Hellinger's sketches, barely a cut above in-the-know gossip column, tabloid prose, and hard-boiled pulp, possess a sly self-awareness and are already suffused with nostalgia.

Collected in 1931, before Prohibition's repeal would doom this New York underworld, the stories are a eulogy to the end of an era quickly disappearing as the Depression was taking its toll, and Hellinger, like so many denizens of Broadway (including Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney), moved west to Hollywood – to Warner Brothers specifically – for work and money. This migration, connected as it was to the arrival of sound and the need for vocally trained actors and skillful writers, also meant that the ''new genres reflected the urban roots of filmmakers'' (Giovacchini 2001: 51). Like many gangster films, *The Roaring Twenties* begins before its gangland heroes enter the world of crime; however, instead of a prelude in the city slums, it chooses the trenches of Europe. Three doughboys land in a foxhole and share a cigarette (and a match), each revealing something about himself in their introductory banter, as bombs explode overhead.

The sequence follows the long prologue designed to mimic, in another intertextual reference, a *March of Time* newsreel, and it introduces the three protagonists in a precise order. George Hally (Humphrey Bogart), sitting in the mud, smokes.

Figure 13.3 Cagney and Bogart face off in the foxhole. *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

His precious cigarette is knocked from his mouth by Eddie Bartlett (James Cagney), who rolls on top of him (see Figure 13.3). When Cagney offers to share one of his cork-tipped smokes with Bogart, Lloyd Hart (Jeffrey Lynn) tumbles onto the two, hurtling the pack across the trench as a bomb explodes. Bogart berates Lynn, who "just finished law school," for not "having heart," as he's terrified by the firefight; while Cagney, who "don't like heroes or big mouths," mediates between them: "We're all scared, who wouldn't be? What do you think we're using in this war, water pistols?" This triangulation will continue in both crime and romance, until the end. The three men – George, a saloon keeper; Eddie, a grease monkey; and Lloyd, who plans to open his office on the 28th floor of the Woolworth Building – soon find themselves together in a bunker, awaiting armistice (see Figure 13.4). While the three mull over their future plans, Lynn takes aim at a "Heinie," but he can't shoot a kid of 15. Bogart shoots instead: "He won't be 16," he sneers as the news arrives: The war is over.

The film follows the vets' postwar destinies. Back stateside, no one can find work; Prohibition shuts Bogart's saloon, so, when Cagney gets a job driving a cab, it becomes the means to build a fleet of trucks to transport bootleg to a string of speakeasies. Lynn, without clients, goes in with Cagney and takes care of the business. But his gangster career takes a turn as he eventually falls for Jean Sherman (Priscilla Lane) – Cagney's girl, a nightclub singer – marries her, and gets a job in the DA's office, bent on ridding the city of crime.

The wartime scene is actually the film's fourth opening gesture, overdetermining the role of the prologue within the gangster genre. We first see the credits:

Figure 13.4 Three on a match. *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

illuminated marquee lights superimposed on a nightscape of New York; then, a textual preface concludes with Mark Hellinger's signature; finally, a newsreel montage, beginning with the spinning globe superimposed on a calendar that is a backdrop for the White House later overlaid with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's profile, covered by the year 1940, which finally merges into a huge question mark.

The prologues hint not only to narrative cinema's historicizing practices, but also to a certain way of doing it that is indebted to the tabloid press. Released in 1939, the film asks its audience to speculate on the future as history, by presenting the globe's reverse orbit and the calendar dates as they unravel to mark the crisis years of the mid-century: 1938, Adolf Hitler, and a headline blazing ''Czechoslovakia''; 1935, Benito Mussolini; 1929, Herbert Hoover; and back to 1924's headline ''Prosperity'' until Woodrow Wilson and 1918. These visuals are matched sonically by the voice-over narration tracking the ''newsreel'' montage.

First appearing in the pages of sensational newspapers in the 1920s, Hellinger's sketches were remediated in book form in the early 1930s. At the decade's end, they became the basis for a movie script that, more than 20 years later and almost 40 years after the events narrated, also generated a television series. This journey from newsprint to book to celluloid and then to television follows the same path much pulp detective fiction would – from pulps to novels to screen to television, with stops along the way, occasionally as cartoons, comics, or, more recently, video games: for instance the 1932 Warner Brothers ''social segment film,'' as Harry Alan Potamkin called it, *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, whose script was based on the *True Detective Mysteries* account by Robert Elliot Burns of his real-life

experiences as an escaped convict (quoted in Giovacchini 2001: 60). Hellinger's book is itself a history of a moment captured by a journalist (''Journalism is the first rough draft of history,'' goes the saying attributed to Philip Graham of *The Washington Post* in a 1940s editorial).

In the book's epilogue – the allegorical tale of ''True Love'' – Hellinger abjures describing the causes of a wife's infidelity and suggests that readers ask any number of others – such as Ben Hecht (newspaperman-turned-screenwriter for *Underworld* and *Scarface*) – for an explanation. Contemporary readers would be fully aware of the self-referential character of this gesture; there was, at the time, a limited number of reporters, short-story writers, and screenwriters working the crime beat, so Hellinger is placing himself amid this select gang, which included Hecht and W. R. Burnett. *Scarface* was co-scripted by W. R. Burnett, who is credited with penning the first gangster novel in the United States (*Little Caesar*), which, in turn, solidified Warner Brothers as the kings of the genre. Written in 1929 and quickly adapted for the screen in 1930 after the success of *Doorway to Hell*, *Little Caesar* established Warner Brothers' rise-and-fall plotline formula throughout the early 1930s – what Potamkin called ''the personality film'' (quoted in Giovacchini 2001: 60). By the decade's end, the novel had been reprinted as a 25-cent paperback edition by Modern Age Books, which specialized in ''printing books in editions of thirty to a hundred thousand copies [. . .] These low-priced books carry the imprint of the 'Three Seals' [. . .].''[1]

