

The Film Noir Collection and the Legacy of Nineteenth Century Modernity

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ABSTRACT

The Film Noir Collection and the Legacy of Nineteenth Century Modernity

Robert J. Read

Film noir has usually been considered to be an autonomous cinematic movement and many critics have focused upon a variety of issues and concerns contained within the phenomenon. Frequently, scholars and critics have found it necessary to include filmographies, accumulated lists designed to illustrate what qualifies as a film noir. However, these lists have often proved to be inconsistent and capricious. Despite the uncertainty, filmographies continue to be key tools of noir criticism, and along with their accompanying theories, have become part of the film noir collection. In this thesis I will employ the film noir collection, including my own collection of film noir and noir criticism, as the basis for my study.

This thesis takes the position that the accumulated films and accompanying critical writings create an encyclopedic body of knowledge which reveals that film noir is not a solitary phenomenon, but rather a cohesive representation of modern American life. By concentrating upon the unifying image of the modern city, the noir collection is bound by its urban representation. Moreover, the image of the modern city as the unifying element of the noir collection presents the opportunity to see film noir as part of the greater breadth of modern urban representation. Therefore, I have opened the film noir collection to the critical writings of Walter Benjamin and like-minded scholars to illustrate the affinities between nineteenth century modernity and film noir. Specifically, I have chosen to focus upon the presence of the flâneur and flâneur-derived urban figures in the modern noir city. This

perspective allows film noir to be examined in a new light, not as an independent cinematic movement, but as part of the larger and continuous representation of modern life.

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Dedication

To my wife Bernaie

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Introduction

A Privileged View

I collect film noir, and as a collector my top priority is to accumulate as many film noirs as I possibly can. But my collection is not just restricted to films, it also contains books, articles, novels, anything that centres on film noir. In particular, I am interested in the foundational film noirs of the early 1940s, when this cinematic phenomenon was emerging out of artful horror films and low-budget Who-done-its. I enjoy viewing and studying the films, but I have found that the critical body of work that surrounds film noir is often unsatisfactory and it seldom reflects my interests in film noir. For when I turn to my collection of noir films and film noir related items, I see them in a different light. My collection provides me with a unique perspective, a privileged view, and one that few critics and scholars are able to access. When I examine my collection of film noir, I see film noir as a representation of the modern urban experience. Certainly, film noir has been discussed within the context of its urban setting, but I believe these discussions have not been extended to their fullest extent. Because the urban representation of film noir is not restricted to an individual cinematic movement, the cinematic cities of film noir are part of a larger continuation of the representation of the modern urban experience. As a cinematic moment, film noir flourished from the early 1940s to the late 1950s; however, the phenomenon of film noir should be discussed within the greater context of its depiction of modern life. Therefore, to elucidate the representation of the modern urban experience, I will examine film noir through the principles of nineteenth century urban modernity and the depiction of flâneur-derived figures found within these cinematic cities.

Quickly consider the 1949 Universal-International film *Abandoned*. The story focuses upon a black-market baby smuggling ring operating in the underground world of post-war Los Angeles. The production was a midrange budget studio film. The film was nothing special. A tawdry little crime melodrama produced for the bottom of the double-bill. In 1979, Alain Silver, Elizabeth Ward and their various associates collected the film as an example of film noir in their monumental *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*. The film was now canonized for the ages as a bona fide film noir. But like so many of the films collected in *Film Noir*, it has been forgotten and only referenced when referring to the titular state of fear and anxiety so common to film noir: *Desperate*, *Railroaded*, *Convicted*, *Cornered*, etc. But in recent years, the idea of film noir has achieved a certain amount of popular recognition. And many of the classic film noirs, *Double Indemnity*, *The Maltese Falcon*, or *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, are easily accessible in all the better video rental and retail stores. However, Silver and Ward's *Film Noir* lists more than three hundred films and only a small percentage are readily available on video and DVD. Therefore, to gain insight into the world of film noir, the cinéophile must become more than just a passive viewer of the films that are available. The film noir scholar must become an active collector because much of the film noir canon is only available through less than legitimate means. The film noir collector must be like a detective searching the underbelly of a great city. He or she must be able to negotiate through the netherworld of video bootlegging and satellite piracy to find an illusive title like *Abandoned*.

As I have stated, the greater noir collection consists of more than three hundred films; to date, my collecting has accumulated slightly more than two hundred of these film titles.

Although not yet complete, the possession of such a vast number of related films can provide a film scholar insight that is not afforded to everyone. The unique perspective of the collector allows me the license to begin with a seldom seen film noir. I have chosen *Abandoned* because I see the film as exemplary of many of the problems surrounding film noir. First, there is the presence of the film within the collection. As stated, *Abandoned* has received little critical attention and yet it has been canonized as noir. The mere presence of such an obscure film within the collection suggests the arbitrariness of the collection. There is no set filmography of noir, and many scholars find it necessary to create their own list of what they consider to be film noir. Therefore, the inconsistency and capriciousness of noir collecting have lead to the inclusion of many debatable selections, which places the firmament of noir into question: How can a film be collected as film noir, if there is no standard requisite for a film noir? Hence, I feel it is necessary to collect film noir together under the auspices of its shared representation of the modern urban experience.

Moreover, *Abandoned* is exemplary of the fundamental contradiction between style and realism within noir criticism. There has been scant commentary on the film, and the only lengthy consideration of the film is in *Film Noir* by critic and scholar Carl Macek. He describes the film as depicting the city of Los Angeles with the same sinister, almost surreal, visual malevolence that cinematographer William Daniels gave to Jules Dassin's *The Naked City*, produced a year before *Abandoned*. Moreover, the low-key vision of slick, rain-dampened streets and oblique vertical chiaroscuro lighting created an atmosphere that underscores the noir development of the narrative (8). Macek's comments emphasize the highly stylised visual quality associated with film noir: rainy

streets, dark shadows and strange camera angles. But his comments bring to light the inherent contradictory nature of film noir. The concluding voice-over narration of *Abandoned* declares: “But whatever the time, or wherever the place; this happened in a city that may be your home.” Clearly, the filmmakers wanted the film to have a direct impact upon the audience: *this* happened in *your* home. Hence, *Abandoned* reveals the contradictory nature of film noir criticism. The critic’s insight has focused upon the unique visual style of film noir and he lauds the film for its artificiality, style, and aesthetic merit. However, the producers of the film were trying to achieve a direct and often lurid sense of the real. They wanted to hit their audiences with the possibility that these dark tales were happening right next door. Therefore, film noir must be regarded through the mutual representation of the modern city, which is presented as a conflicting mixture of artificiality of style and the representation of the real urban environment.

Because of the inconsistent procedures for collecting film noir and the contradictory nature of noir criticism, I believe, it is important to reconsider the fundamental basis of the noir collection. First and foremost, film noir is the representation of the modern city. Whether the film is shot on location on the actual city streets, like *The Naked City* and *Abandoned*, or if the city space is a studio re-creation of New York’s Greenwich Village, as depicted in Fritz Lang’s *Scarlet Street* and Edgar G. Ulmer’s *Detour* (both 1945), the modern city is omnipresent. The realization that film noir is primarily a representation of modern urban space opens the collection of film noir to be seen as a continuation of the literary and cinematic traditions of representing the modern urban environment. Therefore, I propose that the noir collection be regarded through a foundation based upon principles originating from the nineteenth century urban experience of the flâneur. As the

Ur-figure of urban observation and negotiation, the flâneur has been instrumental in studying urban modernity. A brief survey of the noir collection reveals that each film narrative is dependent upon its characters' varying abilities to manoeuvre through the space of the modern city. Regardless of the character's occupation or the particulars of the narrative, each film noir is built upon the principles of observation and negotiation within the labyrinth of the modern city.

Again, *Abandoned* is exemplary. The film presents several distinct flâneur-derived urban figures: the noir protagonist, a newspaper reporter; the sister of a missing girl, the female flâneur; and the police detective, a traditional but ineffective character. Each of these distinct urban figures finds their origins with the flâneur, and each character must be able to develop the flâneur's skills of observation and negotiation to uncover the malfeasances of the baby smuggling ring. But *Abandoned* features another urban figure that is particular to the urban environment of film noir, the flâneur gone-bad, the serial killer. And, as the beast within the labyrinth of the modern city, the serial killer must exert the same abilities of observation and negotiation to perform his devious misdeeds. More than the city itself, it is the presence of these flâneur-derived characters that links film noir with nineteenth century urban modernity. Therefore my intentions are to focus upon these flâneur-derived figures within film noir as examples of how film noir is related to the larger process of representing the modern urban experience.

Chapter 1 introduces film noir as a collection. The use of collections within film studies is an often unrecognised methodology, but one that has been an underlying factor within the discipline for many years. Much of the critical recognition of film noir has centered around collecting through the inclusion of filmographies. These appendicized

gatherings of film titles have been a defining factor in the understanding of film noir; moreover, they have established loose guidelines for subsequent noir collectors (including my own collection). However, the noir collection is more than just a list of film titles. The greater noir collection must also include the critical discourse that surrounds the topic. Hence, Paul Schrader's "Notes on Film Noir" is just as important to the collector as Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946). Moreover, the collection of film noir has reached a point where it can be employed as an encyclopedia of knowledge that can now foster new understandings into its unique presence within film scholarship. The most important revelation about the noir collection is that the first noir scholars (the Americans and the French) were not focused upon the aesthetic merits of film noir, but upon the relationship these films had with the immediate social order of modern America. It is important to realize that the original considerations about film noir were centered around the relationship between the cinematic cities and their actual counterparts.

Chapter 2 takes the noir criticism from the early concerns of film critics into the study of noir aesthetics. The shift from a direct representation of modern life within film noir to an aesthetic, stylised view of the modern city separates the noir collection from its initial industrial production and turns the cinematic phenomenon into a venerated art object. However, by continuing to focus upon noir as a coherent collection of films, the collection also reveals that the majority of these venerated art objects were, in fact, cheap, quickly made B movies designed to be consumed and forgotten by their entertainment-hungry audiences. Moreover, now that these B crime films have been collected and separated from their industrial production, they can be regarded as a system of historical knowledge, a window into the modern urban experience of its historical moment. It is the

representation of the modern city that unifies the noir collection; moreover, these images of the city place film noir within the larger body of urban modernity.

Chapter 3 takes the collected representation of the modern urban experience in film noir and examines the historical development of urban representation that preceded the noir phenomenon. I have chosen to concentrate my examination of modernity through the urban figure of the *flâneur*. During his reign in the arcades and on the streets of nineteenth century Paris, the *flâneur* developed specific skills in order to perform his daily tasks of strolling and observing the ever-growing modern city. However, as the cities grew larger, there was less space available for the *flâneur* and he faded from the streets and into the pages of literature. As the *flâneur* disappeared, his position on the street was appropriated by new urban figures, in particular the detective and the criminal, each of whom adopted the skills of the *flâneur*. As the decades passed, the detectives and the criminals of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century literature maintained their *flâneur*-derived abilities and plied their trades through numerous literary cities. The development of the cinema had little effect upon these fantastic urban figures and each transferred easily onto the silver screen. The detectives and the new cinematic criminals, the gangsters, would continue to be exemplified by their *flâneur*-derived abilities. However, these fantastic urban figures would prove to be ineffective when they were confronted by the realist foundation of film noir's urban spaces. These traditional fictional figures found their way into the noir cities, but they became disoriented figures, ineffective and impotent. The past abilities to negotiate through the labyrinth of the modern city were lost, and these exceptional figures became part of the everyday crowd.

Chapter 4 examines the population of the noir city and their relationship with the

flâneur of the past. The first section concentrates upon the noir protagonist and his differentiation from the flâneur-derived figures of the detective and gangster. The most significant factor in the demise of the original flâneurs was the increasing congestion of modern traffic. Baudelaire referred to this modern phenomenon as the mire of the Macadam (the mire was the *movement brusque* of the horse-drawn coaches and the Macadam was the nineteenth century road surface developed to absorb urban waste and the occasional pedestrian's boot). For Baudelaire, it was the crush of the traffic that disabled the flâneur forcing him into the passive position of the flowing crowd. However, film noir reverses the demise of the flâneur from the crowded streets. The noir protagonist is forced out from the crowd, to become a hesitant and unwilling hero. He is forced into the position of a flâneur-derived figure without the legacy of the flâneur's abilities; hence his inability to successfully deal with the narrative dilemmas. And yet, the skills of the flâneur are not completely lost to the urban figures of film noir. During the wartime period, film noir saw the rise of an empowered female urban figure, the flâneuse. She was a middle-class urban figure, enabled to occupy the flâneur's position by the depletion of men through wartime service. However, as a woman, who ventures into the modern city to solve the mystery at hand, she opens herself to the dangers of the modern city, the beast in at the heart of the labyrinth, the Minotaur. The psychotic killers of film noir become the precursors of today's serial killers. These urban monsters also follow in the footsteps of the flâneur, for as film noir demonstrates, the serial killer must also be able to successfully employ the skills of observation and negotiation within the modern labyrinth.

It is the presence of these flâneur-derived figures within the noir city that link film noir to the principles of nineteenth century modernity. It is necessary for characters to be

able to employ the skills of the flâneur to manoeuvre through the noir city, and it is essential to understand film noir as part of the continuation of modern urban representation. This thesis is intended to provoke new thought about film noir and its relationship to the greater project of urban modernity. By examining film noir as a collection (both films and criticism), the binding factor for the collection becomes the representation of the modern urban experience. Moreover, the representation of the modern urban environment allows for the rethinking of film noir and changes it from an autonomous cinematic movement into a component of the larger practice of urban modernity.

Chapter One: Film Noir the Collection

The First Collectors

Although the term film noir was introduced in 1946, the effects and influences of noir criticism did not achieve widespread notice until the 1970s. One of the major works of this later period of interest was Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward's *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, a collection of several hundred urban-based thrillers gathered together under the auspice of film noir. This massive filmography provided detailed statistics, plot synopses, and short critical analyses, all in the hopes of elucidating the question: What is film noir? Noir criticism and writings began in the immediate post-war years and continued today. And yet none has been fully able to explain this cinematic phenomenon. Was film noir a genre, a style, a mood? Did film noir even exist? Silver and Ward's collection attempted to organize film noir through the consideration of the films as representative of an American style. Together, they looked beyond previous arguments, and bluntly stated that [Film noir] is a self-contained reflection of American cultural preoccupations in film form. In short, it is the unique example of a wholly American film style (1). Silver and Ward incorporated films produced from 1929 to their present (1979): highly stylised films; visually empty films; major studio A-pictures; lowly Poverty Row fodder; shadowy, black and white chiaroscuro; vibrant Technicolor; studio-bound productions; neo-realist police procedurals; auteurist masterpieces and filmmakers who have directed as few as three films throughout their entire career. As individual works, the majority of these films have received scant attention, but when collected as film noir they become exemplary of an

American style. James Naremore has divined that Silver, Ward, and their various contributors, all contended that noir is essentially pessimistic or perverse (103). Undoubtedly, there are veins of pessimism and perversion throughout the noir canon, and the encyclopedic *Film Noir* has been very influential to ensuing scholars, providing sundry examples of film noir. However, despite the density of their collection of films, their work has done little to answer the question of what was film noir.

As a system of historical knowledge, the collection has existed for centuries, but its power for interpretation of history has seldom been considered. Walter Benjamin writes:

What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relations to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this “completeness?” It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object’s mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection. (Benjamin 1999, 204-205)

Benjamin was an avid collector of old books, works of art, as well as a discursive array of fragments, quotations, and snippets that would become known as the *Arcades Project*. For him, the act of collecting served two distinct purposes. The first distinction was the creation of a uniquely personal relationship between the collector and the collected objects. The second function of a collection was a much more public endeavour, one in which the collection becomes a source of historical knowledge. Although Benjamin’s collections never reached the “completeness” he was hoping for, today his *Arcades Project* serves both as insight into his personal relationship with his studies of modernity, and as a meandering encyclopedia of the knowledge of an epoch, a splintered view into a specific historical moment.

In his essay “Unpacking my Library,” Benjamin discusses the personal sensations and sentiments involved in collecting. For him, the act of collecting revealed more about the collector and his relationship to his possessions than of the objects collected, for each accrued item contains the power to overwhelm the collector with a flood of memories. He states “Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories.” And only within the eyes of the collector could the disorder of the collection achieve order. The owner’s relationship to the object does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value, but the collector studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate. (60). Benjamin recounts how each object held a personal memory of its accumulation and acquisition, each specific book invoked fond memories of antiquarian auctions, where some books were lost to higher bidders, while some were triumphantly seized through auction house strategies.

Once an object has been collected, it is removed from its original function and context, and placed within a new contextual setting: the collection.

We need only recall what importance a particular collector attaches not only to his object but also to its entire past, whether this concerns the origin and objective characteristics of the thing or the details of its ostensibly external history: previous owners, price of purchase, current value, and so on. All of these- the “objective” data together with the other- come together, for the true collector, in every single one of his possessions, to form a whole magic encyclopedia, a world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object. Here, therefore, within this circumscribed field, we can understand how great physiognomists (and collectors are physiognomists of the world of things) become interpreters of fate. (Benjamin 1999, 207)

The accumulated object is divested of its original meaning, function, and purpose and becomes incorporated within the magical encyclopedia of the collection. The collector becomes the interpreter of the fate of an object, its life before the collection and of its

place within the collection. Benjamin states that once amassed within a collection, an object undergoes the elevation of the commodity to the status of allegory (207). The disassociation of an object from its intended function, and its subsequent inclusion into a collection, isolates the object's past history and its fate as a collected item, fabricating it as allegory, for not only its own history but the greater interpretation of its historical period.

However, the collection was not simply a private, mystical experience of venerated objects, the collection also functioned as a historical system, as an encyclopedia of knowledge. Benjamin states:

Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of "nearness" it is the most binding. Thus, in a certain sense, the smallest act of political reflection makes for an epoch in the antiques business. We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to "assembly" (205).

Within the private order of the collection, the collected object takes on the personal embodiment of "nearness." However, when the collection becomes divested of its personal magic, and enters into the public arena of the antique business, its personal memory becomes frozen, and the "nearness" of the collection becomes part of the knowledge of the epoch. In other words, when the collection becomes open to public scrutiny, its power to invoke personal memory ceases, and its ability to reveal historical knowledge begins. Hence, the public collection reveals specific historical knowledge which, in turn, opens the accumulation of artifacts to interpretations not originally intended by the collector. For Benjamin, the assembled kitsch he found in the Arcades could produce revelations into the past that would be startling and shocking. He felt that these neglected collections would act as an alarm clock, waking the modern world from

its dreamlike state.

In film studies the function of the collection has received little consideration, and yet its presence has been influential for decades. Dana Polan discusses Andrew Sarris' *The American Cinema: Directors and Direction* within the context of a collection. Polan ponders the number of copies of Sarris' book that are filled with check marks and underlined titles. Moreover, as a founding work of auteurism, Sarris' book has ingrained the use of the collection within film studies, simply by implying that there were still more films to be seen, more collecting to be done. Certainly Sarris' book has provoked everyone in film studies to seek out the complete films of the Pantheon directors, and has frustrated many with those seldom-seen and hard-to-find films. Sarris' simple act of gathering together selected titles of various film directors served to create one of film studies first collections and provided the impetus for the film collector. Polan notes the curious sense of empowerment a number of [collectors (he included)] felt when [they] realized that the titles that Sarris had not italicised for being of special interest were in some cases films that he simply had not seen and could not therefore "collect"(10). As Benjamin's old books returned memories of various acquisitions, Polan's heavily check-marked copy of *The American Cinema* invokes memories of the feverish agon to see more films; accumulate more listings. There is frequently competition among collectors, a will to accumulate more examples and to master them better than others have (10). For Polan, *The American Cinema* initiated a fervour amongst auteurist collectors, the desire to collect the masters of American cinema, the thrill of competition between collectors, and the act of "out-Sarrising Sarris" (11). The accumulation of films, under the guise of auteurism, became a personal, even irrational, attempt to obtain completeness from

Sarris' incompleteness.