Lyric, Baroque, Gangster

The internecine connections among Warner Brothers' gangster films, the novels and sketches upon which they were based, and the writers who worked on the original newspaper stories, their fictional and animated adaptations, and later scripts open many avenues to understanding the interlocking immersive matrix of the 1930s' gangster film, stars, and documentary. Film historian Jennifer Smyth suggests that these films – a species of biopic (or better, anti-biopic) – were part of Hollywood's historiographic project in the 1930s, when Warner Brothers also turned to heroic images of European intellectuals – *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936) or *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), both starring Paul Muni – and revolutionaries – *Juarez* (1939) – to shore up its credentials as a maker of a serious art form. Thus *The Roaring Twenties* was akin to *Young Mr. Lincoln* (Fox), or even to *Gone with the Wind* (MGM) – a film made in the shadow of that studio's innovation: color (*The Wizard of Oz*, MGM) – all released in 1939. Not only is *The Roaring Twenties* structured as a reminder of its origins in print, it also recalls Warner Brothers' history as *the* gangster film studio. For emphasis, *The Roaring Twenties* repeats the opening sequence of an earlier Warner Brothers' underworld film from the latter half of the decade, one that features Ur-gangster Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart: *Bullets or Ballots* (1936). The opening sequences of gangster

films, understood as a species of history film in which the present is viewed historically, are especially significant for the genre; in part (usually through textual apology), they serve to justify the subsequent violence forestalling censorship, but they also point to the thrills that only moving pictures could produce as they plunge the spectator into the gangsters' everyday street life – chasing girls, reading newspapers, watching movies. *Bullets or Ballots* begins with two fedora-wearing men buying tickets from the kiosk outside a movie theater and asking if the crime picture has started yet. Once they/we are inside, the crime picture turns out to be a newsreel documenting the crime spree that these men's gang has unleashed upon the city as racketeers extort local businesses. Their reign of urban terror explodes across a series of newspaper headlines that detail their violent exploits. Satisfied, yet annoyed by their notoriety (much as Rico Bandello had been when he read the newspaper accounts of his exploits and fumed at his new moniker "Little Caesar" – "he arranged the clippings in a neat pile, then read them over and over": Burnett 1938: 35), the men noisily exit the theater. Bogart vows revenge on the newspaper editor, setting the plot in motion. Here as elsewhere, the newspaper and the newsreel fulfill the crime film's commitment to participate in the documentary project "to report to the nation."[2] Hence news reports within gangster films work allegorically, to reveal how the press, the pulps, and newsreels feed the genre even as the genre feeds these forms.

In effect, the 1930s gangster film, understood as allegory, was already a nostalgic, even a melancholic form; its cinematic conventions dated to D. W. Griffith's 1912 *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (which borrowed visually, for its location shots, from Jacob Riis's 1890 documentary phototext *How the Other Half Lives*), and its literary antecedents were much older still (see under: snakes and women, two brothers, etc.). The gangsters' criminality and the locations in which it occurs suggest that the anarchic violence – either of individual passion or of mob chaos – can be contained within hierarchal groups and cordoned off spaces. Gangsters are organized outside of legitimate order, and their unruliness becomes a mechanism used by authority to control political forces that might usurp power. Gangs threaten the social order; but they also maintain it, both through law enforcement and through exposure, because they themselves rely on a sentimental attachment to neighborhood and family. Their stories are always in effect a return to melodrama.[3]

Sigmund Freud defines melancholia, an extreme form of mourning (*Trauer*), as "an object-loss [a loved person, or . . . one's country, liberty, an ideal] which is withdrawn from consciousness [. . .] The melancholic displays [. . .] an extraordinary diminution of his self-regard . . . [and] extends his self-criticism back over the past" (Freud 1957: 245–246). A response to ambivalence, this is ultimately a narcissistic, even sadistic state, which may be the result of repressed "traumatic experiences." As such, it is a malady of historical "impression," perfectly suited to modern capitalist culture (257, 254). The melancholic's self-abnegation lends itself to melodrama – "O Woe is Me" – as it stages an allegorical tale of loss by substituting the damaged self for the destroyed ideal. "On the melancholic's Via

Dolorosa, allegories are the stations'' (Benjamin 2003: 167). Walter Benjamin, that most melancholic philosopher of history, explains in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Trauerspiel*) that allegory is characterized by ''awkward heavy-handedness'' (Benjamin 1998: 187), which is everywhere concerned with resuscitating the dead and its always partial remains – ''the highly significant fragment, the remnant'' (178). He goes on: ''Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things'' (ibid.). They speak of history as if it were nature: implacable, inevitable, and recurrent. ''Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life. It is not only in the loss of limbs, elimination and purification that everything corpse-like falls away from the body piece by piece [. . .] There is in the physis, in the memory itself, a *memento mori*'' – he notes of the grotesque, ''corpse-poetry'' of Daniel Caspars von Lohenstein (218).

Obviously Benjamin is describing seventeenth-century baroque drama and not Warner Brothers' gangster films. The entire field of the American gangster – and much of the 1930s' mass culture – includes, however, according to William Solomon (2002), many instances of this melancholy grotesque. Depression-era popular culture might be considered as an updated form of baroque allegory – of the driven nature of the ''Little Caesar'' toward death, of the excess of capitalism, of the power of the city replacing nature as a palimpsest for venal desire and greed, of crime as a form of social organization. As Nick Roddick points out: ''Crime stories are twentieth-century realistic drama at its most conventional [. . .] The idea of giving a dramatic focus to fairly ordinary problems – poverty, unemployment, sexual inadequacy, alienation, ambition, greed – by making them criminal motives is very much a product of modern industrial society'' (Roddick 1983: 77). But during the 1930s, proletarian novelists, many of whom, like those reporting on and dramatizing the gangster, described urban ghettoes and rural poverty in an effort at social amelioration, nevertheless produced spectacles that went beyond the dramatic; they indulged, sado-masochistically, in a ''bitter corpse-lust [. . .] the dismembered cadaver of the stricken masses; the 'converted' author can now at will dissever a head, a finger, a leg'' – according to Edward Dahlberg (1960: 60), whose novel *Bottom Dogs* captured the essence of the Depression-era proletarian grotesque. Like the sadism of the gangster genre, 1930s' leftist literary radicalism, also indebted to a documentary impulse toward exposing the capitalist system, returned to the generic conventions of the corpse-poetry of the baroque and updated it for the purposes of the class struggle.

Benjamin makes use of the figure of Baudelaire, the poet of the modern city, to explain why the representations of the modern metropolis are infused with a melancholia that lends itself again to allegory. Benjamin also took up allegorical writing when he declared: ''Baudelaire's genius, which is nourished on melancholy, is an allegorical genius . . . the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller'' (Benjamin 2002a: 10). In ''Paris, capital of the nineteenth century,''

Benjamin located the urban crowd as a threshold between the familiar and ''phantasmagoria,'' with the arcade or department store as its most telling locale. ''The devaluation of the world of things in allegory is surpassed within the world of things itself by the commodity,'' he noted in a then unpublished series of observations entitled ''Central Park,'' which gesture to Baudelaire's ''Americanism'' (Benjamin 2003: 164, 188). If baroque stagings of the German seventeenth-century decaying landscape – and of French lyric paeans to the anonymous cityscape in the nineteenth – rely on allegory, layering the ruins of past spaces and histories onto new ones through the evocation of a visual spectacle of desolation and dismemberment (''Baudelaire's original interest in allegory is not linguistic but optical'' [187], then the gangster cycle serves much the same purpose for mid-twentieth-century America. ''[W]hat was allegory in Baudelaire has lapsed into genre,'' Benjamin remarked of the poet Maurice Rollinat – but he might have been speaking of tabloid crime stories (165). He goes on to comment: ''the Baudelairean allegory – unlike the Baroque allegory – bears traces of the rage needed to break into this world, to lay waste to its harmonious structures'' (174). In the gangster genre – and in all its media: tabloids, movies, novels, radio, and the rat-a-tat sound track accompanying them – writers would find the ''rage needed to break into this world''; they would review the origins of poverty in the criminality of capitalism and still make a quick buck. They could eat their cake (or drink their gin) and have it too. Gangsters, in this sense, made it possible for broad audiences to see the corrosive effects of World War I and Depression on working-class people – first on people of the city (primarily immigrants) and later on people of the rural areas (black and white tenants displaced from the Dust Bowl) – all of which later became the subject of documentary photography under the aegis of Roy Stryker's New Deal photography unit of the Farm Security Administration. These sensational images connect to a repetitive genealogy graphing a baroque public spectacle of the popular crime tabloids and the films ''ripped right off the front pages'' of them. And *The Roaring Twenties* offers a synopsis of this recent history. Rather than poverty, this crime story has its origins in government: World War I and the Volstead Act; war and moral panic, the twin fuels of sensational news accounts. Or, as Benjamin notes: ''To write history means giving calendar dates their physiognomy'' (2003: 165).

Hollywood/History

In his meditation on ''History, cultural memory and the digital dark age,'' Cherchi Usai declares that ''cinema is the art of destroying moving images'' (2001: 7). He considers the interrelationship of the terms ''cinema'' and ''history'' in order to reframe film history, by which he means four interlocking things: (1) the history of the material – film; (2) filmed history as an archive; (3) film as history – the subject; and (4) history as filmed – a new form of historiography. ''Film history,'' he continues ''proceeds by an effort to explain the loss of cultural ambience that has

evaporated from the moving image in the context of a given time and place'' (21). Its lack of fixity – in perception, in memory, in actuality – is what provokes the desire to stabilize film history, to arrest the ephemeral quality of film and of history.

According to Penelope Pelizzon and Nancy West (2010: 75), Warner Brothers capitalized on this through a process of ''allegorizing'' the headlines. Of the ''American historical cinema,'' Jennifer Smyth notes: ''Instead of masking the traces of history, these classical Hollywood films showed the evidence of their own historical construction [. . .] the most spectacular images of the past did not obey the formulas of narrative and continuity editing [. . .] Hollywood films could serve as a new [. . .] form of historiography'' (Smyth 2006: 10–11). This form of historiography relies on seeing the present as a potential past. More topical films, such as Warner Brothers' 1939 *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, were based on contemporary news accounts. In this case, the *New York Post* serialized story of how the FBI cracked a spy ring. Even before publication, reporter Leon G. Torrou sold the studio the rights to his scoop, which had been enjoined from publication by the New York courts. The federal case became national news as the film hit theaters; they unspooled simultaneously, circulating a new kind of criminal gang, the Fifth Column, and a new sense of film as history, immediate as a newspaper (Giovacchini 2001: 94).

Daily newspapers made their début in Paris and New York during the 1830s. Coinciding with the advent of photography, they were decidedly text-based; their presence on the Paris streets was central to the construction of the urban space as a crowded one, with the fleeting connections charted in Baudelaire's poems and essays and in stories like Edgar Allan Poe's ''Man in the Crowd.'' These melancholy encounters or missed liaisons included glanced headlines displayed on a kiosk; the news was as evanescent as the intriguing stranger – a passing spectacle of bodies and texts glimpsed amid city streets and their underworld. Tabloids such as New York's *Graphic* and *Police Gazette* circulated lurid accounts of urban crime, *Graphic* becoming the first paper ''to use granulating photography, a primitive engraving method that enabled the newspaper to make cuts directly from photographs and to print actual photos of the culprits and victims of [. . .] murder,'' remark Pelizzon and West (2010: 7). By the 1920s, the screaming headlines of Prohibition-era criminality set the tone for a constantly migrating series of ''celebrity'' cases to appear in tabloids, pulps, and legitimate newspapers.[4]