Polan, like Benjamin, realizes that the collection is much more dynamic than just self-serving accumulation. Polan states that, as an activity of creative collection, auteurism involves more than just a neutral making of lists. The creativity of auteurism bases itself in strategies that construct its objects in value-laden ways. Sarris' book plays a pivotal role. First, by suggesting that auteurism is a process of isolation (some directors are auteurs, some aren't) and of valorisation (some auteurs are higher in the constellation of quality than others). And second, there is an activity of meaning-making: not merely are certain directors declared to be auteurs but specific significations are assigned to them (11). Sarris' lists serve to isolate and validate certain directors as auteurs and attach specific meanings and values to the works of these selected filmmakers. Each auteurist film becomes allegorical through its attached value, changing its position from industrial product to valued art object.

Polan continues discussing auteurism and the collection within a contemporary context. Sarris' book and the succeeding accumulated auteur scholarship created an encyclopedic body of cinematic knowledge. Polan considers that the work of auteur-collectors has become stagnated by what he describes as the real auteurs turning out to be the auteurists rather than the directors they study (13). Polan's vision of auteurism echoes Benjamin's view of the arcades of Paris, an accumulation of historical knowledge that can divulge new paths of understanding. He continues by stating that what the collector's subjectivity has replaced is the sweep of history itself, and its modes of production, not some realm of lone, creative individuals. Polan sees the future of auteurism, in the consideration of auteurism, as itself a historical activity, arising from particular social and

cultural situations, as a way of responding to them (15). Polan turns to James Naremore who locates the development of auteur theory within a specific historical moment in 1950s France. Naremore, following Raymond Williams' notion of "cultural formation," sees the development of auteurism as part of a larger profile of cultural awareness, where auteurism exemplifies post-war French Americanisation and echoes earlier avant-garde movements (16). The consideration of auteurism as part of a historical process opens up the study of the film director into new arenas (2-4). Auteurism, like Benjamin's collections, has become an encyclopedic body of knowledge from where new insight can be divined. No longer does the collection of auteurist films reflect personal memories, nor is it solely concerned with venerated masterpieces, but it becomes a springboard to a greater understanding of the historical and cultural moments from which the films were produced, and their consideration as exemplary cinematic art.

Silver and Ward's *Film Noir* holds a similar place in film history as Sarris's *American Cinema*. Both works draw from the previous work of post-war French intellectuals, incorporating their interests in American culture, and compiling these ideas through the use of the collection. But *Film Noir* is not a collection of auteurist legacy, but a selection of denotations upon urban-based thrillers. Each individual film commentary attempts to explain what is noir about a particular film. For example, Robert Porfirio's commentary on Arthur Ripley's *The Chase* (1946) describes the film as containing equal quantities of what French film critics Borde and Chaumeton outlined in their 1955 article "Towards a Definition of Film Noir" as quintessentially noir: elements of oneirism, eroticism, cruelty, and ambivalence (55). However not all commentaries are as succinct as Porfirio's. Consider Carl Macek's comment for the inclusion of Henry Levin's *Convicted* (1950).

Macek states that there is a noir quality in the film due primarily to the presence of Glenn Ford, and that the noir sensibility would be unobtainable without Ford (63-64). It would seem that the presence of noir characteristics would justify the inclusion of *The Chase* as film noir, but the mere presence of Glenn Ford is hardly enough qualification to consider *Convicted* as film noir. And yet, both films are included in the collection. Therefore it is important to examine *Film Noir* not through individual commentaries, but in the accumulation of these discursive films under the umbrella of a collection of film noir.

The films accumulated in *Film Noir* introduced the cinematic concept of film noir to the personal experience of the collection. As Walter Benjamin's book collection prompted memories of auctions and acquisitions, so too should film noir. Many critics/collectors of noir have brought their own personal memories into the discussion, recognizing the moments when they opened their eyes and all they saw was black. For James Naremore, his noir revelation came while mulling over childhood movie going memories, of escaping Southern humidity, and delighting in urban adventures (5). Nicholas Christopher's noir moment occurred with his first viewing of *Out of the Past*, high on opium in a Parisian theatre called the New Yorker (xi). And Paula Rabinowitz discusses her nostalgic recollection of watching noir's dark melodramas televised on *Million Dollar Movies* and *Dialing for Dollars* (x). The personal memories of noir critics/collectors, like Sarris's check marked and underlined auteurist collection, solicits the personal desire of the collector to accumulate more examples. Despite the size of *Film Noir*, commentary like Macek's remark about Glenn Ford and *Convicted* leads to questions of whether or not Silver, Ward, or Macek had actually seen the film (viewing of the film reveals it to be stylistically dearth, and a near shot-for-shot remake of Howard

Hawks's *Criminal Code* [1931]). Moreover, the incongruity of such commentary functions like Sarris's non italicised titles, implicating that there must be more films overlooked by Silver, Ward, and their contributors that could easily have more substantial noir qualifications than *Convicted*. Hence, like Sarris's auteurist collection, the mere presence of a collection of film noir entails that there are more films to be collected, and more film noirs left unrecognised.

The feverish agon to see more films, to create more lists, has opened film noir to the possibilities that Silver and Ward's collection of canonical noir is incomplete. The possibility that there are more film noirs to be collected, that the noir canon is incomplete, has lead many scholars and collectors to out-Silver-and-Ward Silver and Ward. Subsequently, there have been many noir filmographies that have attempted to incorporate films that were not considered within the scope of *Film Noir*. First, consider the forerunner to Silver and Ward, John S. Whitney's vanguard collection of film noir published in 1976 and based upon the characteristics developed by Raymond Durgnat in his article "The Family Tree of Film Noir" (321). Whitney's considerably smaller filmography includes *The Chase*, but overlooks *Convicted*, and strangely incorporates such questionable films as Michael Curtiz' *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). He states that the former exemplifies noir characterizations, milieu, and icons (324); while the latter demonstrates Hitchcock's *weltanschauung*, which is similar to film noir, and that Hitchcock employs filmic tools similar to that of film noir (349). Silver and Ward see these films as predecessor and successor to film noir, but definitely not genuine noir (324 and 207). Whitney's collection, like Silver and Ward's, has incorporated the work of past collectors and made the noir filmography an essential

tool in the study of this cinematic phenomenon. However, Whitney's initial collection deviates greatly from what has become considered film noir. The interpretive strength of his film collection is not found in specific films, but in his early use of the collection to augment Durnat's delineation of film noir.

As stated earlier, Silver and Ward's *Film Noir* drew from the work of previous collectors, except that, other than Whitney, there were no prior noir filmographies published. However, the collection recurred within the early scholarship of noir. In fact, film noir began with a collection, a collection of wartime American thrillers, released to French audiences after the end of World War Two. The first noir collection was small. As described in the early noir writings of Nino Frank and Jean Pierre Chartier, it incorporated only five films: *The Maltese Falcon*, *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, *Murder, My Sweet*, and *The Lost Weekend*. However, the collection quickly grew. *The Lost Weekend* was soon banished and substituted with *The Woman in the Window*. And later *The Postman always Rings twice* was added to the noir collection (Naremore 13), as well as *This Gun for Hire*, *The Killers*, *Lady in the Lake*, *Gilda*, and *The Big Sleep* (Borde and Chaumeton 17). The filmic collection became a necessity for noir understanding. Raymond Durnat's noir typology "Paint it Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir" incorporated exemplary lists with each film noir type. In "Notes on Film Noir," Paul Schrader relies upon ingrained film lists to illustrate his argument. As Schrader breaks the noir cycle into three distinct units, each discussion is accompanied by a collection of exemplary film noir. Moreover, Robert Porfirio also employs short demonstrative collections within his piece "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the Film Noir." However, the greatest use of the noir collection comes in the form of the appendicized filmography.

These often varying collections can be found in Foster Hirsch's *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen*, Paul Arthur's unpublished dissertation *Shadows on the Mirror: Film Noir and Cold War America 1945-1957*, and Nicholas Christopher's *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*. Frank Krutnick's *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* includes a filmography based upon the cinematic adaptations of hard-boiled literature, many of which are regarded as film noir. And most recently, Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo's *Noir Anxiety* includes a filmography of more than one hundred and seventy film noirs, although the authors only discuss five film noirs within their text. Unlike other cinematic genres, cycles, and periods (for example: Westerns, Screwball Comedies, Pre-Code films), the explanation and definition of film noir is dependent upon the use of the collection as demonstrative of what a film noir is thought to be.

Other noir collectors have taken the noir ideal even further than *Film Noir*. Although many scholarly writings on film noir have included noir collections within their discourse or as added appendices, the proliferation of home videos and cable television has helped to stretch the boundaries of noir collecting to its utmost. Lee Server's "The Black List: Essential Film Noir" has included— and in direct violation of Silver and Wards' delineation of an American style— French crime films and Japanese Yakuza thrillers (153-159). David N. Meyer's *A Girl and a Gun: The Complete Guide to film Noir on Video* confronts fellow noir collectors with a quotation from Jean-Luc Godard— All you need to make a film is a girl and a gun— a dedication to Ida Lupino and Sam Fuller, an acknowledgment to Silver and Ward; and a collection of 102 films from the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany released from the 1930s to the 1990s. Even more exasperating is Paul Duncan's *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal*.

Duncan's collection includes 518 films classified as Pre-Noir films, French Poetic Realist films, Noir from the Classical Period (1940-1960), other American Noirs (1960-1975), Neo-Noirs (1976-1992), and finally, Films Noir from around the world. The foundation of Duncan's collection is to elucidate the average viewer as to whether or not the film you are about to record on home video is a film noir or not (41). And another self-admitted unscholarly collection of film noir is Arthur Lyons *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir*. Lyon's collection focuses upon the disregarded studio B's and Poverty Row crime thrillers, as well as a selection of cheap post-war British crime melodramas. He describes his collection, arising from personal passion for film noir and B movies, and states that his collection invokes an excitement akin to a palaeontologist discovering a dinosaur bone (5). From a scholarly perspective Server, Meyer, Duncan, and Lyons provide no real critical insight. However, their work maintains the basis of film noir as personal collection and exemplifies how the video revolution of the 1990s has spurred noir collection.

Personally, as a film noir collector, I have been drawn to these inconsistent lists and filmographies. For it has been through these accumulations of film noir that I have built my collection. Each new examination of film noir brings something new to my collection. For example, Arthur Lyons' filmography in *Death on the Cheap* contained many lowly B noirs that he has viewed at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences and the UCLA archives, and at this moment are unobtainable for me. However, he also included several films available on video, which I had not yet collected. Upon reading Lyons' book, I was provoked to find as many of these available titles as possible. My film noir collection bristled with the new videos: *Cast a Dark Shadow* (1955), *Destiny* (1944), *The*

Great Flamarion (1945), *Inner Sanctum* (1948), *The Judge* (1949), *The Lady Confesses* (1945), and *Lady in the Death House* (1944). Upon viewing these films, I would discover that the actual noir characteristics of these films are debatable, even negligible; however because of Lyons inclusion, it became necessary for me, as a noir collector, to seek them out and to include them in my collection. Although far from scholarly, Lyons' book has changed the understanding of film noir by expanding the possibilities of what can be included in the film noir collection: ultra-cheap Poverty Row mysteries and British crime melodramas. Consequently, his work has caused the film noir collection to reach beyond a standardised corpus of films to become a more randomly and personally generated set of cinematic examples. Moreover, through the act of collecting, film noir becomes a malleable concept, which is nevertheless grounded in the existence of actual artefacts

The accumulated body of these noir collections, my own included, creates an exemplary encyclopedia of films that can be considered film noir. Like Sarris's auteurism, the collecting of film noir is a process of isolating specific films, removing them from their original function, and attaching new meaning through their presence within the magical encyclopedia of the collection. Once a film has been collected as film noir, it loses its connection to its industrial production. Films of unique generic characteristics lose their industrial classifications once isolated within the noir universe: horror films, such as *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) and *Among the Living* (1941); detective films like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946); or melodramas, such as *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945) and *Caught* (1949). These films are divested of their specific generic traits to become absorbed into noir discourse. As the great physiognomists Silver and Ward have stated, their editorial position is to study film noir

not merely as a genre of American film but as a movement inspired and supported by a collective vision. Their stance may seem arbitrary because they exclude certain films with some noir characteristics simply because they are genre pieces. In their defence, they state:

The determining factors in excluding productions from the comedy, gangster, Western and period genres are simple. The concept that film noir must be grounded in a contemporary setting excludes Westerns and period films. The concept that film noir must have a narrative that is dramatically developed with an underlying seriousness and verisimilitude in exposition excludes comedies. The concept of a complex protagonist with an essential awareness of his or her situation excludes the gangster film. (323)

Silver and Ward outlined their criteria for excluding certain genre films and thereby they developed a process of isolating what they consider to be true film noir. The fate of film noir is thereby dependent upon its placement within the collection. Once within the magical encyclopedia of noir, a film becomes valorised. However, unlike Sarris's *American Cinema*, film noir has no official ranking system of which film is the noirest. And yet, when one peruses the noir collection, one film stands out as having received more critical attention than any other: Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*. Naremore has suggested that one can imagine a large video store where examples of such films [film noir] would be shelved somewhere between gothic horror and dystopian science fiction: in the centre would be *Double Indemnity*, and at either extreme, *Cat People* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (9). Undoubtedly, *Double Indemnity* is the jewel in the noir crown. However, let us again consider two lesser noir films, *The Chase* and *Convicted*. There is an inherent ranking system going on within the claim that *The Chase* is demonstrative of Borde and Chaumeton's noir characteristics, while *Convicted* must rely solely upon the presence of Glenn Ford to qualify as film noir. In other words, the qualifications of *The*

Chase make it a better film noir than *Convicted*. Consequently, *The Chase* would find itself placed closer to *Double Indemnity* on Naremore's video store shelf than *Convicted* would be.

The most important function of the isolated collection of film noir is that, by being collected, these films have a value attached to them. Like auteurism, what was once the commercial product of Hollywood has been given a value above and beyond its initial industrial purpose, and it enters into the allegorical world of the venerated art object. For film noir, the allegorical position as art object is found in its cinematic style. Paul Schrader has stated: film noir is more interested in style than theme (62). However, film noir's style, the American style, is more than just cinematic artistry. Silver and Ward have taken the idea of style beyond the visual realm, when they state:

“Film noir” is literally “black film,” not just in the sense of being full of physically dark images, nor reflecting a dark mood in American society, but equally, almost empirically, as a black slate on which the culture could inscribe its ills and in the process produce a catharsis to help relieve them.

(1)

Film noir becomes an allegorical representation for American society to explore and expel cultural woes, a metaphor for the struggle between good and evil in the American wartime and post-war urban environment.

The magical encyclopedia of film noir has been expanding and developing for more than fifty years. It is a compilation of critical analysis, varied filmographies, cinematic history and personal anecdotes. However, film noir is subject to many of the same problems that Polan has found in the encyclopedia of auteur studies. As Paul Schrader points out, while auteur criticism is interested in how directors are different, film noir is concerned with what they have in common (62). And it is the commonality of these films

that binds the collection of noir. But at the same time, this commonality also allows for the noir collection to become bathetic and bloated, causing film noir to lose its specificity. Hence, the fate of the noir collection is jeopardized by the desire to account for every cinematic shadow: not every bleak film is film noir. It is then necessary for the film noir collection to be unified by one central theme, one indisputable and binding factor that can include all the films within the collection. Therefore, the collector must turn to the first noir critics to isolate their concerns with these films and what it was that made them take notice of these particular films from the hundred of other film produced by Hollywood at that time.

The Critical Origins of Noir

To understand the origins of film noir, one must sort through the collection to excavate the innovative critical developments that would become film noir. Like auteurism, film noir was a product of post-war French cinema culture, and therefore, it can be seen as a historical activity arising in particular social and cultural situations as a way of responding to them (Polan 15). In recognition of the Parisian origins, both Paul Schrader and Raymond Durgnat begin with crediting the post-war cinéphiles. Additionally, James Naremore also gives precedence to these pioneering French film critics, he states:

In one sense the French invented American film noir, and they did so because local conditions predisposed them to view Hollywood in certain ways. As R. Barton Palmer observes, post-war France possessed a sophisticated film culture, consisting of theatres, journals, and “cine-clubs” where movies were treated as art rather than as commercial entertainment. Equally important, the decade after the liberation was

characterized by a strong resurgence of Americanism among French directors and critics, many of whom sought to refashion their art cinema along the more “authentic” lines of Hollywood genre movies. (14-15)

The importation of American cultural objects: movies, music, cars, and even American-style home appliances, became increasingly influential in post-war France. However, the fascinations of the French cinéphile had little influence in Hollywood. Decades later, the Parisian interest in Hollywood films would re-enter American culture through the introduction of the auteur theory and film noir.

Although credit for recognizing film noir has gone to the French, the American cinéphile was not blind to the films that would become noir. Both Siegfried Kracauer and John Houseman were interested in contemporary film production and wrote about films that they designated as “terror films” and “the toughies.” Their work can be seen as a response to the historical moment of post-war cultural production. However, Kracauer and Houseman were not interested in an American influence or style, as they collected these films under a different concentration. In a handful of articles written in the immediate post-war years, both Kracauer and Houseman expressed an earnest concern for the escalating trends of violence, ignorance, and the rising Right-wing extremism portrayed in this newfound cinematic representation of American culture.

Kracauer, himself a collector of films viewed, began to recognize a disturbing shift in post-war Hollywood films. In his 1946 article “Hollywood’s Terror Films: Do they reflect an American State of Mind?” Kracauer discusses and labels a number of films as “terror films,” films that would later be included in the collection of film noir: *Shadow of a Doubt*, *The Stranger*, *The Dark Corner*, *The Lost Weekend*, *The Spiral Staircase*, *Gaslight*, and *Shock* to name just a few. He begins:

Films saturated with terror and sadism have issued from Hollywood in such numbers recently as to become commonplace. The trend undoubtedly has its source in the requirements of wartime propaganda. The original task was to depict the threat of Nazism to the American public . . . But even in wartime, the trend went beyond exposing brutality. Along with anti-Nazi films, a number of movies appeared that cultivated the same kind of horror merely for the sake of entertainment. And now, with the war over, the species continues to flourish and to increase. (132)

Kracauer felt that these films had a predilection for presenting crime and violence in the setting of the everyday. He realized that Hollywood has always been fond of the depiction of violence, but feels that the post-war films have taken the representation of violence to new and more intensified levels (132). Moreover, he saw amongst the recent film productions a demonstration not of outright sadism, but of the permanent menace of it (133).

For Kracauer, the post-war violence of the terror films originated directly from Hollywood's propagandising of Nazi brutality. However, the brutality of violence that grew throughout the war years did not dissipate after the end of hostilities. The violence simply became ingrained into the social order of everyday life. He described the situation of post-war American society and its own home-grown version of Nazism. Kracauer boldly and perhaps foolishly declared:

Apprehension is accumulated; threatening allusions and dreadful possibilities evoke a world in which everybody is afraid of everybody else, and no one knows when or where the ultimate and inevitable horror will arrive. When it does arrive, it arrives unexpectedly; erupting out of the dark from time to time in a piece of unspeakable brutality. That panic which in the anti-Nazi films were characterized as peculiar to the atmosphere of life under Hitler now saturates the whole world. (133)

He expressed concern for this shift in brutality from anti-Nazi films such as *This Island is Mine* (1942) and *Joan of Paris* (1943), which both depict characters undergoing Nazi

torture, and that these violent images were being transferred into the everyday of American urban life (134). Hence, the promise of assurance and security, which counterbalance the brutality of the Nazis in wartime films was not fulfilled in the post-war Hollywood films, or by implication, everyday American life.

Furthermore, Kracauer believes that movies cater to popular demand, and reflect popular tendencies and inclinations; therefore, the violent imagery he finds in the “terror films” has a corresponding effect in actual American society. He continues by examining two post war films *The Dark Corner* and *The Lost Weekend*. Both pictures feature acts of what Kracauer describes as morbid brutality, but more important, both films locate these acts of sadistic violence within the identifiable city space of New York’s Third Avenue: “The ironwork, the bars, the pawnshops of Third Avenue generate a region of anarchy and distress”(134). Moreover, he asserts that there is nothing accidental about this. The people of the end-of-war urban space are emotionally out of joint and inhabit a realm ruled by bodily sensations and material stimulants. The identifiable elements of the urban location create a realm in which dumb objects loom monstrosly high and become signal posts or stumbling blocks, enemies or allies. This obstructiveness of inanimate objects is infallible evidence of an inherent concern with mental disintegration (134). Hence, the acts of violence coupled with the recognizable urban spaces introduces Nazi-like brutality into the everyday world of post-war America, which in turn causes the widespread phenomenon of mental disintegration.

Kracauer pronounces that the source of the widespread inner disintegration is fear. During the war period, American society was captivated with the hope of winning “freedom from fear” which stems from a greater increase in the feeling of fear (135). The

anti-Nazi Hollywood film, following the necessities of wartime propaganda, created tense situations based upon a concentrated fear, but the present post-war thrillers have been incapable of alleviating the pressure created by said fear, which then transfers into real life. Consequently, once within post-war society, this uncontrollable fear renders society itself impotent, and unable to provide shelter for the individual, or the principles that would compel the individual's integrity (135). The mental disintegration finds its origins in the evolution of wartime insecurity and fear of an imposing enemy, the Nazis, into a state of unfulfilled relief. The Nazis had been destroyed, but the fear needed to spur the populous into action remains, and now it permeates the everyday existence of urban life.

Amazingly, Kracauer does not see this mental disintegration or proliferation of fear as an unconscious act or social inevitability, but he sees it as a deliberate agenda.

The kind of horror formerly attributed only to life under Hitler, in the anti-Nazi thrillers [that] has been acclimated to the American scene, is more than accidental. Aside from genuine and constant affinity between sadism and fascism, it seems probable that the sadistic energies at large in our society at the present moment are specifically suited to provide fuel for fascism . . . The particular fear we have to deal with here springs, in the final analysis, from a crucial dilemma. Caught in the snarls of the free-enterprise system, we nevertheless view with apprehension the totalitarian potentialities inherent in any sort of planned economy. Democracy, with its individual freedom, seems economically out of joint, so that it must resort to makeshifts and breed nightmarish dreams of fascist pseudo-solutions worse than the ills they are intended to cure. (135-136)

Kracauer believed that film has a direct correlation to society's propensities. He sees the shift in intense violent representation as evidence of a political shift toward the Right. Of course, Kracauer was correct in sensing the change in American politics and the move from the national socialist policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the more conservative outlook of post-war Presidents Harry Truman and later Dwight Eisenhower.

Kracauer takes a more specific and political focus in his 1948 article: "Those Movies with a Message." He examines a diverse group of films, *The Farmer's Daughter*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, as well as an array of future film noirs: *Boomerang*, *Crossfire*, and *The Long Night*. In this article, Kracauer is not concerned with the build-up of desensitising sadistic violence, but the depletion of a liberal message. Again, he declares forthrightly that "Films supplement real life," and "Films mirror our reality" (567). Hence, he believes that the current trends in Hollywood films precisely reflect the greater American societal whole.

Kracauer recalls the wartime narrative convention in which some character would deliver a speech glorying in hopes for the future. "I hope . . . that all together we will try-- try out of memory of our anguish-- to reassemble our broken world into a pattern so firm and so fair that another great war can never again be possible" (*The Story of G.I. Joe*). This gospel of peace was invariably entwined with a eulogy of democratic ideals and a promise to live up to them after the war (567-568). Certainly there were hundreds of wartime films, which preached the same message of a better world after terror and fear had been eliminated, and Kracauer recognizes that in the immediate end-of-war period, there were a few Hollywood films which did continue this wartime convention. He discusses William Wyler's *The Best Years of our Lives* and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, and finds that both films promote social progress through the depiction of post-war optimism (568). However, Kracauer argued that the post-war period would forsake the promises of security and assurance and the optimistic post-war film would be short lived.

Additionally, Kracauer observes a tendency for these post-war films to undermine

their liberal message. He states:

But there is a strange inconsistency in these “progressive” films. Upon closer inspection one cannot help noticing that they reveal the profound weakness of the very cause for which they try to enlist sympathy. No doubt they champion social progress within the dimensions of plot and dialogue, but in the less obvious dimensions they manage to suggest that liberal thought receding rather than advancing . . . Instead of showing the strength of liberalism, they testify to its extreme fragility. (568-569)

To exemplify his stance, Kracauer chooses the highly regarded soon-to-be film noir *Crossfire*. In the film, Kracauer finds the investigative figure of the District Attorney to be completely ineffectual in his masquerade of toughness. He describes the detective as “far from the conquering hero, and a blasé man-about-town playing at being the liberal-minded sleuth (569). Albeit the D.A. professes liberal values about racial harmony and living life for the greater good of all, his aloof demeanour and lack of dynamism in the investigation present his “progressive” attitude as hollow and meaningless. Kracauer also finds this liberal front and lack of convictions in other characters: the ex-Sergeant in *The Best Years of Our Lives* and in the drunken prison doctor in *Brute Force*, another future film noir. He states “All these characters suggest that liberalism is on the defensive” (569).

Kracauer continues by discussing the presence of returning veterans in Hollywood films. He states that the ex-G.I. is the potential recipient of the liberal gospel, but these characters are rarely seen on the screen. Instead, the returning veteran is presented as visionless, at the mercy of the wind, benumbed even in lovemaking, and that they drift about in a daze bordering on a stupor. The guise of the discharged soldier assures us that they are now average individuals, stunned by the shock of readjustment (570). Like the District Attorney in *Crossfire*, the returning war veteran, a figure that should be

empowered with a “progressive” attitude, is instead presented as weakened, disenfranchised, and a victim of mental disintegration. The image of the ineffectual ex-G.I. permeated many post-war films, but this figure was most prominent in noir films. Kracauer points toward *Crossfire*, *Boomerang*, and *The Long Night*, but these are a few of the numerous other fascinating noirs that presented similar returning Veterans: *The Blue Dahlia*, *The Chase*, *Criss-cross*, and *Desperate*. Also of note is that this phenomenon of discharged and damaged veterans continued into the Korean war period with films like *Quicksand* and *Human Desire*.

Kracauer is less accusing than in his early article “Hollywood Terror films.” He does not directly point the finger at the new Right-wing power structure of post-war America. And yet he maintains his conviction that films are directly representational of society’s circumstances. He states:

Our post-war films present a common man reluctant to heed the voice of reason and a liberal spokesman unable to run the emotional blockade around him. I am aware, of course, that this is not intended. But there it is. (571).

Now two years later and with less accusatorial language, Kracauer still maintains that there has been a dramatic shift in representation within Hollywood films. Faced with the growing influence of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the HUAC trials, Kracauer has toned down his finger-pointing. The shift in American culture is no longer a deliberate form of propaganda, but an unintentional shift in society. Consequently, he presents the same idea of lost integrity within American culture, but now he finds that these changes are unconscious and inevitable.

However, Kracauer cannot fully follow the ineffectual nature of the D.A. in *Crossfire*,

nor the drunken doctor in *Brute Force*. He cannot completely acquiesce to the power structure of post-war extremism. Instead, he cuts to the heart of the problem and metaphorically declares:

Yet evil does exist, and it cannot be drowned in bright visions. Even the most effective parade of hopes is thoroughly ineffective today—eyewash rather than white magic. A more fully orchestrated reasoning is needed to stir up hibernating minds, a reasoning that comes to grips with dark powers that impatiently lie in wait to close in on us. Instead of lightly passing over them, we should acknowledge their existence and, so to speak, live on intimate terms with them. Blank opposition to evil is futile. Evil yields only to an embrace, to a change in the substance of what cannot otherwise be conquered. (572)

It may be hard to believe, but there it is. Kracauer blames the loss of progressive liberal attitudes in post-war America with the problem of an underlying evil in society.

Despite Kracauer's brash accusations, his was not the only voice of concern about the popular trends in post-war Hollywood product. Film producer and critic John Houseman took up his pen against what he described as the current trend in "tough" films. In a 1947 *Hollywood Quarterly* article "Today's Hero: A Review," Houseman discusses the repercussions of the presentation of a disaffected heroic figure. He begins by describing the state of film in American society:

Every generation has its myth—its own particular dream in which are mirrored the preoccupations of its waking hours. In years of rich artistic activity the myth becomes absorbed into the intellectual and emotional life of its time. In a period of general anxiety and low cultural energy like the present dream reveal itself naked and clear. Then we witness the fascinating and shocking spectacle of a nation's most pressing fears and secret desires publicly exhibited in whatever art form happens, at the moment, to be most immediately accessible to the largest mass of its people. Today this art form is the Hollywood-made motion picture. (161)

Houseman's declaration about Hollywood film echoes those of Kracauer that there is a direct relationship between the movie's silver screen and the audience's greater social

position. Hence, the problems that Houseman finds in post-war films coincide with the problems in post-war society.

According to Houseman, the problem is not that the current “tough” movie is solely a lurid Hollywood invention, but that its patterns and its characteristics coincide too closely with other symptoms of national life, and that these symptoms provide a fairly accurate reflection of the neurotic personality of the United States of America in the year 1947 (161). He singles out Howard Hawks’ *The Big Sleep* as exemplary of society’s general anxiety and low cultural energy. Houseman feels that the film adaptation varies greatly from the novel; the cynical and hard-boiled treatment given by Chandler has lost its edge through the dramatization. The detective, Philip Marlowe, who was an instrument in the plot and the other characters who were colourful signposts in a complicated maze have become disconnected and powerless. Houseman sees the cinematic hero and heroine of *The Big Sleep* as both utterly lacking in ideals and ambition (161-162). Furthermore, he believes that the depiction of vacant heroes is inextricably linked to the woes of post-war America. Again, he echoes Kracauer’s previous statements.

The “tough” movie, generally speaking, is without personal drama and therefore without personal solution or catharsis of any kind. It almost looks as if the American people, turning from anxiety and shock of war, were afraid to face their personal problems and the painful situations of their national life. (163)

Houseman identifies *The Big Sleep*, a film which would become regarded as a canonical film noir, as representative of the social problems of anxiety and apathy in post-war America.

After Houseman’s condemnation of *The Big Sleep* and contemporary cultural malaise, the pages of *Hollywood Quarterly* became the site of a short and heated debate. In his

1947 response to Houseman's accusations, Lester Asheim fired back with a contrary piece titled "The Film and the Zeitgeist." In his article, Asheim explains that despite Houseman's reproach, the current trend in Hollywood films was far from the desolate delineation of Houseman's blasé hero. Asheim volleys by stating that certainly Houseman's example of *The Big Sleep* is suitable to discuss the phenomenon of the current "tough" cycle, but the film and the cycle is hardly representative of the entire universe of Hollywood's productions. Asheim quotes *Variety*, a Gallop poll, and the previous week's box-office receipts, and from this information he divines that of the twenty-four separate films in these groups, only three— *The Big Sleep*, *The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers*, and *The Killers*— can really be called part of the tough cycle. Asheim also points out that half of the films in his survey are films of pure entertainment, light and gay, preferably with music; yet no claim is made that post-war America is a light-hearted, song-in-its-heart haven of romance and the joys of youth (415). He concludes with a precisely aimed attack on Houseman:

What must constantly be borne in mind is that an analysis of film content provides an insight only into the *producers' idea* of the national taste, and not the national taste itself. To select a single isolated example which supports a preconceived thesis is thus to remove one's study that much further from the reality one wishes to measure. (416)

Therefore, Asheim does not see the current trend in "tough" films as representational of the larger universe of Hollywood films nor as a depiction of the greater American society, only as Houseman's personal agenda.

Not to be outdone, Houseman counters Asheim's attack. Again in the pages of *Hollywood Quarterly* is "Houseman replies to Asheim." In his terse response Houseman finds Asheim's argument unanswerable, from the four hundred and fifty feature pictures

produced there are bound to reveal many elaborate patterns of public reaction and taste. But Houseman steadfastly stands by his thesis, that the numbers of new films that compliment the cycle of “tough” films do represent a shift in American society. Moreover, Houseman facetiously agrees with Ashiem, stating that a proper and elaborate diagnosis of public taste on the basis of box-office returns could and should be attempted.

Such an analysis might be sociologically valuable, but critically it would be negligible. How strange a spectacle the statisticians can make of themselves when they venture into the art world is clearly demonstrated by the grotesque, if lucrative, antics of the ubiquitous Dr. Gallop. (89)

Despite Asheim’s bean-counting, the development of a “tough” cycle of films in post-war America continued, and according to Houseman, was representative of dramatic shifts in American culture and society.

When examining the writings of Kracauer and Houseman with the retrospect knowledge of the noir collection, many noir motifs can be observed: post-war readjustment, alienation, fear, violence, and the ineffective hero. Moreover, these new social problems are located in the cinematic representation of urban space (*The Lost Weekend* and *The Long Night*) or in films which are inextricably linked to their urban settings (*The Big Sleep*). Moreover, although neither critic employed the term, the majority of films selected by Kracauer and Houseman will become later known as film noir. But most important, the anarchy and distress, the anxiety and fear, depicted in these noir films find their way into the world of the everyday of the urban American experience. This raises the question, if Kracauer’s and Houseman’s concerns over “terror” and “tough” films provide insight into the problems of the everyday world of the modern American city: did the originating French film noir critics find similar concerns

with these films? The answer is yes.

As stated earlier, the term film noir originated with the post-war Parisian film critics, and not with the waning liberal attitudes of the American Left. Although many noir scholars have given credit to the innovations of the French cinéphile, few have taken a focused look at what the originators of film noir actually wrote. The ideal of black cinema, dark film, or film noir originated with two articles written by Nino Frank and Jean Pierre Chartier, both of which were published contemporaneously with Kracauer's "Hollywood Terror Films" in 1946. These brief, influential, and often overlooked articles examined a collection of wartime American films released to post-war French audiences. What these newly liberated cinéphiles witnessed in the recesses of Hollywood films was a trend toward a darker, more sinister depiction of American urban life: a depiction which is startlingly similar to the world envisioned by Kracauer and Houseman.

Nino Frank's article "The Crime Adventure Story: A New Kind of Detective Film" is credited with introducing the term film noir. Published in *L'Écran Français*, Frank gathers the first collection of film noir from a larger body of Hollywood films released to the newly liberated French population. He discusses how these new detective films, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, and *Murder, My Sweet* are different from the traditional film versions of the detective fiction of Conan Doyle, S.S. Van Dine, and Ellery Queen. He contends that the difference of these new detective films is a sense of "lived experience" (22). Unlike the focus of pre-war films upon the central detective figure, these new films concentrate upon the characters (23). He explains:

So these "dark" films, these film noirs, no longer have anything in common with the ordinary run of detective novels. Because they are purely psychological stories, action, either violent or exciting, matters less then

faces, behaviour, words– hence the verisimilitude of the characters of ordinary detective films will seem puppets. Today’s spectator is sensitive to nothing more than *this impression of real life, of lived experience*, and – why not?– of certain disagreeable realities that do in truth exist, whose representation never served any purpose; the struggle of life is no invention of our time. (italics mine, 23)

For Frank the most important differentiation between the old-fashioned detective film and the new dark film is the relationship to reality, to the “lived experience” of everyday life. Unlike the cardboard conventions, which surrounded Sherlock Holmes, Phil Vance and Ellery Queen, these new cinematic investigators were confronted with complex and deeply psychological figures, which in turn gave these new films a greater sense of lived experience.

In “The Americans are Making Dark Films too,” published in *Revue du Cinéma*, Jean Pierre Chartier discusses *Double Indemnity*, *Murder, My Sweet*, *The Lost Weekend*, and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* within the context of their inherent pessimism and disgust for humanity. He explains that even if these films make room for the appearance of a young woman who shifts the hope for progress to the next generation the characters of these films are more or less immoral, especially the female characters which he finds particularly horrid (25). Chartier examines the malfeasant sexual appetites of Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* and Clair Trevor in *Murder, My Sweet*, and declares:

It is evident how important sexual attraction is in the construction of these plots. Through a kind of contradiction due to convention, the censor, insensitive to the despairing pessimism that emanates from these characters, has prohibited any representation that would reveal the true importance of this motive for their actions. The result is that what these characters do seems controlled by an unshakable criminal destiny (26).

These characters are driven by an inner disintegration and unable to escape the general anxiety of the lived experience, they succumb to their unshakable criminal destiny.

Chartier finds that the world portrayed in these “dark” films has been compared to the pre-war French films of the Poetic realist period, but states that there is very little similarity.

Insatiable Messalinas, brutal or senile husbands, young men willing to kill in order to win favours of a femme fatale, unrepentant drunks, these are the charming characters of the films we have analysed. There has been discussion of a French school of film noir, but *Le Quai de Brumes* and *L'Hôtel du Nord* at least are characterized by hints of revolt. In them, love offers the mirage of a better world, while an implicit social reform opens the door to hope; and if the characters are indeed desperate, they elicit our pity and our sympathy. Nothing like that here. These characters are monsters, criminals, or victims of illness; nothing excuses them, and they act as they do simply because of a *fatal, inner evil* (italics mine, 27).

Therefore, according to Chartier, the characters ensconced in film noir are inherently evil, bad from the get-go, unable to suppress their fears and desires, and they willingly enter into a world of crime and immorality.

The accumulation of scholarly work, fan-based enthusiasm, and vast filmographies that encompass the film noir collection contains the knowledge of an epoch. Like Benjamin's *Arcades Project* which has become a fragmented encyclopedia of modernity in nineteenth century Paris, the knowledge contained in the noir encyclopedia becomes its twentieth century counterpart, revealing the continuation of modernity into the American urban experience. Kracauer, Houseman, Frank, and Chartier expressed through their own observations and considerations their concerns for the change in Hollywood's cinematic representation of modern American life. When collected together, these writers have found that Hollywood's depiction of American urban life has a precise correspondence to the greater reality of modern life. Through the characters found in the urban space created by Hollywood, the industry has produced a representation of the actual streets and alleys

of the real city. The lived experience of the everyday is now haunted by the spectre of Nazi-like, erratic and unforeseen sadistic violence. The modern heroes have become ineffectual, vacant, and lack ambition. The omnipresent villains have become increasingly monstrous and have succumbed to a fatal inner evil. These urban figures, so common to film noir, find that their inception is not in the Hollywood studio system, but on the streets and in the experience of modern American urban life.