Myriad forms of text and image suffused public spaces. With money, periodicals might be purchased and brought into the privacy of the home; but they beckoned in the bustle of public spaces as well. Almost every film in which a chase on foot occurs finds either the stalker in pursuit or his/her prey stopping at a kiosk to thumb a magazine or to view the street reflected in a drugstore window displaying magazines. In one of the classic Warner Brothers cartoons of 1937, ''Speaking of the Weather,'' Hollywood celebrities ''come to life off the magazine covers in a drugstore magazine rack late at night.'' Various caricatures become involved in a plot to capture a crime tabloid thug by ''The Police Gazette''; he's sentenced by

''The Judge'' for ''Life'' but flees to ''Liberty,'' each magazine title conveniently propelling the story along.[5] All these public ephemera found their way into the private homes of the middle class, often in the form of scrapbooks that ''came to mirror the changing pulse of American cultural life – a life of episodic moments, randomly reflected in a news clipping or a silhouetted photograph, a lock of baby hair or a Western Union telegram'' (Helfand 2008: xvii). Since the late nineteenth century, reading the news had been a visual experience that subsumed the black-and-white image into its story-telling. In fact it was a newspaperman, Arthur Brisbane, an editor of the Hearst *New York Evening Journal*, who coined the slogan ''Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words,'' in an address before the Syracuse Advertising Club in New York in 1911; the imperative was quickly picked up by Rochester's Eastman Kodak company as an advertising slogan.[6]

That vivid graphics and pointed text could propel the narrative was part of the idea behind the advertising industry's appeal to emotion. Historian David Gray documents the origins of workplace motivation posters, the brainchild of Seth Seiders, who in 1924 founded a company to produce and distribute ''employee-motivational posters and visual–textual publicity on a national basis'' (Gray 2010: 77). By 1929 over 350 different posters were available to the 40,000 firms contracting for them; their presence in the workplace – both white-collar and manufacturing – was ubiquitous and designed to appeal to the ''human element'' in much the same way as mass advertising mobilized affect – with bold colors, suggestive captions, and repetitive reinforcement (81). An ever-sprawling proliferation of images of the phototextual circulated the very idea of mass circulation.[7] And this during the period 1929–1933, when sales of newspapers and magazines fell by almost 15 percent.[8] Critic Will Straw estimates that between 1920 and 2000 over 200 true crime magazines titles had circulated more than 5 million pictures, most of them between 1930 and 1950. ''In the lay-outs of true crime magazines, all the major currents of twentieth-century design mingled promiscuously, from clean, symmetrical grids through chaotic montages, which twisted pictures to make words and words to form pictures'' (Straw 2006: 004). By 1937, in a how-to essay published in *Writer's Digest*, George Scullin was alerting potential pulp magazine authors to include photographs with their tales of crime:

> First in demand comes photographs of the principals in the case. The victim, the murderer, the officer who bylines the story . . . Then comes scene stuff. The house in which the murder took place, the field in which the body was discovered, the bridge from which the killer leaped in making his escape, the car he wrecked in his flight, the clues which led to his capture . . . (Scullin, quoted in Straw 2006: 007)

Pelizzon and West extend this linkage of images and texts as it migrates through ''narrative mobility'' beyond the page of the newspaper itself, to include the press books attached to Hollywood movies and the movies' use of headlines and stories ''ripped right off the front pages,'' as is most evident in Darryl F. Zanuck's

description of Warner Brothers' 1930s crime-film "headline policy" (quoted in Pelizzon and West 2010: 16, 53–54).[9] For, as Jonathan Munby argues, the "gutter press" of the 1920s paved the way for the emergence of Hollywood's "gangster cycle" of the 1930s (1999: 37), in part because of the public craving to know about "the other half" – as Carleton Simon, working for the Studio Relations Committee (which was charged with implementing the Production Code) declared, cribbing Riis (Munby 1999: 102).[10] Zanuck referred to these tabloid stories as "spot news," readily mined for plotlines because they were familiar (Hirschhorn 1979: 82). They erupted everywhere, including in Kenneth Fearing's poems:

> On Sunday, when they picnic in emerald meadows they look at the Sunday paper:
> GIRL SLAYS BANKER BETRAYER
> They spread it around the grass
> BATH-TUB STIRS JERSEY ROW
> And then they sit down on it, nice.
>
> (Fearing 1940: 14)

Big Shot

The documentary's gyrating headline effect is captured in the opening sequence of *The Roaring Twenties*. This vivid montage was directed (without credit) by Don Siegel, who later directed *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and made to replicate the feel of the very newsreel that would have preceded its screening (Newman 1997: 291). The prologue links the credits to the action. In *The Roaring Twenties*, stock footage is cut with newsreel clips to trace the film's diegetic prehistory – including such 1920s celebrity highlights as Herbert Hoover and Al Jolson – moving its narrative backward through the recent decade, seemingly long past. As Smyth describes it: "Warner Brothers created a dual history – a deliberate and structured traditional history of the United States from the First World War through the Depression, and a farewell to its early gangster films now banned from circulation by the censors" (2006: 221). The rotating globe and the superimposed dates that recede from 1940 to 1919, accompanied by the stentorian tones of the film's narrator, presuppose an audience thoroughly ensconced within the visual ecology of newsprint and pulp. They acknowledge the viewers' immersion in black-and-white imagery as it shifts from page to newsreel to movie. Locating the story in time, the dateline and the globe were crucial elements of both the crime film and the war film: a few minutes into *The Public Enemy*, an intertitle flashes the date: 1915; *Casablanca* begins with a spinning globe and a newsreel-style narration "spoken by a radio announcer from the Warner station KFWB" (Sperber and Lax 1997: 207).