The contributions of these original collectors/critics have often been overlooked by many contemporary noir scholars. Therefore, the recognition of their contribution becomes part of the privileged view of the noir collector. Moreover, it is important to realize that the original focus of these scholars was upon the representation of the modern city, the figures that dwelled in the city, and the imminent danger of everyday life in the modern city. Therefore, I feel that the contributions of the earliest noir critics, especially their common concern for the representation the modern urban space, should be the foundation for the noir collection.

Chapter Two: From the Everyday to the Exceptional

Style and Veneration

When the initial noir collectors/critics looked at the accrued urban film texts, they saw a direct causal relationship with the social and political conditions of late 1940s and early 1950s. However, as time passed between the initial gatherings and the later noir critics of the 1970s, the focus of film noir collecting changed from a direct concern over modern life to concerns over style and cinematic tradition. The value of film noir was reoriented from a direct representation of the modern American city to a venerated art object, one that was unified by the commonality of style. Following Benjamin's definition of collections, a collection is first isolated from its initial function. The act of dissociating film noir from its industrial production was performed by the first collectors/critics. Later, according to Benjamin, the collected objects gain an allegorical meaning, by becoming valued art objects. The veneration of film noir centered around the aesthetic concerns of the critics of the 1970s. Moreover, Benjamin states that each collector brings their own personal desires to their collections. For the aesthetic critics, Hollywood's production of film noir was the height of stylised cinematic imagery; therefore, film noir became regarded as an aesthetic object.

When the first critics isolated various urban dramas as "terror films," "toughies," or "film noir," they did so because of the mutual representation of urban space. The concentration of the earliest noir critics has been described by R. Barton Palmer as a "sociological approach to the analysis of film noir." He contends that the earliest phase of noir insight focused upon the assumption that Hollywood films were impersonal

“industrial” products, whose ultimate author is the studio system, and that American commercial films were ultimately to be judged by the effects, good or bad, that they create for their eager consumers (8). Hence, we can consider the writings of Kracauer, Houseman, Frank and Chartier as belonging to the first phase, the sociological phase, of noir criticism. However, as Palmer points out, this first phase was to be overlooked for an aesthetic approach which disconnected film noir from its industrial origins. The aesthetic approach to film noir was centered around *politique des auteurs* or the auteur theory (8). Film noir came under the influence of director-orientated criticism. The compatibility of film noir with auteurism was fuelled by the lionized filmmakers who were also responsible for many notable film noirs: Alfred Hitchcock, Nicholas Ray, Edward Dmytryk, Robert Aldrich, John Huston and Samuel Fuller (9). Hence, the film noir collection becomes isolated and disassociated from its original function; it was no longer an industrial product. For the aesthetic collectors/critics, film noir is now considered as an aesthetic and stylised cinematic phenomenon: a celebrated art object.

Under the auspice of the aesthetic approach, film noir criticism moved into stylistic analysis. Critics focused upon the distinctive cinematic style of film noir, and the director’s usage of heavy shadows, rainy streets, sharp camera angles, and reflective surfaces to create tension and unease. Paul Schrader was one of the first and most influential of the noir aesthetic critics. In his 1972 article “Notes on Film Noir,” he discusses the importance of acknowledging noir style. Schrader itemizes the dominant stylistic trends of noir: scenes lit for night; the preference of oblique and vertical lines over horizontal; equal lighting emphasis for actors and settings alike; compositional tension over physical action; an almost Freudian attachment to water; the love of

romantic narration; and the use of a complex chronological order (57-58). Moreover, for Schrader, these stylistic items mark film noir as a period of immense creativity; and a randomly picked film noir is likely to be a better made film than a randomly selected silent comedy, musical, western and so on. As a whole, the film noir period achieved an unusually high level of artistry (61). Schrader believes that the creativity of the film noir period was not the exclusive domain of auteurs, but that film noir enabled all filmmakers to indulge in stylistic expressions. He continues by declaring that the best work of many filmmakers is film noir; some directors who began in film noir and never regained their original heights; and other directors who made great films also made great film noirs (62). For Schrader, film noir was an egalitarian locus, and provided filmmakers the opportunity to achieve a certain level of stylistic sophistication.

However, his sharpest criticism is aimed at the American film critics and their snubbing of film noir and its dynamic aesthetics. According to Schrader, American film critics have always been slow on the uptake when it comes to visual style, and the critical neglect of film noir associated with American film criticism has been because American critics have been traditionally more interested in theme than style (62-63). Schrader condemns the sociological approach to film criticism and the emphasis upon theme over style. For him, film noir is about the use of visual style to create a mood within a certain film and not about the representation of the lived experience of modern life. Subsequently, Schrader's edict has become very influential with much of the literature on film noir. Many critics began to see film noir as a cinematic exhibition where directors, great and small, could let loose, go crazy, and indulge in the excessive use of light and shadows, abstract angles and complex narratives.

Despite Schrader's egalitarian approach to style, film noir style and auteurism became increasingly linked together. In their 1974 article "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir," Janey Place and Lowell Peterson situate style above all other approaches to film noir by focusing upon notable auteurs.

Nearly every attempt to define film noir has agreed that visual style is the consistent thread that unites the very diverse films that together comprise this phenomenon. Indeed no pat political or sociological explanations—"post-war disillusionment," "fear of the bomb," "modern alienation"—can coalesce in a satisfactory way such disparate yet essential film noir as *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, *In a Lonely Place*, *The Big Combo*, and *Kiss Me Deadly*. The characteristic film noir moods of claustrophobia, paranoia, despair, and nihilism constitute a world view that is expressed not through the films' terse, elliptical dialogue, not through their confusing, often insoluble plot, but ultimately through their remarkable style. (65)

Following Schrader's lead, Place and Peterson argue that noir style must be the primary focus for noir interpretations. But they ignore Schrader's egalitarianism and concentrate their proposal upon a few carefully selected film noirs, those directed by renowned filmmakers: Hitchcock and Ray, and Joseph H. Lewis, Robert Aldrich, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Robert Siodmak, Billy Wilder, and Jules Dassin. For Place and Peterson film noir is an auteur-centered cinema, where the style of acknowledged directors overshadow any possible sociological explanations.

Although Schrader declares that film noir is not an auteur-based cinema, he sees it is a stylistic free-for-all, open to anyone willing to indulge, and Place and Peterson's comments are firmly rooted in auteurism and their bias towards specific filmmakers. They all agree that the aesthetic approach to film noir is the binding factor in the noir collection. However, the collected filmographies of film noir have created an enormous corpus of films. A body of work that is so large that an argument based solely upon style

alone cannot successfully connect all of these sundry films. Certainly there are many stylish film noirs, some made by acclaimed filmmakers, but not every film noir was an exercise in style and not every film noir can be designated through its excessive use of style. In an attempt to unify the noir collection through an aesthetic interpretation, collectors/critics have focused upon the cinematic stylistic of noir ancestors as an attempt to legitimate their approach.

The most obvious aesthetic legacy of film noir is its descent from German Expressionism and the influx of European filmmakers throughout the 1930s. Yet, the history between the German film industry and Hollywood is as circuitous as the entangled noir narrative. Briefly, the influx of German émigrés, as well as many other European filmmakers, was not a single cohesive movement but more like a decade long trickle of film directors, cinematographers, and composers. Early émigrés include Karl Freund and Edgar G. Ulmer, who were major influences in the look of the Universal and MGM horror films of the early Thirties. Throughout the decade, Hollywood saw the arrivals of numerous filmmakers who would become associated with the Germanic noir style, including Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Billy Wilder, Anatole Litvak, Robert Siodmak, W. Lee Wilder, John Brahm, Fred Zinneman, Max Ophüls, as well as cinematographer John Alton, composers Max Steiner and Franz Waxman, and UFA trained Englishman Alfred Hitchcock. Interestingly, many of the later émigrés, specifically Billy Wilder and Siodmak, came to Hollywood through Paris, where they were exposed to the French Poetic Realist films of Jean Renoir, Julien Duvivier, and René Clair (Although Renoir, Duvivier and Clair were in Hollywood during the film noir period, their contributions to the noir cycle are minimal, even negligible). Consequently, much of the visual tradition of

film noir has been traced back to the imagery pioneered at Decla-Bioscop, Nero Films and UFA.

To add value to the noir collection, Foster Hirsch has followed the trajectory of German Expressionism as an art movement in an attempt to connect with the noir aesthetic. He discusses the development of the themes of night, death, psychic disorder, and social upheaval upon German silent film:

The German Expressionist dramas were set in claustrophobic studio-created environments where physical reality was distorted. Stories of the loss or the impossibility of individual freedom dominated the “haunted screen.” Images of death, of a relentless fate, and of the divided soul appeared with insistent repetition. To convey their dark themes, the films developed a distinct visual vocabulary consisting primarily of chiaroscuro and distortions of time and space. (54)

However, the relationship between German Expressionism and film noir is decidedly more complicated. Hirsch explains that the relationship goes beyond visual style to include moral sensibility. The shadowed and fractured visual space intensifies the mood (*stimmung*) of the negative stories. Moreover, the conflicting shapes and patterns of movement convey restlessness and chaos, as if the physical world has assumed the dementia of the bewitched characters (54). Hirsch cites the examples of Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), F. W. Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* (1924), and Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), and states that these Expressionist films with their tormented protagonists and stylised urban settings, exerted deep influence on the subject matter and the visual temper of the American film noir (57).

The jump between the German films of the Twenties and the noir films of the Forties was not a succinct movement. Throughout the Twenties and Thirties, the legacy of German Expressionist techniques was employed for specific purposes in Hollywood.

First, the shadowy techniques were implemented for prestige or overtly artistic films, such as Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), John Ford's *The Informer* (1935) and Fritz Lang's first Hollywood films: *Fury* (1936) and *You Only Live Once* (1937). These films would utilize the conspicuous artiness of Expressionism to convey the weightiness of the film's social message. However, Expressionism was not exclusively reserved for arty social commentary. The other continuing use of German Expressionism in Hollywood was through the portrayal fear and menace. The employment of unstable imagery was ideal for urban based genre films, specifically the horror films of Freund (*The Mummy*, 1932 and *Mad Love*, 1935) and Ulmer (*The Black Cat*, 1934). And in addition, expressionist aesthetics found their way into the shadowy world of Warner Brother's Pre-Code urban thrillers, the horror films (*Doctor X*, 1932 and *Mystery in the Wax Museum*, 1933) and the gangster films (*Little Caesar* and *Public Enemy*, both 1931). The legacy of Expressionism in Hollywood maintained both the overt artistry and urban menace of the earlier German films, and through the endurance of stylistic possibilities of artfulness and menace found its way into burgeoning film noir of the early 1940s.

When Hollywood began to place specific interest in producing midrange budget films to fill the demand for double-bill programmers, the shadowy world of German Expressionism was uniquely suited to satisfy artistic impulses and to create an uncertain atmosphere within the budget-restricted studio crime melodramas. Many of the earliest film noir dramas combined the artiness of expressionistic techniques with the menace of an unstable, threatening, urban environment: *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940), *Among the Living* (1941), *I Wake Up Screaming* (1942), *Journey into Fear* (1943), and *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). But perhaps the most effective early film noir to exemplify the

amalgamation of Germanic visual style and urban uncertainty is Robert Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1944). Robert Porfirio states that the film incorporates Siodmak's Germanic sensibilities with the image of a desperate innocent loose at night in New York and that the whole noir world is developed almost entirely through mise-en-scene. Moreover, the tour de force jazz sequence constructed from intercutting shots of Elisha Cook Jr., reaching orgiastic fervour as he climaxes his drum solo with shots of the wordless sexual innuendoes of Ella Raines, Siodmak brilliantly interweaves expressionistic decor with the American idiom. Moreover, Porfirio states that if the sequence were viewed without sound it would be indistinguishable from one of the classic German films of the 1920s (226). Porfirio's observations of *Phantom Lady* exemplify the meeting of Germanic style and the urban experience found in film noir. The mixture of New York at night with the stylised imagery of the past, the amalgamation of art and menace, could be exemplified by any of the previously mentioned film noirs. Hence, the legacy of German Expressionism's dementia of the bewitched found itself translated into the stark jagged looming shadows that stretched across city streets, fractured the interiors of seedy apartments, and infiltrated into the subconscious of many a dream sequence to become the hallmark of the studio film noir.

However, the arty and menacing world of German Expressionism was not the only cinematic influence upon the visual style of film noir. The other significant contributor to noir stylistics was Italian neorealism. Forster Hirsch follows the contemporary influence of the films of Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Luchino Visconti. He states that the Italian filmmakers were renowned for *not* distorting or refracting reality in their films (he notes that this is never a simple matter); moreover, they concentrated upon

contemporary material; they used their cameras as neutral recording devices; their goal was to capture a sense of the flow of reality; and their landmark films were notable for their absence of stylistic flourish (66). Hirsch continues by focusing on key elements of Italian neorealism: the grainy quality of images; natural lighting; location photography; frames packed with the background movement of the city; the uninflected camerawork and editing; performers who seemed like, and often were, real people; and most important the scrupulous avoidance of aesthetic effects (66-67). Hirsch's last criteria of neorealism reveals the contradictory state within the work of the Italians, he states that the neorealists were adamant about not using aesthetic effects, but Hirsch's criteria are based solely upon aesthetics: grainy images, natural lighting non-professional actors. Hence Italian neorealism's avoidance of style becomes their style, and it is the denial of an aesthetic style that Hirsch accredits to influencing the look of many realist film noirs.

The realist look of many post-war Hollywood films that Hirsch attributes to the noir period is as much due to the influence of Louis de Rochemont and his *March of Time* newsreel series as it is the influence of the Italian neorealists. The semi-documentary technique employed by de Rochemont, and director Henry Hathaway in their crime films paralleled those of the Italian neorealists: the proliferation of location shooting, the use of unknown actors, and most importantly, frames packed with the background movement of the city. In the *Film Noir* entry for *House on 92nd Street*, Carl Marek and Alain Silver acknowledge the stylistic influence of *March of Time* and the newsreel semi-documentary techniques.

Utilizing location photography and a stentorian narrator, the film possesses a surface realism not common to movies of that period. The film boasts that it was based on actual F.B.I. cases, with only the names being

changed; and director Hathaway chose to shoot the film in the actual locales of the original incidents. Many of the actors in the film were non-professional and some were even actual F.B.I. personnel. (135)

Moreover, Marek and Silver acknowledge that the innovation of the realist aesthetic and the creation of the semi-documentary crime film inspired many filmmakers looking for a greater sense of urban reality (135). From de Rochemont's original foray with *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), he later produced *Call Northside 777* (1948) and *Kiss of Death* (1949), the use of semi-documentary techniques flourishes with films like *Berlin Express*, *The Naked City*, *T-Men*, and *The Street with No Name* (1948); *C-Man*, *He Walked by Night*, and *White Heat* (1949), and *The Asphalt Jungle*, *D.O.A.*, *Panic in the Streets*, *Side Street*, *South Side 1-1000*, and *Union Station* (1950), and it would continue throughout the 1950s.

Whether or not the aesthetic noir collectors/critics attributed the realist influence that ran through the film noir period to the work of the Italians or to de Rochemont, the use of location shooting, non-professional actors, and urban backgrounds became one half of the unifying factor for the aesthetic approach. Together, the legacy of Expressionism and the parallel currents of Realism were employed by aesthetic critics to justify the collection of film noir under the guise of stylistic integrity, hence the consideration of film noir as an art object. However, the enormous collection of film noir cannot be fully accounted for by denoting the cinematic style trends of European influences or newsreel techniques. The "look" of film noir, much to the chagrin of the aesthetic critics, must be considered through the economic and industrial necessities of film production. Both the shadowy world of Expressionism and the semi-documentary environment of realism were simply economic ways of producing quick and slick crime melodramas to satisfy audiences.

From the Exceptional to the Everyday

The gambit of the film noir collection runs from the glossy big-budget A-productions to the bottom-of-the-barrel cheapies, but undoubtedly the majority of the noir collection is populated by modestly budgeted B movies and programmers. James Naremore correctly states:

Most of the respected examples of classical noir belong not to Poverty Row but to an ambiguous middle range of the industry. Very few films about urban darkness and murder in the 1940s and 1950s were among the most expensive Hollywood productions, but neither were they truly cheap . . . In both economic and cultural terms, therefore, they are best described as liminal products, and it seems appropriate that they eventually came to occupy a borderland somewhere between generic thrillers and art movies. (139)

Hence, any examination of film noir must consider that these films were produced to fill the demands of this mid-level niche market. As film historian Don Miller has stated, during the classical period, there were three classifications for Hollywood movies: the A, the B and the programmer, which was sometimes alluded to as a “nervous A” or a “guilt-edged B.” They weren’t B’s, yet not quite A’s (1970, 31). The quivering vacillating mass of Hollywood’s middle ground film production consisted of films with big stars in cheap movies, or glossy films cast with nobodies. Accordingly, you could have Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Graham starring in Columbia’s claustrophobic *In a Lonely Place* (1950) and Dan Duryea and June Vincent starring in Universal’s well-groomed *Black Angel* (1946) collected together as mid-budget film noir.

Although B movies and double-bills had been an important facet of American film production since the 1920s, it was not until the late 1930s that the major Hollywood studios became interested in the production of quick profitable films. In 1938, the B

movie came into its own, when it was solidified at nearly every major studio (Miller 1973, 133-134). In addition, *Variety* estimated that in 1938 between sixty and seventy-five percent of the theaters in the United States were running two features (quoted in Bjork, 35). The major and minor Hollywood studios began to cater specifically toward the production of low and mid budget films which could be used to support new A releases in major market movie palaces, and to serve as top billing in smaller neighbourhood and rural theaters. These liminal products were aided by Hollywood's entrenched industrial system and stables of contract players, which made the production of these budget-conscious films very easy and efficient, as well as a source of quick revenue. The B's and the programmers were made cheaply, but obscuring and overcoming budget deficiencies were the tightly-knit stories, often creatively directed, enacted by casts comprised of newcomers gaining experience for bigger things, and movie veterans comfortably settled within their strata, workmanlike at their craft. Youthfulness pervaded the writing and directorial departments too; often the fact that a number of writers and directors come to the forefront while relatively young is glossed over in the wake of the big-name artists with lengthy careers already behind them (Miller 134). Although these conditions encompass all of Hollywood's low-budget production, it was also the environment, which allowed for the "look" of film noir to be constructed.

However, the recognition of film noir as mid-to-low budget productions has always been a problem for aesthetic critics and their directive to separate and venerate art objects from their initial industrial purpose. As Paul Schrader has acknowledged, in some critical circles high-budget trash is considered more worthy of attention than low-budget trash, and to praise a B film is somehow to slight (often intentionally) an A film (62).