The visual underworld of poverty and crime depicted in tabloids relied, in the words of the *Daily Mirror*'s first editorial (June 24, 1924), on "90 per cent entertainment, 10 per cent information – and the information without boring you" (quoted in Bessie 1938: 139) – a theme that Orson Welles would take up a few years later in *Citizen Kane*.[11] The movies followed suit: Warner Brothers

actually produced "mock tabloids" featuring the "news" and press books of their gangster films as part of a publicity campaign, by using the "Picture News Flash" (Pelizzon and West 2010: 37–49).

Beginning with World War I's end and Prohibition's start, *The Roaring Twenties* links the history of United States and world politics, war and Depression, directly to the film industry and its connections to other media. It situates newspapers and popular songs as central transmitters of information and films as vehicles, actually vessels, encasing historical knowledge. Critic Rey Chow, speaking of Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution*, calls historical films "knock-offs," akin to pirated copies, as they attempt to "rescue history from oblivion" and "recreate precise historical details" as "public display" (Chow 2010). The historical knock-off might be another way of thinking about the gangster film as allegory. This genre retells the story of capitalism, and thus remakes it into a melancholy melodrama.

In the trailer for *The Roaring Twenties*, Mark Hellinger describes his affection for the hoodlums and dancers he knew while working for Hearst's papers; the film culls stories of New York night life in the 1920s from his column "Unsung Broadwayites," which reached 25 million readers, and from his short story "The World Moves On" (Dimendberg 2004: 58; Sperber and Lax 1997: 119). In Hollywood's rendering of the immediate past as history, headlines serve to telescope world events, as does the voice-of-God narrator. In this case, using Mark Hellinger's actual script and voice, which is recognizable from his radio broadcasts, the movie sends its audience hurtling back through the decade – like Dorothy swirling through Kansas in the cyclone, or like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History blown backward across its wreckage – to its own youth. Moreover, the film serves up an assortment of Warner Brothers fare – gangsters, musicals, fallen women, melodrama, social problems and, in anticipation, the war-buddy film and the returning veteran problem saga. It is an archive of Hollywood genres as well as of current events (see Figure 13.5); or, in the words of critic Leo Miskin, instead of offering a "view of that decade between 1920 and 1930," the film catalogued "a condensed history of all those Warner gangster films" (quoted in Smyth 2006: 221).

Originally Anatole Litwak directed the film, but he was replaced by Raoul Walsh – whose feature-length directing début at Fox, *The Regeneration* (1915), the first feature-length gangster movie, was partially shot on location using street scenes of New York's Lower East Side and Hell's Kitchen. *The Roaring Twenties* was Walsh's first Warner Brothers film. It nods to Walsh's history, the studio's, and Hollywood's: Walsh played John Wilkes Booth in D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, shot footage for Griffith while accompanying Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution, served in the Army Signal Corps during World War I, and, when talkies arrived, used a newsreel truck to shoot on-location action for the 1929 western *In Old Arizona*. He made 20 more films in all genres – musicals, romances, westerns, comedies – before landing this "bootleg melodrama," as the New York *Daily Mirror* called *The Roaring Twenties* (Meyer 1978: 311).

Figure 13.5 History as palimpsest as FDR bleeds into Adolf Hitler. *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

By 1939, ''the characters variously said to be based on either bootlegger Larry Fay [also known as The Great Gatsby] and night-club hostess Texas Guinan'' (Newman 1997: 291) or ''gangster Moe 'The Gimp' Snyder and torch singer Ruth Etting'' (Bubbeo 2002: 135) were also affectionately drawn from the actors' histories. Humphrey Bogart's second film, *Broadway's Like That*, also starred Ruth Etting; later that year (1930) he played a prison inmate in John Ford's *Up the River*. By 1932 he was at Warner Brothers' studio and appeared typecast in his first tough-guy role in *Three on a Match*. So, by the late 1930s, the standard line was ''[i]f it's a louse-heel, give it to Bogart,'' noted writer/director Vincent Sherman (quoted in Sperber and Lax 1997: 112).[12]

An allegory of the studio's imbrications in the world of gangsters or, more aptly, in their representation, this film's 1920s setting is essentially a palimpsest for the studio's 1930s story; released within weeks of Britain declaring war on Germany, the film began with the armistice of World War I; it linked the gangster to war, demonstrating a direct connection between firepower on the battlefront and machine guns on the nation's streets. Coming at the dénouement of the gangster films' heyday (which had mutated in various ways to the T-Men and G-Men and rural gang films after the 1935 Will Hay moratorium banning the gangster), the film uses ''tabloid features'' that ''distance and sentimentalize the period when jazz journalism was the rage [. . .] Nostalgia replaces carnivalism'' (Pelizzon and West 2010: 50).[13] But, in Walter Benjamin's telling, nostalgia *is* the carnival; the corpses in allegory *are* theatrical. In this film, each scene – in the trenches, in the speakeasy, in the gangsters'

offices and garages – points toward its genre's future demise. After Cagney tumbles into a trench in France – doing what his "good" brother Mike did in *Public Enemy*, serving in the army – his foxhole buddies pledge to stick together when they return stateside; but crime and betrayal inevitably follow. As Bogart doublecrosses Cagney and Lynn falls for Cagney's wartime penpal, a singer in Panama Smith's (Gladys George) club, only Cagney upholds the gangster's code of honor. The end of Prohibition means the end of business for all except those willing to work for reform; they sink into depression as the Depression curtails legitimate work, and Cagney and George end up drunks. Lynn could nail Bogart and Cagney, so Bogart vows to kill him; but Cagney gets there first, taking a bullet as he shoots. Staggering away from Bogart's corpse in a long trek through the city streets, he collapses on the snowy steps of a church on Christmas Eve, dying in Panama's arms – a bathetic *pietà*. The men's violent triangulation is doubled by the romance of unrequited love: Eddie's for Jean and Panama's for Eddie, another hard-bitten, big-hearted blonde, like Joan Blondell's faithful sidekick pining for her boss, producer Cagney, in *Footlight Parade* (1933). In short, the plot contains a telescoped history, nodding and winking at its audiences' familiarity with a landscape littered with black and white – and with sounds of radio, musicals, and the city – as it melds Warner Brothers' Depression sagas of hoofers and mobsters with Movietone newsreels.[14]