Therefore, the aesthetic value of the B film and the programmer have often been ignored by film critics in favour of films produced by recognizable figures, like Welles, Hitchcock, and Ray (it is important to remember that the noirs of these auteurs were all films of liminal production). But these aesthetic noir critics have been recalcitrant. One rare critic to address film noir's liminal production aesthetics has been Paul Kerr. In his 1979 article "Out of What Past? Notes on the B Film Noir," Kerr acknowledges the stylistic freedom afforded to mid-to-low budget film production and he cites the examples of RKO producer Val Lewton, who during the mid-forties was given limited budgets but more importantly, a free reign stylistically (115). Lewton's B-unit utilized Expressionistic shadows to mask the fact that they were reusing the studio sets (the staircase from *The Magnificent Ambersons* [1941] appears in both Lewton's *Cat People* [1942] and *The Seventh Victim* [1943]), and to create an air of suspense and uncertainty by not showing what was lurking in these shadows. Lewton's B-unit created a shadowy world of eleven films, nine of them horror films, a world that had tremendous stylistic influence upon the developing noir cityscapes. At Producers Releasing Corporation, Edgar G. Ulmer was also given a free reign by his higher-ups; however, he was limited to 15000 feet of film stock per picture (115). And during his time at PRC, Ulmer produced and directed two ersatz-noirs *Bluebeard* (1944) and *Strange Illusion* (1945) and the bleakest of all film noirs *Detour* (1945).

The position that Hollywood's mid-to-low budget productions served as locus for ingenuity and creativity is reinforced by Arthur L. Mayer. In his 1947 article "An Exhibitor begs for B's," Mayer states that the system of block booking or double billing served as a vehicle for substantial amount of dramatic and technical innovation that

proved of great value for subsequent A productions, and for the schooling and introduction to the public of many of the brightest luminaries of the film firmament (174). Moreover, Mayer states that Hollywood's artistic lifeblood is found in the B film and that if attention is not paid to this unique film form, the Hollywood studios will lose their cinematic leadership to the new European filmmakers (177). Ironically, Mayer was not only an exhibitor of B movies, but he was also one of the major importers of European films. Regardless of Mayer's conflicting position, he does make an important assertion: Hollywood's aesthetic innovations were taking place in the budgetary conscious world of B's and programmers. Many of noir's greatest stylists began with the "cheapies," Joseph H. Lewis, Anthony Mann, Phil Karlson, Norman Foster, and Richard Fleischer, as well many of noir's unrecognised directors Boris Ingster, Edwin L. Marin, Harry Levin, and Joseph Newman. Hence, the development of noir aesthetics may not be solely derived from cinematic influences, but may be considered as a product of industrial practicality.

Moreover, Paul Kerr removes the production of film noir from an aesthetic perspective, and places it within a distinct period of film history. He states that the requirements of low-budget film production, the compressed shooting schedules, overworked script editors and general cost cutting procedures could well have contributed to what we now call film noir. Nevertheless, an analysis of film noir as an attempt to make a stylistic virtue of economic necessity is inadequate (116). For Kerr, noir style is not the impetus for the accumulation of these unique films; instead he turns to the history of film production to unify the noir collection. He states that the noir collection is bracketed by two distinct moments of history of the Hollywood studios: the filing of the Anti-Trust suits of 1938 and the final divorcement with their distribution subsidiaries in

1959 (119).

Kerr's economic history brackets the same moment as Miller and Bjork's major studio interest in B and programmer production, he cites the monopoly created by block-booking of double-bills as the initial source for film noir, and traces noir's history through to the final demise of studio controlled film exhibition. Kerr combines the aesthetic of mid-to-low budget studio film production with the larger practice of exhibiting films through the studio's lateral distribution system.

As the majors' profits rose, the volume of their production actually fell: having released some 400 films in 1939 the big eight companies released only 250 in 1946, the balance being made up by a flush of new B companies, this geographically—but not economically—reduced constituency may have afforded Hollywood the opportunity to take a closer look at contemporary and specifically American phenomena without relying on the “comfortable” distance provided by classic genres like the western and the musical. That “closer” look (at, for instance, urban crime, the family and the rise of corporations) could, furthermore, because of the national specificity of its audience and as a result of the “dialectic” of its consumption (within the double bill) employ a less orthodox aesthetic than would previously have been likely. (119)

Therefore, the introduction of the double-bill, and the films that supplied it, find their unique stylistic innovations through the necessity of their industrial production; moreover, the aesthetics attributed to film noir are centered around the ability of these liminal films to have a “closer” look at the social changes on urban crime, the family and the rise of corporations. Kerr's alignment of noir aesthetics to B-movie and programmer production with the ability to address topical issues within the narrative brings noir interpretation closer to the initial sociological approach and the presentation of the problems of the real American city.

The Noir of the Real City

The positioning of aesthetic interests within the sociological interpretation of film noir is reinforced by recent discussions of the relationship between film noir and photography of the same period. Alain Bergala states that the relationship between photography and the cinema of the Forties was one of the historic, rare coincidences, rich with implications for the parallel history of the arts, by which two only apparently related expressions, photography and cinema (70). Bergala is referring to the similarity between the photographic representation of New York City by Arthur “Weegee” Fellig and the high-key lighting and chiaroscuro shadows of film noir. Fellig was a staff photographer for *PM* magazine, who travelled the streets of New York city in his 1938 Chevy replete with police scanner and newspaper office in the car’s trunk.

Throughout the Forties, Weegee photographed the nightlife and underbelly of New York. He concentrated his camera upon the rich, the poor, and the criminal; the nightclubs, the tenements, and the aftermath of crimes. However, Weegee’s New York was not like a studio back lot, and that was not an extra crumbled on the ground but an actual dead gangster. In 1945, he published a selection of his photos in the book *The Naked City* (the title was later appropriate by Mark Hellinger for the 1948 Jules Dassin film). Weegee’s aesthetic realism was being recognized for its depiction of the actual urban experience, and later, this photographic style would be paralleled with the aesthetics of film noir.

Bergala, influenced by the aesthetic critics, states that film noir is a heterogeneous collection of films defined primarily by visual aesthetics: strong contrasted images, hard clearly demarcated shadows, determinedly black areas, and strong directional lighting that

reveals its artificial, pinpoint source. But more importantly, these are the chief characteristics of the “Weegee’s touch” and his ruthless flash photographs must be sought on the side of the “poor” lighting of the B movie films (76). Bergala recognizes that the crime photos taken by Weegee have the same stark, chiaroscuro lighting effects of the B film noir. He accredits Fellig’s cinematic style with his European roots. “Weegee” was born in Galicia and emigrated to the U.S. at the age of eleven. Moreover, Bergala attempts to create a shared ethnic sensibility between the photographic style of Fellig’s work with the European émigrés and their Central European-derived aesthetic of Forties film noir (77). However, the similarities in style between these stark and bloody crime photos and the splintered lighting effects of a B film noir are only a small element of a greater representation of urban life during this unique period. Furthermore, Fellig was not the only person travelling through the streets and back roads of 1940s U.S. with a camera.

Undoubtedly, the photography of Weegee is the most recognized documentation of urban crime in the 1940s. As William Hannigan points out, in *New York Noir: Crime Photos from the Daily News Archives*: the flash photograph aesthetic permeated tabloid crime photography from the Thirties to the Fifties. As evidence, Hannigan presents a 1932 photograph of confessed murderer William Turner handcuffed to Detective Jacobs waiting outside the District Attorney’s office. The photo demonstrates the visual codes that flooded the public imagination and would come to define the Gangster films of the Thirties and the later film noirs (20-21).

For Hannigan, film noir directly follows the representation of criminality in the big city; moreover, he states that although the conventional look of film noir is understood to have grown out of German Expressionism, there can be little doubt that tabloid

photography provided the raw visual data at the heart of noir (20). Hannigan goes further by stating:

The [*New York Daily News*] helped define the dangerous big-city streets that were its setting, and the photographs of what transpired in this dark world, with ubiquitous criminals and unyielding sexuality, were a part of the public's visual language years before the films now associated with [the film noir] style. Using dark shadows and high contrast lighting, the *News* expressed the real and imagined aspects of the city that are the vocabulary of noir. (20)

Therefore, the noir aesthetic synthesizes style and realism, the imagined and the real, of the actual experience of the modern city into a visual code already understood by consuming audiences.

Hannigan convincingly reinforces his argument with comparisons of noir lighting from stills of *Murder, My Sweet* with tabloid shots of child murderer Harry F. Powers. Both images use a single light source to create their harshly lit, heavily shadowed images. Furthermore, Hannigan provides another very effective and graphic comparison, he juxtaposes a still from *Double Indemnity* where Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck stand over her husband's corpse sprawled across the railway tracks with a tabloid shot of David "the Beetle" Beadle dead on a Hell's Kitchen sidewalk, his brains and blood dripping into the gutter. Hannigan elucidates the congruencies between the two images through the framing of the body, the desolate surrounding and, most importantly, the single light source punctuating the dark of night (21). Hannigan provides numerous photographic representations of gangsters, juvenile delinquents, and murder victims, all captured alive, or dead, on the streets of the big city. Hannigan's written argument is brief, but the volume of photographic evidence he provides makes his tentative connection between film noir and big city crime photography feasible. For each lurid and

tawdry tabloid photo could easily be mistaken for a still-shot from a forgotten unrecognisable B film noir.

Both Bergala and Hannigan attribute the style of noir aesthetics to the violent and miscreant images of big city tabloid photography, but the stark stylised representation of mid-century America was not limited to urban crime and B movies. Paula Rabinowitz argues, in *Black & White & Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* that the noir aesthetic can be found in numerous and various cultural products of wartime/post-war America. But for brevity and to maintain continuity with Weegee and the *New York Daily News*, I will focus upon Rabinowitz' evidentiary use of the work of Farm Security Administration, and later Office of War Information, photographer Esther Bubley. Hired through a Depression-era government make-work project, Bubley documented the lifestyles of uprooted working women, and tracked their private lives through residences in boarding houses and furnished apartments (28). Bubley's images of transient women workers present the same harsh flash photographic lighting of the tabloid cameramen. However, Bubley's images were not those of urban criminality but the documentation of alienation and the deep malaise found on the faces of these itinerant women workers (30).

Rabinowitz provides the 1943 photograph "Girl sitting alone in the Sea Grill, a bar and restaurant waiting for a pickup" as demonstrative of film noir aesthetics and themes in Bubley's imagery. She states:

Bubley anticipates the signature icons surrounding the femme fatale: a lone woman sits at the end of a long booth, a glass of beer almost empty, smoking, framed by Venetian blinds. Behind them the night is black save for the neon letters above her head; but a man's head is visible outside the window behind her, peering at her back. She waits under surveillance, explaining: "I come in here pretty often sometimes alone, mostly with another girl, we drink beer, and talk, and of course we keep our eyes open

you'd be surprised at how often nice, lonesome soldiers ask Sue, the waitress to introduce them to us." (30)

The description provided by Rabinowitz details much of film noir's iconography: the night, the Venetian blinds, the smoke, the loneliness, the desperation and the repetition. She equates these details with Ella Raines pursuit of the bartender in *The Phantom Lady*, where she sits night after night, drinking and smoking, watching him and waiting for him to crack and reveal the truth about the phantom hat. And with Barbara Stanwyck, again in *Double Indemnity*, she would sit lonely, desperate, night after night waiting in her suburban Spanish Bungalow for some poor sap to stumble into her spider's web (30-31). All these images portray women trapped in a world of quiet desperation, waiting for something, usually a man, to come and break the never-ending cycle of loneliness.

In her book, Rabinowitz traces these images of loneliness, desperation, and the place of women in mid-century America through photographic imagery, popular literature, and household objects to demonstrate that the exceptional qualities of film noir were not that exceptional, instead the films served as representations of everyday modern American life. Rabinowitz' perspective of film noir is innovative, for her regard towards film noir equals Benjamin's last criteria of the collection. Film noir has become a collection of images and knowledge of a past historical moment, a solid homogeneous text, a magical encyclopedia, which has been turned out into the public sphere. Her perception of the noir collection is unmistakable, and evident in her word play with James Naremore's subtitle "Film Noir in its Contexts," Rabinowitz openly states that her perspective of film noir is not in its context; instead she views film noir *as* the context, adding that the plot structure and visual iconography of film noir make sense of America's landscape and history (14).

Moreover, film noir has come close to reaching Benjamin's illusive "completeness," for very little can be added to the collection. Instead, the information within film noir is now ripe to be exploited for the revolutionary knowledge it contains. Therefore, Rabinowitz' strategy is to employ film noir as a revolutionary encyclopedia of knowledge from which to examine what she labels "pulp Modernism" and the issues that surround the place of women in wartime/post-war America.

Film noir provides a medium for understanding the peculiar way in which America expressed its unique hokey modernism. The films offer a theory of its pulp modernity . . . by activating the world of scandal and trash and relocating it within a domestic melodrama, these films archive changing sexual, gender, and racial mores during the embourgeoisement of white working-class ethics. (6)

Hence, Rabinowitz clearly defines film noir as a foundation of knowledge from which a study of "pulp modernism" can be launched.

Moreover, Rabinowitz's work also brings film noir criticism full circle. When Kracauer first isolated the "terror" films, he did so under the auspice of the recognizable city landscape; the prominence of Third Avenue's ironwork, bars and pawnshops brought these films into a new realm of cognisance (134). Rabinowitz circumscribes the urban space of film noir within a similar recognition of everyday modern life. Again echoing Benjamin, she sees film noir as a template for analysing how cultural formations achieve legibility through stable repetitions of instability, predictable renderings of chaos, and sinister animations of immobile objects. Moreover, the B movies shown on *Million Dollar Movies* served as black-and-white lenses into the 1930s and 1940s, years of her generation's parents youth about which they were militantly silent (14). Therefore, film noir became the encyclopedia of the unspoken and enigmatic past, which provided insight

into hairstyles, clothing, home, and work. Rabinowitz recalls:

I understood why they could never speak about the past; it was simply too dangerous. The black Bakelite telephones, the white Venetian blinds, the curved Studebaker windshield, the brass Zippo lighters, the mirrors and doorways and hats presented a menacing world of the mundane. (15)

Therefore, like the first collectors, Rabinowitz clearly places film noir within the realm of the everyday, an unstable, menacing, and repetitive world of uncertain lived experience.

Rabinowitz's work provides the opportunity to see film noir as a cohesive text, an encyclopedia of knowledge about the urban experiences of mid-century America. Moreover, this chronology of noir criticism reveals that throughout the entire noir collection, critics have been expressing concern over the representation of the modern American city. The earliest noir critics, the sociological critics, were interested in how this new emerging vision of the lived experience of modern America was presenting the film viewer with a recognizable and precarious city, a daily experience where Nazi-like brutality could arise from the everyday world. The aesthetic approach presented a vision of the American noir city as a highly stylised art object, but through the cinematic traces of German Expressionism, the modern city was depicted as a milieu of social and mental instability. Coupled with the cinematic parallel to Italian Neo-Realism and American semi-documentary techniques, Hollywood's urban representations were once again connected to actual city spaces. Moreover, the production of film noir has been historically bracketed between the end of the Depression and the major studio's increase in mid-to-low budget film production, the divestment of their film exhibition and the demise of major studio production of intermediate films. Thus, the encyclopedia of film noir becomes a cohesive and complete body of knowledge, allowing contemporary critics

to employ the knowledge of this particular epoch as a foundational theory of American or pulp modernism.

It is important to see film noir as a historical moment, a complete, although fragmentary, vision of the experience of modern life in wartime/post-war American cities. Amongst the revolutionary properties contained in the knowledge of film noir is the depiction of the everyday lived experience and the hidden menaces that coexist within the modern city. Although much of the critical discussion of film noir has centered around aesthetic concerns, my interest is in the unstable and dangerous depiction of modern urban American life. Moreover, the uncertainty of the noir city extenuates noir study beyond the limits of its historical moment of the 1940s and 1950s, and opens film noir to considerations outside the boundaries of cinematic interpretation. Some scholars have taken film noir as a starting point and extenuated the idea of film noir into the present contemporary setting; however, I would like examine the elements of nineteenth century modernity that arise from the collection of film noir. Therefore, I will move into a discussion of the modern city as interpreted through the nineteenth century figure of the flâneur and his various urban descendants.

Chapter Three: The Heroes of Modern Life

The Rise and Fall of Flânerie

The earliest noir critics were concerned with the decay of the lived experience in the modern American city. They observed the growing ineffectuality of the central protagonists, the increase in violence and brutality among the city's criminal contingent, and they directly related these changes to everyday life in the modern city. In other words, the central focus of film noir was the representation of the experience of the urban figure and his ability, or lack thereof, to negotiate a narrative path through the labyrinth of the city space. Therefore, by employing the theory and legacy of the modern city's Ur-figure, the flâneur, film noir can be interpreted as a continuation of the nineteenth century literary representation of the modern urban environment and the everyday experience of city life. The most commonly associated urban figure in film noir is the detective, specifically, the hard-boiled detective. The other common urban figure associated with film noir is the gangster. Because the detective and the gangster find their literary and cinematic predecessors with the flâneur (the other figures are more closely associated with another form of modern urban figure, the man of the crowd: the badaud) it is necessary to trace their metamorphosis from the flâneur to film noir.

As the archetypal urban figure, the flâneur finds his origins with the modernization of the city, specifically Paris, in the early nineteenth century. However, recent scholarship has extrapolated the presence of the flâneur into an interpretive figure, adopting the flâneur's practice of observing the city space as a distinct methodology. Keith Tester describes the flâneur and his growing importance to interpreting the modern city:

Flânerie, the activity of strolling and looking which is carried out by the flâneur, is a recurring motif in literature, sociology and art of the urban, and most especially of the metropolitan, existence. Originally, the figure of the flâneur was tied to a specific time and place: Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century as it was conjured by Walter Benjamin in his analysis of Charles Baudelaire. But the flâneur has been allowed, or made, to take a number of walks away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth century Paris. Not least, the figure and the activity appears regularly in the attempts of social and cultural commentators to get some grip on nature and implications of the conditions of modernity and post-modernity. The flâneur has walked into the pages of the commonplace. (1)

According to Tester, the flâneur is both a figure of urban representation and interpretation, therefore the flâneur's legacy can be employed to develop an understanding of the modern urban experience of film noir.

As stated, the flâneur arises with the development of modern urban life in nineteenth century Paris. His presence within the city was more than the simple observation of the spectacle and pageantry of modern life. For the flâneur had to be able to loiter within the crowd to observe its pulse. In addition, he had to be able to negotiate, to circulate, through the mass of the ever-growing urban population. Benjamin has described the activity of the flâneur as botanizing on asphalt (1983, 36). Initially, the flâneur found the arcades of Paris an ideal location for the observation of modern life. For the flâneur, these glass-covered byways were a cross between a street and an *intérieur* (37). Benjamin stated that these interior spaces were a place where the street reveals itself as a furnished and familiar interior for the masses (1999, 423). But with the Haussmannization of Paris, the crowds of the arcades abandoned these narrow passages for the wider spaces of the new boulevards. The flâneur followed, and took with him the interiorized space of the arcades into the streets of Paris. The familiarity of the flâneur created an interior of the

city streets, which allowed the flâneur to undergo his movements unmolested.

The flâneur began to circulate throughout the new urban spaces of nineteenth century Paris. For the flâneur, the city splits into its dialectic poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room (417). To maintain the balance between the open landscape of Paris and the familiarity of the interior, the flâneur needed to cultivate his skills as both observer of modern life and negotiator of the city space. Following Benjamin's fragments in Konvult M, it is evident that the flâneur's knowledge of the city was essential for his negotiation and circulation through modern Paris. From the earliest entries, Benjamin documents the necessity for the flâneur to possess complete knowledge of the city. Additionally, the flâneur's knowledge must contain more than the simple understanding of the Parisian network of *arrondissements*, *quartiers*, and *faubourgs*, but also the historical and literary traditions of each specific local.

That anamnestic intoxication in which the flâneur goes about the city not only feeds on sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possess itself of abstract knowledge— indeed, of dead facts— as something experienced and lived through. This felt knowledge travels from one person to another, especially by word of mouth. But in the course of the nineteenth century, it was also deposited in an immense literature. (417)

Therefore, the activities of the flâneur were founded upon his immediate knowledge of the city and his abstract knowledge of history and literature, and only through this complex collection of knowledge could the flâneur successfully undertake the occupation of flânerie in the modern city space.

Once outfitted with the total understanding of his urban environment, the flâneur could enter the new Haussmannized streets of Paris with the same determination he demonstrated in the arcades. Hence, the flâneur became so comfortable within the new

spaces of Paris that they too began to take on the familiarity of a home.

The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of business are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. (Benjamin 1983, 37)

And yet, the reign of the flâneur on the new streets of modern Paris was short-lived. The open thoroughfares quickly became clogged with traffic of all kinds. And the increasing congestion made the new streets too dangerous to stroll at the pace of a tortoise (Benjamin 1999, 422). The population of the city was growing, and as the streets of Paris became increasingly crowded, the flâneur was pushed from the sidewalks to meet his doom.

Benjamin has numerous fragments devoted to the increase of traffic on the streets of modern Paris, but most disturbing to the flâneur was the loss of his autonomous position as loiterer. The flâneur's occupation of the street was being challenged by rival urban types, the detective and the criminal, but also by the prostitute, the sandwichman, and most disturbing to the flâneur were the urban impoverished: *les clochards*. Susan Buck-Morss describes the decent of flânerie:

On the boulevards, the flâneur, now jostled by crowds and in full view of the urban poverty which inhabited the public streets, could maintain a rhapsodic view of modern existence only with the aid of illusion, which is just what the literature of flânerie— physiognomies, novels of the crowd— was produced to provide. (103)

Hence, the flâneur, no longer able to botanize on the streets, moved into the cities of literature.

The historical understanding of the flâneur limits his existence to a brief period in the

mid-nineteenth century; however the actuality of the flâneur is debatable. Rob Shields posits that the flâneur existed only in the literary imagination.

Although a concept arguably dating from the democratization of the city under the French Revolution, the flâneur, or street prowler and wanderer, is glorified in the work of Balzac and Alexandre Dumas and later in a different tone in the work of the modernists such as Aragon and Baudelaire. Flânerie was therefore always as much mythic as it was actual. It has something of the quality of oral tradition and bizarre urban myth. (62)

Therefore, as a literary figure, the flâneur was taken up by many authors as a narrative device to explore the modern city. In *Konvolut M*, Benjamin cites many examples of literary flânerie: Dumas, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Eugene Sue, and Charles Dickens. Benjamin expands the possibilities of the flâneur to also include Offenbach, and Beethoven. However, the most important figure associated with mid-nineteenth century literary flânerie was Charles Baudelaire.

The prose and poetry of Charles Baudelaire translates the author's presence into both poet and flâneur. Keith Tester distinguishes the Baudelaireian poet as a figure that is *doing* rather than simply *being*; the struggle for existential completion and satisfaction requires relentless bathing in the multitude. It requires *doing* over and over again (5). Therefore, as both poet and flâneur, the position occupied within the city space equates the act of observation with *doing* and the position of observed as *being*. Benjamin refers to this contrary situation as the dialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man (Benjamin 1999, 420). However, this contradictory state between the observing and the observed, the *doing* and the *being*, means that the *doing* can never cease. The flâneur in the form of the Baudelairean poet

can never rest in the knowledge of *being*, since the resting is itself a form of *doing*. The secret of *being* is then the actuality of *doing*.

In Baudelaire's terms, this is also an intrinsically modern existence since it represents a synthesis of the permanence of the soul of a poet with the unexpected changes of public meetings. It is a quest for the Holy Grail of *being* through a restless *doing*; a struggle for satisfaction through the rooting out and destruction of dissatisfaction. (Tester 5)

Therefore, according to Tester, the search for self-hood through the diagnosis of dissatisfaction does not lead to satisfaction but to more dissatisfaction. For the Baudelairian poet the only alleviation of the dialectic of the flâneur is death (5-6). As a literary flâneur, the Baudelairian poet occupied a contradictory position within the city space. As both observer and observed, he was unable to reconcile his unstable position.

The distant, yet intimate, position of the flâneur found itself best represented in Baudelaire's essay "The Painter of Modern Life." Baudelaire adopted Constantin Guys as both an actual and allegorical figure of modern observation. As Baudelaire explains, the painter of modern life is a solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, he is always roaming the great desert of men, but he has a nobler aim than the pure idler. The painter of modern life is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call "modernity," to distil the eternal from the transitory (Baudelaire 1972, 402). Tester resolves that within the terms established by Baudelaire, the flâneur is basically the hero of modernity (6). Hence, the heroics of the flâneur are found in the pursuit of the indefinable modernity, a quest to find relief from dissatisfaction through the endless pursuit for satisfaction. Because the flâneur is fundamentally a figure who can only be known through the activities of flânerie, a certain mystery is intrinsic to his identity. Therefore, the flâneur cannot be defined in himself as very much more than a tautology.

The flâneur is the man who indulges in flânerie; flânerie is the activity of the flâneur (7). Subsequently, the flâneur exists only in subjective form, as poet or artist, and therefore translates easily into literary figures, but it is impossible to label an actual person as a genuine flâneur. The flâneur is only revealed through his activity within the city space.

The flâneur is the man of the public who knows himself to be of the public. The flâneur is the individual sovereign of the order of things who, as the poet or artist, is able to transform faces and things so that for him they have only that meaning which he attributes to them. He therefore treats the objects of the city with a somewhat detached attitude. The flâneur is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city. (Tester 6-7)

Therefore, the determination of the flâneur is only found through the activity of the secret spectator. He is a figure that can only be seen from the corner of your eye; you cannot directly focus upon him; he can only be observed in the periphery.

The urban space occupied by the flâneur, the position of loiterer, was threatened by the growing crowds. As the flâneur was being pushed into extinction, his position in the street was to become the residence for new urban types. The prostitutes and the clochards, like the flâneur, are simultaneously of the crowd, and yet separate from the crowd; they occupy space amongst the badaud, but they are not a part of it. The desired and despised figures of the modern streets, the prostitute and the urban poor continue the flâneur's activity of occupying the margins of urban space. However, as objectified figures, they do not undertake the flâneur's activities of observation and negotiation. The flâneur's activities of *doing* and *being*, of observing the crowd from within the crowd, will become the profession of the detective.

From the Flâneur to the Hard-Boiled

Although the actuality of the flâneur died out very quickly amongst the ever-growing crowds of the modern thoroughfares, the skills developed by the flâneur would linger in new urban variations. The most significant urban figure to undertake the flâneur's observational position within the modern city space was the detective.

Preformed in the figure of the flâneur is that of the detective. The flâneur required a social legitimization of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence presented as a plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight. (Benjamin 1999, 422)

The flâneur's skill of observation translated directly into the detective's position as investigator; moreover, the position of loiterer allowed for the detective to find disguise within the ranks of the badaud. The detective finds his occupation within the dialectic of flânerie, but unlike the flâneur who is trapped within the contradiction of observer and observed, the detective employs the dialectic within his endeavours. As the secret spectator, the detective hides amongst the crowd without being subjected to the gaze of the observed; the activity of *doing* while obscured by the position of *being*. Hence, the detective succeeds the literary flânerie of the Baudelairian poet and appropriates the prototype of urban observation in the narratives of various nineteenth century authors, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

The act of flânerie passes from the Baudelairian poet to the detective by way of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd."

Poe's famous tale . . . is something like the X-ray picture of the detective story. In it the drapery represented by crime disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who arranges his walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd. This unknown man is the flâneur. (Benjamin

1983, 48)

Poe's tale of pursuit through the streets of London follows three modes of urban existence: the flâneur, the badaud, and the detective (Gunning 1996, 26). Initially, the narrator occupies the position of flâneur, he sits in a coffee shop window. He observes the passing crowd, he studies the details of each passerby from the leisurely perspective of his café vantage point (27-28). The second mode of urban presence is that of the badaud. This urban figure has taken on many different names, individually he is known as the gawker, the bystander, the gaper, or the rubbernecker. Benjamin has characterized them as the stagnation of the flâneur (Benjamin 1983, 69). And, Baudelaire described them collectively as the great desert of men. However, whether as a single individual or in the multitude of the crowd, the badaud denotes the masses that surround the flâneur, or simply all the other urban types that do not engage in flânerie. Therefore, Poe's eponymous character is immersed in the collective that surrounds him. But it is through the flâneur's observations of the crowd, that the figure hidden amongst the badaud is singled out (Gunning 29). It is only then, when recognized, that the unknown figure of Poe's tale becomes the man *of* the crowd. However, the man of the crowd is singled out because he is not one of the faceless members of the great desert of men, rather because he is an exceptional figure, incoherent and mysterious. The man of the crowd represents an unknown, a challenge to the essential knowledge of the flâneur, and therefore, spurs the observer into an active role which in turn drives him from the safe vantage point of the flâneur into the bustle of the street.

Within Poe's narrative, the unsettling presence of the man of the crowd serves as catalyst for the flâneur to become the detective. The narrator is drawn from his point of

observation into a more elusive attempt to decode city types, the urban landscape becomes a site of mystery that must be penetrated to be deciphered. The unclassifiable figure impels the narrator into a detective-like act of shadowing (27). Hence, the narrator is pulled from his comfortable seat and drawn into the swell of the crowd to pursue the unsettling figure of the title character.

If the flâneur is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it accredits his idleness, he only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is an artist. (Benjamin 1983, 40-41)

Therefore, the detective arises from the position of the flâneur; no longer a detached observer, the detective undertakes the vigorous pursuit of a specific character, becoming an active participant in the flow of the crowd, while all the time, he is concealed within the crowd. Throughout Poe's urban escapade, the narrator as detective is never observed as detective. His chase becomes artful, unseen. He even confronts the unknown figure face-to-face, and remains unrecognised (Poe 187). The flâneur has initiated the transition into the detective.

However, the motivation that changes the flâneur into the detective is not the presence of the mysterious figure. He is merely symptomatic of the greater change in the urban space. Poe's eponymous character is representative of the destabilizing of the city space. The new modern city, the interiorized and familiar range of the flâneur, was undergoing a drastic change into the unknown and mysterious. For Poe, the narrator is driven to pursuit, not by the presence of the enigmatic figure, but by the rupture caused by the figure's unknownness, his mysterious presence within the familiar. The flâneur prides his

existence upon total knowledge of the most inconsequential details of his urban space; to know that it was behind the church of Notre Dame de Lorette that the *cheval de renfort* was kept for the omnibus (Benjamin 1999, 416 and 417). However, when Poe's narrator observes the man of the crowd, his mysterious presence becomes representative of the flâneur's decline of total abstract knowledge. The disturbance in the flâneur's familiarity causes him to abandon his occupation of observation and undertake the new occupation of detection.

As nineteenth century Paris expanded, the ability of the flâneur to roam the streets became increasingly dangerous. The rise in population and criminality rendered several *quartiers* inaccessible. The modern city became crowded, mysterious, and perilous. Eugene Sue describes one such *quartier*.

On the 13th of December 1838, a cold and rainy evening, a man of athletic form, wearing a miserable blouse, crossed the Pont au Change and plunged into the cité, a labyrinth of obscure, crooked, and narrow streets, which extend from the Palais de Justice to Notre Dame. Wretched houses, with scarcely a window, and those of worm-eaten frames, without any glass; dark, infectious-looking alleys led to still darker looking staircases, so steep that they could only be ascended by the aid of ropes fastened to the damp walls by iron hooks; the lower stories of some of these houses were occupied by sellers of charcoal, tripe-men, of vendors of impure meat; and notwithstanding the little value of these commodities, the windows of the miserable shops were barred with iron, so much did the owners fear the robbers of this quartier. (9)

This unflattering description of the modern city begins Sue's *Mystères de Paris*. For Sue, the underworld is depicted as a locus of decay, infection, and poverty. The streets and alleys are abundant with petty crime, impending violence, and unseen menaces. Moreover, no one doubted the existence of Sue's Parisian quartiers (Benjamin 1999, 413). The unknown perils found in the labyrinthine *quartiers* clashed with the interiors of

the flâneur's modern city.

To compensate with the increasing danger of the modern city, the flâneur needed to develop new skills. Benjamin considers the influence of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* upon the literary representation of the flâneur within the ever-more-dangerous city. Benjamin observes, owing to the influence of Cooper, it becomes possible for the novelist in an urban setting to give scope to the experience of the hunter. This has a bearing on the rise of the detective story. Moreover, the city found in the new detective novels has been equated with the savannah and forests of Cooper's novels, where every broken branch signifies a worry or a hope, where every tree trunk hides an enemy rifle or the bow of an invisible avenger (439). Clearly, as the modern city became more like the uncivilized wilderness of Cooper's novels, the art of flâneurie was no longer sufficient to negotiate the modern city streets and the flâneur was no longer considered a native in his city of birth (347). It became necessary that for the flâneur to continue, he must become a detective in the wilderness of the modern city.

As the descendant of the flâneur, the detective becomes an essential figure in the representation of the modern urban experience. The connection between the Baudelairian pursuit of the illusive "modernity" and the position of the detective is made in a short and forgotten essay found in G. K. Chesterton's *The Defendant*. In "A Defence of Detective Stories," he states:

The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life. Men lived among mighty mountains and eternal forests for ages before they realized that they were poetical; it may reasonably be inferred that some of our descendants may see the chimney-pots as rich a purple as the mountain-peaks, and find the lamp-posts as old as the trees. Of this realization of a great city itself as

something wild and obvious the detective story is certainly the *Iliad*. (158)

For Chesterton, the detective story, or more specifically, the good detective story, can realize the heroics of modern life. As a modern *Iliad*, the detective story is the search for the eternal within the transitory, and the detective as hero is best suited to the quest, to negotiate the crowd of the city, described by Chesterton, as a chaos of conscious ones (159). And there within the everyday spaces of the modern, poetic city lies the eternal.

There is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol— a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a postcard. The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon; every slate on the roof is an educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums. (159)

Within Chesterton's poetic London, within the bricks and slates, exists the knowledge and memories of the ages. A knowledge that can only be recouped by the detective's skills derived from the flâneur's observations.

The detective becomes the literary flâneur of popular fiction. Unlike the poet or the artist, the detective finds his impetus in the growing mass markets of serialized novels and "penny dreadfuls." The figure of the flâneur gains importance in popular culture not through an elitist perspective, but through the utopian presentation of a carefree (male) individual in the midst of the urban maelstrom (Shields 67). As the popular ancestor of the flâneur, the detective as hero remained unchanged for decades. In his 1950 essay "The Simple Art of Murder," Raymond Chandler described the detective found in the hard-boiled narratives of Dashiell Hammett.

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man

and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour— by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. (18)

The hard-boiled detective as the modern hero of Chandler's time continues the tradition of *flânerie*. It was essential for the detective to have an abstract knowledge of the city space to be able to negotiate the labyrinth of the modern city. Moreover, as an investigative figure, the detective must be able to hide in plain sight. Like the *flâneur* in the crowd, the detective must be the common man who is far from common to partake in his occupation of observation of modern life.

Hence, the literary reign of the *flâneur* was surpassed by the ever-growing danger of the modern city space, and the detective arose in popular literature to assume the mantle of the hero of modern life. However, the detective was also unable to curb the growing criminality and corruption of the modern city. In twentieth century, hard-boiled detective fiction, the heroic detective no longer walks the streets of the modern city to find the soul of a man built into it. Gone are the purple mountain peaks of chimney-pots, instead the hero of modern life is confronted with a city that was no longer poetic, no longer worthy of a hero.

A world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing; a world where you may witness a holdup in broad daylight and see who did it, but you will fade quickly into the crowd rather than tell anyone,

because holdup men may have friends with long guns, or police may not like your testimony, and in any case the shyster for the defence will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court, before a jury of selected morons, without any but the most perfunctory interference from a political judge. (Chandler17)

The cities of the Continental Op, Sam Spade, and Philip Marlowe were environments rife with criminal activity, although the cities in which they wrought their investigations were nowhere near the poetic realm of Chesterton's detective stories. Each detective had to employ the skills inherited from the flâneur, the knowledge of the city and the observation of modern life to solve their mysteries. Moreover, these heroic detectives maintained their positions as heroes and emerge from their quests untarnished by the corruption of the modern city.

Criminals and Gangsters

Although the detective is the most prominent figure to emerge from the decline of flânerie and the Mohicanization of the city streets, he was not alone in the dangerous urban space. The detective story maps out two positions in the dialectical drama of modernity. First, there is the detective who is intelligent, knowledgeable and whose perspicacity allows him to discover the dark corners of the city's circulation. The other is the criminal, who preys upon the complexity of the city's system of circulation (Gunning 1995, 20). Subsequently, the criminal exhibits similar skills of observation and abstract knowledge derived from the flâneur. The criminal must also be able to employ an abstract knowledge of the circulation and negotiation of the city space, if his criminal enterprises are to be successful. Initially, the relationship between the flâneur and the criminal were parallel but marginal positions within the city space. Like the flâneur, the criminal lives

outside the bounds and bonds of bourgeois life. He observes the underworld impartially, even approvingly (Mazlish 51). From the flâneur's perspective the criminal was an objective figure, one that exemplified the ephemeral qualities of modernity. In his essay "The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life," Baudelaire singles out the modern city's criminal element as exemplary of the modern heroics.

The pageant of fashionable life and the thousands of floating existences—criminals and kept women— which drift about in the underworld of a great city; the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and the *Moniteur* all prove to us that we have only to open our eyes to recognize our heroism. (18)

However, Baudelaire's mention of criminals is fleeting, their presence is lumped together with the other floating existences of the great city. Moreover, Baudelaire's observations turned away from the miscreant activities of the criminals and focused upon the even more ephemeral members of society, the lowest element of the modern city's population: the pedlars and ragpickers (Mazlish 52). Baudelaire's brief mention of the criminal, and the dialectical relationship with the detective, enables these urban malefactors to be considered as decedents of the flâneur. Moreover, as the position of the flâneur began to fragment under pressure from the crowded streets, the possibility that many of the flâneurs would diverge into criminality is not far fetched. As Buck-Morss points out, as the flâneur declines, he becomes a "suspicious" figure (103). Hence, the criminal's illicit occupations are derived from the bisection of the flâneur's position of loitering in the city street into socially positive and negative polarities.