With its interspersing of popular songs and its tracking of cause and effect across poverty, war, violence, and lawlessness, *The Roaring Twenties* acknowledged the social consciousness of the gangster genre, on the one hand, and the utter silliness of studio musicals, on the other. Warner Brothers' 1930s films become relics of the past, allegorical corpses. The tensions palpable between Cagney and Bogart within the narrative mirrored their personal antipathy, signaling the penultimate gangster film in Cagney's career (it was followed six years later by another Walsh film, *White Heat*) with Cagney assuming Bogart's cynical, hard-bitten (though here utterly irredeemable) tough-guy persona. "In those days," Walsh recalled, "Cagney and Bogart were the only two stars you could kill in a picture. You couldn't kill Flynn, you couldn't kill Gable, you couldn't kill Cooper . . . " (Stevens 2006: 27). Tracing the demise of an industry, bootlegging, the film points out how New Deal reforms killed business even as they saved capitalism. Yet, with their New York immigrant roots, Warner Brothers' studio stars and moguls were firm supporters of Roosevelt despite his administration's investigations into Hollywood trusts. Through "brutality [. . .] tempered by sentimentality," *The Roaring Twenties* stages an awkward standoff between studio, law, and the censor, as it inevitably bumps off the mobsters and paves the way for New Deal populism (Sennett 1971: 62). Anticipating such films noirs as *Force or Evil* or Preston Sturges's political spoof, *The Great McGinty*, it demonstrates that city politics, even the reform party of Republican New Dealer Fiorello LaGuardia, was permeated with corruption.[15] Moreover, it allegorizes Hollywood's vertical integration under jeopardy, due to the Department of Justice's 1938 antitrust suit – as the "chaining up" of movie theaters spread nationwide (Cohen 1990: 126). The Prohibition booze biz, where

production, distribution, and exhibition (or consumption) were joined through legal contracts (and, of course, through illegal shakedowns), mirrors Hollywood's own business model.

The Roaring Twenties meshes the violent highlights of a past decade with the one just ending; all this in light of the impending one, which is about to unfold its even greater horrors (see Figure 13.6). When the narrator tells of ''another period,'' hopefully overcome and never to return, he gestures to the obligatory, exculpatory explanation about gangster films' violence. The audience is made to remember history through the use of news broadcasts on film, radio, and newsprint, and through its collective movie-going experience. So, in *The Roaring Twenties*' diegesis, Cagney must take a cigar from the corrupt gang boss and smash it into his face while sitting across a table from him – a retake of his notorious grapefruit in the face of Mae Clarke from *The Public Enemy*. With Al Jolson sharing a cameo with Herbert Hoover in the opening ''newsreel,'' Warner Brothers' film history is recalled for the cognoscenti. Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures explained the interchange of staged photographs, location shots, and fiction in films like Mark Hellinger and Jules Dassin's *Naked City* (1948), which was based on tabloid photographer Weegee's book of the same name: ''A documentary is a picture without women. If there's one woman in it, it's a semi-documentary'' (quoted in Straw 2006: 013). This baroque allegorical film reminds its audience of its debt to the ''true'' of true crime and to the ''real'' of documentary, even as it is neither.

The Roaring Twenties recalls the place of Warner Brothers as the foremost Hollywood studio attuned to social issues in the 1930s even as it parodies, via

Figure 13.6 The world spins out of control. *The Roaring Twenties*, 1939. Warner Brothers. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Director: Raoul Walsh

excess, the immigrant studio heads' own ambivalent relationship with America and with fascism in Europe. This black-and-white vision demonstrates how Hollywood's history really could encapsulate that of the nation. It shows, exactly as Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* would a few years later, that Hollywood is inescapable – its network complete, covering even Georgia's swamps where chain gangs labor. Even there newspaper headlines feature obituaries about major directors, and churches show Disney cartoons to lighten the lives of the downtrodden black parishioners and their less fortunate shackled white brethren. Media extensions, as Marshall McLuhan called them, embed their futures as well as their pasts with each new technological transformation.

Remediation

Remarkably for a film designed as a vehicle for retracing the 1930s through a historical excursion into the 1920s,[16] Warner Brothers retreaded *The Roaring Twenties* for a television audience in the 1960s. Coinciding with the Kennedy administration, it is paradoxical that this nostalgic tour of nostalgia should appear just as the New Frontier was opening. But perhaps not so surprising, the ABC show represented a refusal of another kind of nostalgia: the Wild West. *The Roaring 20s*' NBC competitor, *Bonanza*, was a western, designed by its creator, David Dortort, to portray cowboys not as gunslingers riding a rugged terrain but as members of wholesome "loving families" living together in large houses.

Television westerns kept alive a romantic pastoral rendering of America's past during an era when suburbia was developing new kinds of in-between domestic spaces – neither rural nor urban. By contrast, ABC's *The Roaring 20s* appeared up to date despite its retro quality of fast-talking women, cynical reporters and assorted hustlers, immigrant mothers, dancehall daughters, and back-stage, newsroom, or barroom plots, at a time when, according to census data, US urban population was at its height. One feature of this retro modernity was the show's savvy nod to Warner Brothers', Hollywood's and America's past, a past accessible to television audiences through such programming as Saturday morning Warner Brothers cartoons (where those of my generation learned about the Depression and the war – their parents' unspoken lives) and the black-and-white movies filling empty airtime on *Million Dollar Movies*. "Allegorical emblems return as commodities," after all (Benjamin 2003: 183).