As the modern city expanded and the art of flâneurie declined, the criminal and the flâneur co-existed for a short period in the mid-nineteenth century. During this time, the activities of the criminal became the focus of the flâneur's observations. In Poe's "The

Man of the Crowd” the literary flâneur is propelled from his loitering position into that of the detective through the presence of the sinister title figure. The mysterious man of the crowd does not partake in criminal activity, but there is something malfeasance in his countenance that disturbs the narrator and spurs his pursuit. After his all-night chase, the narrator, exhausted, acquiesces with these words “This old man . . . is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor his deeds” (188). The narrator’s ability to observe has reached its limits, he is unable to penetrate the facade of mystery maintained by the criminal old man, and with the conclusion of his pursuit the malefactor disappears into the crowd from which he was first noticed. Like the flâneur, the criminal has taken a position within the urban throng, a position that has enabled him to conceal his criminal activity from the investigating narrator. The criminal’s act of doing is so deeply concealed under his act of being that Poe’s flâneur/detective is unable to crack the facade and expose any malfeasance.

As the Mohicanization of the modern city gave rise to the dialectical positions of detective and criminal, the detective’s investigations of the criminal’s illicit activities permeated much of the literature of the nineteenth century. Throughout Benjamin’s *Konvolut* on the flâneur, there are numerous literary references to Parisian criminal society and the correlation with the dangerous wilderness of *Last of the Mohicans*, including quotations from Balzac, Dumas, Sue, and Régis Messac’s study of the detective novel. Moreover, as elements of flâneurie began to shift into criminality, the criminals began to prey upon the wayward stroller, their forebears the flâneurs. Baudelaire recognized the effect of growing criminality upon the solitary traveller, and draws upon

the influence of Cooper's characters. He questions:

What are the perils of the forest and the plains when compared with the everyday shocks and conflicts of civilization? Whether man embraces his dupe on the street or downs his victim in unknown forests is he not eternal man, that is to say, the most perfect beast of prey? (quoted in Mazlish 52)

The pages of nineteenth century French literature became filled with images of the modern criminal exhibiting the abilities of the colourful and poetic "savages" of Cooper's America. Benjamin provides an example from Dumas' *Les Mohicans de Paris*, and the description of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques as one of the most primitive suburbs in Paris (439). From this and other quotations found in the *Konvolut*, Benjamin constructs an image of the nineteenth century literary criminal as a combination of flâneur-like sophistication and primitive savagery.

Although many of the fragmenting flâneurs joined the ranks of the violent and primitive criminals of the Parisian underworld, there were an equal number of flâneurs who chose to maintain their bourgeois facade to disguise their malfeasance. Benjamin states the criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie (Benjamin 1978, 156). Moreover in *Konvolut M*, he has included two quotations that compare Balzac's characters— the usurers, the attorneys, and the bankers— as sometimes seeming more like ruthless Mohicans than Parisians (442 and 447). Benjamin's bourgeois Mohican seems to be an impossible figure within the modern city: a savage criminal hidden amongst the private members of Parisian society. However, the hidden malfeasance of the bourgeois became the focus of many later purveyors of detective fiction. S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, Earl Der Bigger's Charlie Chan, and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot are all examples of literary detectives that

specialized in bourgeois criminality. Hence the literary criminals of nineteenth century Paris ran the gambit from primitive predators prowling the impoverished faubourgs to the corporate shills fleecing their unsuspecting pigeons from their bourgeois battlements.

The heroism of modern life found by Baudelaire within the great city's underworld was temporary. Certainly the instability and danger associated with the Mohicans of Paris affected Baudelaire's interest in the heroics of the underworld. Moreover, it became increasingly difficult to present the literary criminal in a positive light. Throughout the crime literature, and the cinematic equivalents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the criminal was the lesser half of the dramatic dialectic. The malefactors of literature and cinema were presented with the balance of the dialectic narrative of detective fiction: Sherlock Holmes had Professor Moriarty, Inspector Juve had Fantômas, and Inspector Lohman had Dr. Mabuse. Each provided the *raison d'être* for the other. It was not until the prohibition era that the criminal would receive renewed attention as the hero of modern life.

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the rise of the American, or more specifically the Hollywood gangster. In his influential essay, "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," Robert Warshow discusses the Hollywood gangster in remarkably Baudelarian terms. "From its beginnings, [the gangster film] has been a consistent and astonishingly complete presentation of the modern sense of tragedy" (84-85). Warshow equates the conventions of the gangster film with the ageless and eternal conventions of tragedy and the universal experience of art (85-86). And although the gangster is rooted in the epic traditions of the past, he is also subject to the transitory, fleeting existence of the modern city.

The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language and

knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club . . . for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but the dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster—though there are real gangsters—is also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster. (86)

Warshow's comments include much of what has been discussed about the flâneur: his dependence upon the city for his existence; the necessity for the gangster to possess an extraordinary knowledge of his urban environment; and perhaps most important, his tentative link to the real city and his immediate correlation to the imaginary city of literature, or in this case the cinema.

With the advent of the talking gangster film in the early 1930s, the cinematic figure of the gangster fully realized Baudelaire's hero of modern life. The standard narrative of the pre-code gangster film has been considered as a parody of the popular Horatio Alger rags-to-riches stories (Munby 43). However, the gangster's upward mobility also represents the shift from the savagery of the urban wilderness/ghetto and the respectable facade of the bourgeois Mohican. The 1931 film *Little Caesar* set the pattern for the pre-code gangster film and the depiction of the gangster's rise from savage to bourgeois, or one man's desire to "make it" (43). As described by Jonathan Munby:

Little Caesar tells the story of a hoodlum seeking to make it in the big time—"to be someone else." This somewhat abstract quest taps into a more general collective desire for upward mobility fostered in age-old American myth. Little Caesar's dreams are fostered by a newspaper exposé of a famous big-city gangster, Legs Diamond. Out in the countryside, Little Caesar sees no future in small-time gas station heists and sets his sights on the city. (44-45)

However, Little Caesar rises to social and criminal prominence only to have his

“achievements” pulled out from under him. Unlike the Alger stories, the gangster’s tumultuous rise to power is met with an equal and violent descent as he meets his end in a hail of bullets. The upward movement and rapid descent of the Hollywood gangster typifies the transitory and fleeting existence of modern life.

The gangster must survive in this new world wilderness by employing the flâneur’s skills of observation and negotiation in the urban space of the American city. However, the rise of the gangster is not to obtain a legitimate position in society but to usurp the status of the bourgeois criminal. In the case of *Little Caesar*, the gangster Rico machinates to achieve the status held by the famous big-city gangster, Legs Diamond. As the gangster ascends the American socio-criminal ladder, he adopts the affectations of the bourgeois.

As [Little Caesar] rises, his material circumstances improve. He moves out of the dingy Club Palermo into more baroque surroundings. He adorns himself with signifiers of social success: smart suits, cigars, diamond rings, marble tables, classical realist paintings, cars. Yet the running joke is that he and his compatriots of Italian extraction, while they can accumulate the outward signs of “making it,” have no way to actually appreciate the artefacts they have collected. (47-48)

Therefore, the gangster attempts to obtain the social position of the bourgeois by obtaining the trappings associated with their position; however, the gangster is, and always will be, the ethnic “other,” ostracized by WASP society (45). Besides the fleeting rise-and-fall narrative conventions, the American gangster is caught between the roots of the old world and the projected future in the new (49). The gangster is inherently linked to, and cannot escape from, the ethnicity of his European ancestry. Here lies the parody of the gangster’s Alger-esque rise: he can obtain the guise of bourgeois success, but his ethnicity will always betray him.

However, the Ethnic-American gangster comes to personify Baudelaire's criminal as hero of modern life. As discussed by Warshow, the tragedy of the gangster's ill-fated ascent links him to the epic status of hero. For W. R. Burnett, the author of the *Little Caesar* novel, Little Caesar is a gutter Macbeth, a "type" who could embody the "tragic flaw" of "overriding ambition." (quoted by Munby 46). And yet, Burnett's connection to the epic side of the gangster narrative is tempered by the transitory position and short life expectancy of the gangster. Certainly, his ethnicity creates a link with the old world, but it is the non-acceptance of his ethnicity that comes to embody the gangster's fleeting existence. The gangster struggles unsuccessfully to assimilate into bourgeois American culture. Therefore, as a hero of modern life, the gangster's inherent tragedy creates continuity with past epics, but the gangster's constant drive and continuous failure to assimilate into bourgeois America exemplifies his transient nature.

The End of the Line

When I examine my noir collection, I can see the influence of detectives and gangsters on film noir, however I believe that there is a significant change that these characters undergo when they are presented within the actual, cinematic urban spaces of film noir. They are no longer determined by their flâneur-derived legacies instead these fictional figures become part of the everyday life of the modern noir city. The detective becomes an average Joe, scrapping out a living by investigating the infidelities of high society. While the gangster becomes a middle-man, a district manager for a huge, faceless, crime syndicate. Although the hard-boiled detective and the Hollywood gangster were influential to the development of film noir, the transformation of these urban figures into

film noir was unsuccessful. This is not to say that the personnel behind the hard-boiled detective and the Hollywood gangster did not work on the studio pictures now regarded as noir: they did. The most famous member of the hard-boiled school of writing to find his way into the noir universe was Raymond Chandler. Chandler's novels *Farewell, My Lovely*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Lady in the Lake*, and *The High Window* were all given the noir treatment. Moreover, Chandler also penned or co-penned the screenplays for *Double Indemnity*, *The Blue Dahlia*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*. Other well known hard-boiled writers have contributed to the noir collection: Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Cornell Woolrich, as well as numerous forgotten hard-boiled and gangster specialists: Steve Fisher, Daniel Mainwaring, Dorothy B. Hughes, Jonathan Latimer, Horace McCoy and *Little Caesar's* W.R. Burnett. But the participation of these writers, whether direct or indirect, was of little consequence for the representation of urban figures in film noir.

With the end of the Depression, the literary and cinematic trajectories of both the detective and the gangster collided head on with the urban landscape of film noir: neither survived. Certainly, the canon of film noir is peppered with detectives (*Laura*, *The Dark Corner*, *Nocturne*, *Out of the Past*, and *On Dangerous Ground*) and gangsters (*Johnny Eager*, *The Gangster*, *Raw Deal*, *The Racket*, and *The Big Combo*). But their noir incarnations are mere shells of these earlier literary and cinematic figures. Once the detective and the gangster found themselves within the realm of film noir, their flâneur-derived abilities of observation and negotiation lost their effectiveness. Neither figure can dominate their respective narrative quests. And each character finds himself defenceless in the noir city. They are rendered impotent within the narrative. No longer, the driving

force behind the story, the detective and the gangster become part of the crowd. They do not exist within the dialectic of flâneurie; instead they stagnate as members of the badaud.

When Raymond Chandler wrote his essay “The Simple Art of Murder” in 1950, it was the height of the film noir cycle. However, his concern was not about the new cycle of “terror” films or “toughies”; he was concerned with the short stories and novels of Dashiell Hammett which were written in the previous decades. Chandler’s essay was a tribute to Hammett’s contribution to literature, and also a declaration of his influence upon Chandler’s own writing style. Chandler’s hard-boiled detective, Philip Marlowe, followed closely in the footsteps of Hammett’s Continental Op and Sam Spade. And his essay demonstrates how the detective of hard-boiled literature was a direct descendent of Baudelaire’s hero of modern life. However, when John Houseman examined the film adaptation of Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*, he found the film hero to be lacking in precisely the qualities that Chandler delineated in his essay.

A brief comparison between Chandler’s description of the hard-boiled detective and his cinematic counterpart played by Humphrey Bogart reveals the difference between the hard-boiled tale and the film noir adaptation. According to Chandler, the hard-boiled hero should be a man of honour, a man who is neither tarnished nor afraid. This is evident in the literary Marlowe’s arrival at the Sternwood mansion. “I was wearing my powder blue suit, with a dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn’t care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be” (3). Contrarily in the film, Marlowe is dressed in a drab, shabby suit and slouch-brimmed fedora. When Carmen Sternwood approaches Marlowe, she coyly asks “Are you a Prizefighter?” The

novel is playing off of Marlowe's flashy blue suit, he looks like a boxer, out on the town; however in the film, the same line is played as a put-down. Marlowe's slouching presence is far from an athletic physique. The introductions of the novel and the film play out in similar narrative fashion, however it is the contrast of Marlowe's appearance that alludes to the change in the presentation of the character. The literary novel presents Marlowe as strong, self-confident, and subject to the arousal of Carmen Sternwood. Conversely, the film presents Marlowe as dishevelled, frumpy, and the object of Carmen's sexual contempt.

Moreover, in "Today's Hero," Houseman finds the cinematic Marlowe to be far from heroic. For Houseman, the literary detective represents a heroic presence within the novel, one that is above ridicule and conscious of his moral responsibilities as hero, whereas in the film, Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe is open to Carmen's scorn and demonstrates a complete lack of moral perpetuity.

He holds human life cheap, including his own. The sum of his desires appears to be a skinful of whisky and a good sleep. In all history I doubt there has been a hero whose life was so unenviable and whose aspirations had so low a ceiling. (162)

Therefore, Houseman illuminates a marked change between the detective of hard-boiled literature and his incarnation in film noir. The once heroic detective, a man of honour, has come to represent a moral vacuum that leaves audiences wondering if life in the United States of America in the year 1947 is hardly worth living at all (163). The cinematic Marlowe demonstrates none of the heroics initiated by his flâneur-like literary counterpart.

The Big Sleep is not the only depiction of Marlowe as weak and ineffective. In his

first cinematic appearance, *Murder, My Sweet*, Philip Marlowe is presented in an equally powerless fashion. In Chandler's source novel *Farewell, My Lovely*, Philip Marlowe first eyes Moose Malloy while loitering in the street.

It was a warm day, almost the end of March, and I stood outside the barber shop looking up at the jutting neon sign of a second floor dine and dice emporium called Florian's. A man was looking up at the sign too. He was looking up at the dusty windows with a sort of ecstatic fixity of expression, like a hunky immigrant catching his first sight of the Statue of Liberty. He was a big man but not more than six feet five inches and not wider than a beer truck. He was about ten feet away from me. His arms hung loose at his sides and a forgotten cigar smoked behind his enormous fingers. (3-4)

Marlow then proceeds to give a detailed description of Malloy's attire. This brief introduction of Moose Malloy demonstrates all the skills derived from the flâneur. Marlowe occupies a position in the street without being seen. He studies the physical presence of the objectified Moose, right down to a description of his buttons. The literary Marlowe demonstrates the flâneur's skills of observation from his detached perspective within the crowd. However, when Marlowe (Dick Powell) meets Moose (Mike Mazurki) in Edward Dmytryk's 1944 cinematic version of the novel, the detective demonstrated none of the flâneur's abilities. Marlowe is presented as a self-indulgent, alcoholic, Lothario slouching in his office chair. He openly states "the traffic down below had absolutely nothing to do with me." Malloy first appears as a reflection in the office window, a spectre hovering over Marlowe in an ominous fashion. At no time is Marlowe placed in a position of controlling the narrative trajectory. He is unable to withstand Moose's demands. Throughout the film, Marlowe is always one step behind the action. He constantly fails to demonstrate any completion of the detective's flâneur-like abilities of observation and negotiation. He is never detached from the narrative and is physically

pulled into uncontrollable situations by each character he meets. The noir Marlowe is ineffective, and throughout the film, he is at the mercy of the machinations, which surround him. Hence, the ineffectiveness of the hard-boiled detective in film noir demonstrates that he is no longer representative of the heroism of modern life.

A further example of how the detective is pushed out of his flâneur-based position is Paramount Pictures liminal production of *Double Indemnity*. The film was directed by Billy Wilder, based on novel by James M. Cain, adapted by Raymond Chandler, and starred Fred McMurray, Barbara Stanwyck, and Edward G. Robinson. *Double Indemnity* is exemplary of the detective's inability to fully utilize the skills inherited from the flâneur. In the film, Robinson plays Keyes, the insurance investigator. He is intended to represent the detective, the investigative force whose purpose it is to unravel the mystery at hand. At the insurance company, Keyes is known and respected for his intuition into insurance fraud. He refers to his unique investigative skill as his "little man" and points to his stomach, as though an unsettled claim gives him indigestion, a condition that will not clear up until a fraud has been revealed. In one scene we see Keyes interrogate a man who has submitted a fraudulent claim. Keyes is relentless until the man breaks down and admits to setting his delivery truck alight. Because of Keyes' impeccable record, his bulldog-like approach, and his statistical knowledge, he is the perfect choice to become the detective and to investigate the possibility of malfeasance in the "Dietrichson case."

However, the insurance investigator Keyes is not a true detective, rather he is an officious bureaucrat. He is more concerned with suicide statistics and with making his superior appear foolish, than with occupying the position of a proper detective. Keyes is a company man, he is not out to right wrong, to up hold the law, or even restore order; his

mandate is to save the nickels and dimes of the insurance company, and no one does it better than he does. Throughout the film Keyes is tied to the office environment. He doesn't even want his friend Walter Neff to venture into the city space as a salesman, he wants him to share the comfort and the security of the claims office. Keyes' ability for investigation is limited to the bureaucratic setting of his office, whereas outside he is simply a neurotic little bean-counter. Only once do we see Keyes leave his office, and that is when he shows up unexpectedly at Neff's apartment to talk about work. Unknowingly, Keyes stumbles into the planned rendezvous between the two murderers. Moreover, the murderess Mrs. Dietrichson is only hiding on the other side of the open door. Keyes is oblivious to the compromising position he interrupts. He is a bureaucrat, a pencil pusher, and he is unable to observe the machinations that are barely concealed in front of him. This is not to say that Keyes is unaware that there has been a crime committed, but that he can only see criminality through statistics. If Keyes were an authentic detective, like Sherlock Holmes, Philo Vance or Charlie Chan, he would not need the statistical charts about suicide instead he would have been able to merely observe the behaviour of both Neff and Mrs. Dietrichson to realize their guilt. Moreover, the conclusion of the film presents Neff bleeding to death and recording his confession for Keyes. Finally, Keyes arrives, not to confront Neff the murderer, but because he was awakened by a telephone call from the janitor of the office building. *Double Indemnity* is exemplary of how the investigative figure is marginalized within film noir, and therefore rendered impotent within the city space.

The gangster does not fair any better in the noir city. In Warshow's 1947 essay "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," which was also written during the post-war apex of film noir.

He briefly discusses Henry Hathaway's *Kiss of Death* (1947) a film, which will later be canonized as film noir. In a footnote, Warshow states that the film is exemplary of recent efforts to bring the gangster film into line with the prevailing optimism and social constructiveness of American culture, however the efforts to create a contemporary gangster figure have been unsuccessful (85). Warshow is referring to the lack of any sense of tragedy in the representation of the post-war cinematic gangster. Unfortunately, he does not develop this idea further. But as Silver and Ward's *Film Noir* entry for *Kiss of Death* reveals, the gangster Tommy Udo (Richard Widmark) takes on monstrous proportions; as he becomes an incongruous gargoyle of a truly noir world trapped in a narrative of facile social consciousness. (McGarry, 159). The gangster character of Tommy Udo does not follow the rise-and-fall narrative of the traditional gangster film. Udo no longer evokes the tragedy associated with Little Caesar. He is presented solely as a psychotic beast. Additionally, the break with the traditional gangster narrative is also evident in Gordon Wiles' film *The Gangster* (1947). The rise and fall of the gangster Shubunka (Barry Sullivan) is compressed into a single turn of events occurring when the central figure is already doomed (Lucas, 111). Again the noir gangster does not demonstrate any of the tragic origins of his cinematic predecessors. Although the criminal presence of the gangster makes the transition to film noir, the urban figure has lost its traditional attributes of epic tragedy and narrative conventions. Nor does the film noir gangster demonstrate any of the Mohican abilities to observe and negotiate the surrounding city spaces. The gangster's presence is merely a societal abomination. Hence, the gangster, like the detective, has lost all his flâneur-derived skills and finds himself awash within the noir city space.