In *Burnett's Woman*, the first episode of television's *The Roaring 20s*, documentary effects occur through street scenes, broadcasts of boxer Jack Dempsey's 1923 knock-out of Luis Angel Firpo, subsequent footage of half a million people swarming through Times Square, and, most important, the use of direct quotations from 1930s gangster movies that themselves quoted from newsreels. But the show recalls its film heritage in its title, which nods to *Scarface* screenwriter W. R. Burnett. Here the Italian gangster passes as an upper-class businessman, having

changed his name from Brunetti to Burnett; his girlfriend, a dancer in star Pinky's (Dorothy Provine) speakeasy, once Angela Fiore, is now billed as Julie Freed; only her old flame, incorruptible cop Joe Switolski, working for the New York police department, proudly keeps his Polish name – and shares scoops with the columnist who writes "Garrison's Grapevine." He's reluctant to arrest the mobster because, as in the 1939 film, "he shared his last smoke with me in the mud in France." Everyone converges back in the old neighborhood as the cops chase Burnett across tenement rooftops, the action intercut with stock footage again; Burnett falls to his death, like Rico, who dies in the streets, prompting Angela's Mama, the grocer, to conclude: "He come from the gutter, he end in the gutter." Newspaperman Garrison (Rex Reason) replies: "I wish I'd said that."

If the dialogue refers to the film and the plot is motivated by the role of newspapers in city affairs, the show's opening credits recall those of the film version, which in turn called upon the antecedent of movies in burlesque and Broadway and in columnists' wistful prose – as well as in the *March of Time* newsreels that preceded its showing. This time the film's spinning globe is replaced by a gyrating mirror ball; and the scenes of war, as the calendar years peel back from the 1930s to 1919, mutate into stock footage of bathtub gin, aerial stunts, hip flasks, and raccoon coats, gleaned from 1920s newsreels – whose prevailing format depicted a world of aristocrats and movie stars, of dictators and sportsmen, of war and catastrophes that essentially interchanged celebrities and victims regularly encountered though far removed from the lives of those millions watching them at a Saturday afternoon double feature (see Figure 13.7,

Figure 13.7 Spinning mirror ball from the opening sequence of the 1961 ABC television show *The Roaring 20's*.

Figure 13.8 Making bathtub gin, from the opening sequence of the 1961 ABC television show *The Roaring 20's*.

Figure 13.9 Aerial stunt from the opening sequence of the 1961 ABC television show *The Roaring 20's*.

Figure 13.8, and Figure 13.9). Speeding up like the wild tickertape in Pare Lorentz's 1936 documentary *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, this montage superimposes the rush of jazz age images onto the running stock market numbers; it ends with an aerial pan of the Warner Brothers studio as it looked in the 1920s[17] (see Figure 13.10). This historical remove, complete with the jerky movements of

Figure 13.10 Aerial shot of Warner Brothers' studios in 1930. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS. HU058230

silent cinema, repeated for television viewers what the film had brought to its contemporary audience in 1939: a vision of the present as already past and of the past as continually present, a form of grotesque processing in which spectators are constantly brought into the future by returning to the remains of the past.

The revisions of American history embedded in the versions of *The Roaring Twenties* produced by Warner Brothers relay an allegorical tale of America's testy relationship to its past and its past media. As Walter Benjamin noted: ''Just as the illustrated newspaper virtually lay hidden within lithography, so the sound film was latent in photography'' (2002b: 102). The film's overlapping genres – war, gangster, musical, romance – reinforce Hollywood's apparent mastery of its contribution to American history through pre-existing media. A nation continually reinventing itself by wiping away historical remnants of its landscape, of its populations, and of its foundational texts, America is still a place tied nostalgically, even melancholically, to a repressed fantasy that tries to cleanse violence, war, and crime from memory. ''The doctrine of eternal recurrence as a dream of the immense discoveries imminent in the field of reproductive technology'' is how Benjamin put it (2003: 182). Paradoxically, Hollywood and the various mediated texts, from tabloids to TV, that thrive on representing these sensational traumas serve to hide them under repetitive layers of whitewash, through the self-reflexive stance of the renegade, who understands the terrain better than its solid citizens. *The Roaring Twenties* is the culminantion of a quarter century (spectacularly begun with D. W. Griffith's incendiary *Birth of a Nation*) of Hollywood's history as America's historical repository. This revisionist process, one imbricated in the entire field of sizzling media that began a century before *The Roaring Twenties*

with the first daily newspapers and continues today with the swirl of Internet rumors, is ultimately what makes this studio genre film, and its eventual migration into television programming, such an exemplary instance of media allegory, a palimpsest of itself and of the American century. As Paolo Cherchi Usai reminds us, "cinema is not based on reproduction. It is an art of repetition," "a doctrine of eternal recurrence" (2001: 59) – or, in Walter Benjamin's terms, an art of disappearance and reappearance, a history, as Panama Smith explains to the cop, of the big shot that "used to be."

Notes

1 "Seal books cover a wide range, from detective fiction to serious political, social or economic studies" (Burnett 1938: 153). From children's books and cookbooks to a biography of New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia; from reprints of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* to the WPA (Works Progress Administration) guidebook *US 1: From Maine to Florida*; as well as other guidebooks written under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project, from Agatha Christie to Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's phototext *You Have Seen Their Faces* and André Gide's *Travel in the Congo*. By 1938, *Little Caesar* had become the butt of in-jokes, inspiring a number of Warner Brothers' cartoons – such as "Thugs with Dirty Mugs" (1939), in which a mobster known as "The Killer" is "played by" Edward G. Rob 'em some. Other 1930s Warner Brothers' cartoons animated bestsellers and literary classics such as "Sniffles and the Bookworm," just when book sales plummeted. Modern Age Books pointed in a direction that would transform publishing in the U.S.: the paperback revolution, begun in 1939 with Pocket Books from Doubleday and when Penguin Books moved across the ocean as war erupted in Europe.

2 John Grierson, recounting his work for the Empire Marketing Board of Britain, saw one aspect of this work as being to make "films designed to *report to the nation* [. . .] on our economic situation, on scientific research, on social services, on Commonwealth Relations" (Grierson c. 1948–1950: 279). Such films would serve to connect "the general public [that] is divided into an infinite number of specialized publics" (278), in a coherent imperial project.

3 For more on the history and psychology of mob melodrama, see Hill (2008), who explains how the state and the mob, depending upon political shifts, move across a spectrum in defining various forces as good or bad.

4 See the story told by Duncombe and Mattson (2006), which details the endless circulation of "news" about the Brooklyn housewife whose crime wave shocked and titillated the city, sparking the rage for screaming tabloid headlines, newspaper scoops, and "true stories" revealed in the *Daily News, True Detective*, *Modern Romances*, *New York Herald-Tribune*, *New York Times, New York Post*, *New York American*, and the Brooklyn papers – not to mention cartoons, jokes, celebrity sightings, etc.

5 A description of this cartoon can be found in the filmography edited by Friedwald and Beck (1981: 45–46). This cartoon featured a song, "Speaking of the Weather," from the Warner Brothers Busby Berkeley musical *Golddiggers of 1937*. In this it resembled many cartoons, which featured caricatures of notable studio stars and mash-ups of genre movies that would be familiar to its audiences. One imagines viewing *The*

Roaring Twenties similarly, in a situation where newsreels, cartoons, and the B-feature all contributed to a dense mesh, a sort of cinematic spectators' Geertzian "thick description" of intertextual references.

6 For more on the history of this so-called proverb, see Hancher (2010: 267–271). The phrase was immediately picked up by neighboring Eastman Kodak Company for its in-house organ advertisement and used again to refer to the power of visuals to sell things. See West (2000) for the history of Kodak advertisements.

7 It was at the newsstand that Richard Wright first encountered H. L. Mencken's name as he was skimming the papers, and thus he began his self-education: "One morning I arrived early at work and went into the bank lobby where the Negro porter was mopping, I stood at a counter and picked up the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* and began my free reading of the press" (Wright 1993: 288).

8 Welky (2008: 10). Even so, he notes: "Americans bought about three billion periodicals even in the worst year of the Depression, an average of two per month for every man, woman, and child" (83). For instance, "[t]he *Saturday Evening Post* was the 'leviathan of weeklies,' the eight-hundred-pound gorilla of the periodical world. Nearly three million copies spun off the presses every week" (85). In 1928 Leon Whipple argued in another magazine, *Survey*, that the Curtis magazine "creates us. What the SatEvePost is we are. Its advertising helps standardize our physical life; its text stencils patterns on our minds. It is a main factor in raising the luxury-level by teaching us new wants [. . .] But it does more than whet our thing-hunger; by blunt or subtle devices it molds our ideas on crime, prohibition, Russia, oil, preparedness, immigration, the World Court [. . .] Who reads *The Post*? Who looks in the mirror? Everybody – high-brow, low-brow, and mezzanine" ("SatEvePost: Mirror of These States," March 1, 1928, as quoted in Welky 2008: 85).

9 By 1942, almost a decade after Darryl Zanuck had left Warner Brothers for Fox and months after the United States had entered World War II, he spent five weeks living with British troops from the Combined Operations Headquarters. Writing to Anthony Eden to thank him for the opportunity, he noted the importance of combating the "American First Movement" championed by Senator Burton K. Wheeler and other isolationists, pledging to combat them by inspiring "public-spirited Britons and Americans" (1942). While he doesn't directly say it, he implies that his contribution as a "movie producer" will be to help shape public support for the war effort.

10 Munby quotes a letter from Zanuck to Jason Joy dated January 6, 1931, about *The Public Enemy* arguing that the gangster film demonstrated that "only by the betterment of ENVIRONMENT and EDUCATION for the masses can we overcome the widespread tendency toward LAW BREAKING" (Munby 1999: 103).

11 The editorial reads like a Fearing poem. Its concluding paragraph declares: "We ask readers to write and tell us what they DO NOT LIKE. DAILY MIRROR's motto will be 'short, quick, and make it snappy'" (Bessie 1938: 139).

12 James Cagney began his movie career at Warner Brothers in 1930; his second film appearance, in *Doorway to Hell*, led to his portrayal as Tom Powers in *The Public Enemy* the following year, launching his stardom. *The Roaring Twenties* was the last film in which Cagney and Bogart – the "city boys," "urban tough guy" from opposite sides of the track – acted together; they reportedly hated the film (Cagney called it "wind acreage") and each other (Sklar 1992: 29; McCabe 1997: 177; Osborne 2009).

13 "Jazz journalism" is Bessie's coinage.

14 ''[W]hat the public wants is – more or less in order of preference as indicated by theatre managers' reports – the following: Spectacular accidents; catastrophes such as fires and earthquakes; personality shots; racing of all kinds (horses, especially in steeplechases, are more interesting than motor cars, because the danger of spills is greater); battleships; children (babies preferred); sex – for example, bathing-beauty contests, fashion shows, night-club shows, and the like; events with a morbid interest, such as murderers' confessions; football, aviation, and skiing; animals, particularly polar bears and monkeys [. . .]'' (Peden 1932: 22–23).

15 Munby notes that, upon seeing *Little Caesar*, LaGuardia declared he was reversing his stance against censorship, because the film featured an Italian gangster. But, as MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America) secretary Carl Milliken commented about Fiorello LaGuardia's complaint that ''Mr. Hay would not dare to produce such a picture with a Jew as that character,'' he was more likely offended by the physical resemblance of Robinson to the New York mayor, which was reinforced at the decade's end by their proximity on Modern Age Books' list (Munby 1999: 105).

16 Beginning in 1919 and ending with LaGuardia's mayoralty and Roosevelt's third term as president.

17 Only a few episodes of the show exist. They are housed at the Paley Center for Media, New York and California. I thank Mark Ekman for his gracious help in locating the center's holdings for me.

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