The 1955 Allied Artists film, *The Big Combo* presents the dichotomy of the film noir gangster. On one hand there is the traditional gangster figure, McClure (Brian Donlevy) and on the other, the social abomination of the contemporary gangster Mr. Brown (Richard Conte). Throughout the film, McClure plays flunky to the psychotic Mr. Brown. At every possible turn Brown is constantly belittling McClure, making sharp-pointed references to him being old and washed-up. Furthermore, McClure is burdened by his need to use a hearing aid (the device is effectively used by Mr. Brown to torture Police Detective Leonard Diamond [Cornel Wilde]). McClure evokes much of the tragedy of the traditional gangster, but not through Alger-esque overambition, but through antiquation. It is very apparent that McClure is completely out of step with the local syndicate headed by Mr. Brown. And McClure's inherent tragedy is highlighted by his pathetic death. When Brown pulls out his hearing aid, the soundtrack goes completely silent. McClure falls, and his death is only marked by the bright flash of the Thompson's gun burst.

Whereas Mr. Brown differs from the traditional gangster, in that Mr. Brown is depicted in the same fashion as Tommy Udo. Brown is a sadistic egotistical monster, devoid of feeling, corrupted by power, and ruled by sadistic sexual pleasure. Mr. Brown, if that is his real name, takes great delight in betraying his fellow conspirators, degrading his high-class girlfriend (Jean Wallace), and tormenting detective Diamond. "The only thing different between you and me, is that I have personality!" Brown preaches to Diamond. In *The Big Combo*, Mr. Brown's rise to power is not the central focus of the narrative, it is described only through flashback; moreover, the film is not terribly concerned with his fall from grace. *The Big Combo* revels in Mr. Brown's self-gratification through the degradation of others. The narrative is pushed forward by his

sadistic actions and betrayals. Finally, there is no one left for Mr. Brown to debase and he acquiesces to Diamond's bullet.

It is important to note that Mr. Brown is different from the traditional cinematic gangsters like Little Caesar. When Little Caesar reached the zenith of power, he controlled everything. There were no outside elements to mangle his control of the city. And when Little Caesar fell, his demise originated from within his urban milieu. Conversely, Mr. Brown is a syndicate man, he runs the local "combination" for a much larger, national criminal organization. He is not an old-style gangster, but a new corporate crook. If he worked for a big corporation, Mr. Brown would be a district manager, a middle-man. Moreover, Mr. Brown's power structure is limited to the confines of the claustrophobic, always-night, unnamed city. Within this world, Mr. Brown is all powerful. He controls all aspects of malfeasances within the city, however, outside the city he is powerless. When Lieutenant Diamond finally finds the weak link in Brown's world, he does so by leaving the city. He finds Mr. Brown's ex-wife hiding at a rural rest-home, outside of Brown's urban realm. In the traditional gangster film, the city is open for the taking and there is no authority outside the city, but for Mr. Brown the noir city becomes a trap and he is unable to escape. Certainly, both gangsters are shot down within the urban space, but Little Caesar is defiant and heroic. But Brown is trapped by the city, he flees to an airport on the outskirts of town, only to be cornered by Diamond, and gunned down in a fittingly unspectacular hail of bullets.

Both the detective and the gangster are rendered impotent within the noir city by one succinct fact: the representation of the noir city is in direct correlation with the real American urban environment. The detective finds his origins within literature, while the

gangster originates in the cinema; therefore neither can be fully realized when transferred into the realist representation of the noir city. The real urban spaces of film noir are unable to support these fantastic figures. Although both figures find their antecedence with the flâneur, the actual feasibility of the flâneur is at best questionable and at worst impossible. If the flâneur actually strolled on the streets of Paris, it was for only a brief second in history. Hence the continuation of the flâneur can only be found in literature, beginning with the Baudelaireian poet and then fragmenting into various other literary urban types. As derivations from flânerie, the detective and the criminal are bound to their traditional narrative forms. Although the detective exists in both literary and cinematic translations, the abilities of the detective are limited to the fictional worlds of Holmes' London or Marlowe's Los Angeles. Additionally, the gangster must also adhere to his imaginary world, to maintain his tragic sense. Although *Little Caesar* vaguely evokes the biography of Al Capone, the narrative is fully reliant upon Burnett's "gutter Macbeth." Hence when contained within their imaginary realms, the detective and the gangster can fully function as flâneur-derived figures; however, once they are removed from their fantastic cities and reoriented into the noir city space they are rendered powerless and impotent. Therefore as noir protagonists, the detective and the gangster join the ranks of the average man, the everyday Joe, struggling to get by on the streets of modern America and unable to draw from their flâneur-derived abilities.

Chapter Four: The Men and Women in the Crowd

The Mire of the Macadam

Whether the city space has been recreated on a studio sound stage, scarred with shadows and drenched with simulated rain, or if the urban environment has been manifested on the busy streets of some identifiable metropolis, film noir is the representation of the modern American urban experience. As such, film noir creates an environment where the established and fictional characteristics of the detective and the gangster are rendered ineffectual. Neither is capable of executing their traditional narrative trajectory within the constructed realism of film noir. Although both are present within the noir city space, they find their place amongst the everyday world of numerous other urban figures within the narratives of the noir city: newspaper reporters, policemen, government agents, spies, poets, psychiatrists, hit-men, returning war veterans, serial killers, cab drivers, mountebanks, magicians, insurance salesmen, boxers, fight promoters, gas station attendants, nightclub entertainers, gamblers, alcoholics, drug addicts; the list could go on and on. All of these urban figures become part of the crowds that fill the streets of the modern city, the faceless teeming masses that provided the flâneur with his subjects of observation and obstacles of negotiation; inspiration for the Baudelarian poet; suspects for the detective; and victims for the criminal and gangster.

Most importantly the population of the modern city provides the protagonists for film noir. However, an examination of the collection of film noir reveals that the noir protagonist finds himself in the position of flâneur without the inherent abilities of observation and negotiation that define the flâneur. In other words, the central urban

figures of film noir find themselves in the activity of *doing*, but unlike the flâneur, they are not obscured by the position of *being*. The noir protagonist becomes an urban spectacle, unable to achieve the anonymity of the flâneur, he becomes conspicuous, floundering, running irrationally through the canyon-like streets of modern America. Regardless of which film noir is chosen, the central figure demonstrates the division between the act of *doing*, playing the active role of the protagonist, and the position of *being*, existing unrecognised by the surrounding population. The noir protagonist finds himself in the flâneur's position without following the literary trajectory of the flâneur, and therefore, unable to control his environment, unable to interiorize the street. Hence, the origin of the noir protagonist must be found elsewhere, not as a descendent of the flâneur, but as an individual amputated from the crowd, an urbanite dislocated from the badaud. He is an ordinary man, who suddenly finds himself the object of the crowds gawking. He is in an unfamiliar position and he is incapable of returning to the safety and anonymity of the crowd.

The crowd has coexisted with the flâneur since he first appeared on the post-Revolutionary streets of Paris. Together, the flâneur and badaud lived in a symbiotic relationship of the new boulevards; each needing each other to exist. Unfortunately, for all his work discussing the distinction of the flâneur, Benjamin spent very little time theorizing his counterpart the badaud. Therefore, it is necessary to piece together a definition of the badaud from Benjamin's fragments. He states that the badaud originates from the fracture of the flâneur. The flâneur can become the detective by honing his abilities of observation and negotiation, or if he lets these skills stagnate he will become the gaper. The fragmented flâneur becomes part of the crowd. He is absorbed into the

badaud (Benjamin, 1983, 69). Additionally, Benjamin quotes Victor Fournel:

[The] remarkable distinction between the flâneur and the rubbernecker (badaud): “let us not, however, confuse the flâneur with the rubbernecker: there is a subtle difference . . . the average flâneur . . . is always in full possession of his individuality, while that of the rubbernecker disappears, absorbed by the external world . . . which moves him to the point of intoxication and ecstasy. Under the influence of the spectacle, the rubbernecker becomes an impersonal being, he is no longer a man— he is the public; he is the crowd. At a distance from nature, his native souls aglow, ever inclined to reverie . . . the true rubbernecker deserves the admiration of all upright and sincere hearts.” (Benjamin 1999, 429)

The crowd finds its origins with the demise of the flâneur, no longer the keen observer of modern life, the inactive flâneur loses his individuality and fades into the great desert of men, just another grain of sand in the dune of humanity. The remnants of flânerie can be seen in the different monikers attached to the badaud: the rubbernecker, the gawker, the gaper, and bystander. However, the observational skills of the crowd are merely superficial. Unlike the flâneur, the observations of the crowd do not amount to an understanding of the urban environment. The gawkers only feast upon the spectacle in front of them.

Because Benjamin’s definition of the badaud is limited, the dichotomy between the flâneur and the badaud must be explored from other sources. Marshall Berman does not directly address the change from the flâneur to the gawker, but he does discuss the desire of the Baudleirian poet, a descendant of the flâneur, to join the ranks of the “ordinary man.” Berman concentrates upon Baudelaire’s “Loss of a Halo” from *Paris Spleen* #46. Briefly he describes the setting: An ordinary man meets a poet on the busy streets of Paris. The ordinary man is surprised by the encounter and recognition of the poet, but the poet is even more surprised. When the poet crossed the street, he was jostled by the traffic

and lost his halo in the mire of the Macadam (a Scottish invention to pave road surfaces and used by Haussmann for the new Parisian boulevards). However, the poet is not upset at the loss of such an important object, in fact he is delighted for without his halo, he is now able to move about the city unrecognised and join the ranks of the ordinary men (156). Berman's choice demonstrates how a flâneur-derived figure, the poet, makes the transition into the world of the badaud, the place of ordinary men. Through the loss of his halo, the one thing the poet possesses that distinguishes him from the masses, he is able to enter their rank unseen. The poet states:

Now I can walk around incognito, do low things, throw myself into every kind of filth [*me livrer à la crapule*], just like ordinary mortals [*simples mortels*]. So here I am, just as you see me, just like yourself. (Quoted in Berman, 156)

Without his halo, the poet is no longer separated from the ordinary man, he can participate in everyday activities, even wallow in the low things, of the ordinary man. As a poet, as an exceptional urban figure, he had been unable to participate in the everyday. He was only able to observe it. Through the loss of his halo, the poet has become desanctified, and now he can move through the streets incognito. Berman notes that there is the possibility that the poet's halo was not lost through a violent *grande geste*, but that it was allowed to slip off voluntarily (157). Just as the flâneur purposefully neglects his skills to allow him passage into the crowd, the poet's willingness to lose his halo permits his entry into the ordinary. Hence, the exceptional urban figures voluntarily undergo desanctification so that they can undergo integration into the badaud. It is important to note that Berman specifies that the change from the exceptional poet to the ordinary man is facilitated by the traffic of the modern city. For Berman, traffic features prominently in

his account of modern life.

The man in the modern street, thrown into this maelstrom, is driven back on his own resources— often on resources he never knew he had— and forced to stretch them desperately in order to survive. In order to cross the moving chaos, he must attune and adapt himself to its moves, must learn to not merely keep up with it but to stay at least a step ahead. He must become adept at *soubresauts* and *mouvements brusques*, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts— and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and his sensibilities as well. (159)

The modern man must be able to deal with the sudden and brusque movements of traffic; however, it is the congestion of the streets that serve as impetus for these exceptional figures to acquiesce their positions. Neither the flâneur nor the poet is willing to keep pace with the traffic. Instead they succumb to flow of the masses. The flâneur stagnates and the poet allows his halo to be cast adrift in the mire of the macadam, and they become absorbed into the streaming movement of the crowd.

When Berman's Baudelairian poet willingly loses his halo and enters the everyday circulation of the traffic, he enters into the everyday population of the modern city. Berman notes that the mire of the macadam, the moving chaos of the modern street, is only aggravated by the presence of the individual. Haussmann's open boulevards allowed for horse-drawn traffic to increase its speed in the city streets. When the individual steps into the street, his or her presence compounds the danger. For the horsemen must not only keep from hitting each other but now they must dodge the itinerant pedestrian (163). Therefore, when the poet moves across traffic, he enters into an adversarial position with the traffic, which enables the opportunity to lose his halo and join the anonymity of the crowd. Berman divines from "Loss of a Halo" that the modern street supports both the chaos of the traffic and the space of the "ordinary man." Moreover, he implies that the

“heroism of modern life” is achieved by those urban figures who move against the flow of the two currents. When the poet forfeits his halo to the muck of the street, he is severing his individuality to become one of the ordinary men who make up the crowds of nineteenth century Paris. Furthermore, the poet purposefully enters into the street with the intention of allowing his halo to fall. For if the traffic can make the hero of modern life, then, the traffic can also take away the heroic position as well. Hence, the poet willingly relinquishes his position in the city as an extraordinary figure to enter into the everyday world where he can indulge in every kind of filth.

The poet’s discarding of the halo, the rejection of his exceptional status, allows him access to the ordinary world, but it also opens a space for an unfit urban figure to enter into the traffic with the hopes of retrieving the halo and subsequently occupying the exceptional space left vacant by the poet. The halo, adrift in the traffic, has been left to be found by a bad poet:

What’s more, it’s fun to think of some bad poet picking it up and brazenly putting it on. What a pleasure to make somebody happy! Especially somebody you can laugh at. Think of X! Think of Z! Don’t you see how funny it will be? (Quoted by Berman, 156).

To possess the halo, the bad poet must enter the maelstrom of the traffic to usurp the position of hero. When the now sullen halo is found and employed by the bad poet, he attempts to achieve the exceptional status of the poet, but instead he becomes a figure of scorn and ridicule. This shift in positions from the ordinary to the exceptional opens the bad poet to suffer the humiliation generated by his assuming the guise of the Baudelarian poet, a position that he is obviously incapable of occupying. For Berman, this transition evokes a vaudeville routine, and points forward to a century whose heroes will come

dressed as anti-heroes, and whose most solemn moments of truth will be not only described but actually experienced as clown shows, music-hall or nightclub routines—shtick (157). Hence, the occupation of the exceptional urban figure becomes comical, slapstick. Like Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, the anti-heroes of modern life become those that are drawn out from the crowd, and those that undertake the position of the exceptional without being derived from the exceptional.

The shift in urban positioning that is undertaken by the slapstick comedians parallels the similar movement of the noir protagonist. The discordant jump from slapstick to noir may seem a trifle abstract, but consider the commonality between the slapstick comedian and the noir protagonist: both are modern urban figures, both are the central figures of their narratives, and most importantly, both are seemingly at odds with the city and unable to fully control the surrounding urban environment. Following Berman's interpretation, the bad poet, turned slapstick, steps out of the congested space to retrieve the lost halo, and by doing so he opens himself to danger and ridicule, but he is doing so voluntarily. He has made a conscious decision to separate himself from the population around him and becomes the comedic spectacle of slapstick. The noir protagonist follows a similar track, they exist in a world of the ordinary, but through some uncontrollable event, they are now at odds with the everyday modern world. They too find themselves in the *flâneur's* position without the *flâneur's* abilities. Moreover, unlike the voluntary choice of the slapstick comedian, the noir protagonists find themselves in the unwanted position of having to deal with the unexpected. And usually they are unsuccessful.

The Hero of Everyday Life

To see the noir protagonist as an average, ordinary man placed into an extraordinary situation, it is necessary to re-evaluate the noir collection from the exceptional to the average. Film noir should be seen as a liminal industrial product, which depicts the lived experience of the modern urban environment. Therefore, the noir protagonist must be derived from the ordinary world of the crowd, and not from the exceptional world of the flâneur. The idea of ordinariness in film noir is reflected in Gilbert Adair's discussion of Fritz Lang's *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956). Adair focuses upon the felt hats and boxy double-breasted suits that have come to evoke the Hollywood films of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties. He designates the ordinariness of the character's dress, the commonality of their clothes, as the textural specificity of the American cinema, which is contingent upon what might be called its "urbanality" (124). The play on words, urban and banal, draw a direct line between film noir and the everyday. As Adair further points out, Lang's film is visually drab and unyielding, and nothing else but its own subject. Two men in hats and suits sit in an automobile and hatch a plot, two men whose white faces and crisp white shirts stand out against the enveloping of darkness (125). Adair sees *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* as depicting the everyday lived experience, as two ordinary men, in ordinary hats and suits, hatch a plot of extraordinary proportions.

The consideration of film noir as the representation of the average rather than the exceptional is reinforced by Paula Rabinowitz's study of reoccurring common objects in noir. She states that through the recurrence of everyday objects, film noir offers a template for analysing how cultural formations achieve legibility through stable repetition of instability. The everyday world of film noir is dotted with hidden dangers (14).

Moreover, film noir achieves its identifying textures from an array of formulaic images, plots, locations, visual styles, and objects—cigarette lighters, car windshields, doorways, Venetian blinds, and shoes (171). Rabinowitz makes an important revelation about film noir. She lumps together the outstanding elements of film noir, the complicated plot structures, the various locations, and the venerated aesthetic style with the mundane repetition of everyday things, like cigarette lighters, cars, and such. Her strategy negates the exceptional qualities found in much of noir criticism and reorientates film noir into the ordinary world of the average filmgoer. For Rabinowitz, the repetition of visual style, so commonly associated with film noir and the central focus of the aesthetic critics, is just another example of the ordinariness of the modern space depicted in these films. The shadowy chiaroscuro worlds of noir have become as mundane as a cigarette lighter. Moreover, she bluntly points out: “There can be no subjects without objects”(171). Hence, the modern city space found in film noir, the world of ordinary objects and ordinary places is essential to the development and understanding of the noir protagonist as an ordinary man.

However, it is within this ordinary world peopled with ordinary heroes that the extraordinary takes place. The noir protagonist originates from an ordinary location within the faceless crowd. However, as Rabinowitz has declared, the ordinary world is wrought with hidden dangers, and it is one of these hidden dangers that force the noir protagonist out of his passive position in the *badaud* and into the active position of the *flâneur*. The extrication of the noir protagonists from the crowd is often brought about by a circumstance that is outside of their control, a destabilizing occurrence, which forces the noir protagonist into the spotlight: the murder of an estranged wife, *The Blue Dahlia*

(1946), a cocaine-induced state of amnesia, *Fall Guy* (1947), or being sold-out by your boxing manger without being told, *The Set-Up* (1949). Each event pushes the noir protagonist out of his complacent position of the ordinary man and into an active position that was traditionally occupied by a flâneur-based figure. Moreover, without the legacy of the flâneur to back him up, the noir protagonist finds himself unable to fully realize his predicament. And the noir protagonist is left adrift, engulfed by circumstance, and unable to take control of subsequent narrative events.

As an example of the unwillingness of the noir protagonist to enter into the active position of a flâneur-derived figure is the 1947 Anthony Mann film *Desperate*. Steve Randall (Steve Brodie) is a war vet turned truck driver, an ordinary man. He is hard working and trying to start a family. One day, he receives a last-minute phone call from someone wanting to hire him and his war-surplus truck for a late night pick-up at a warehouse. Unknowingly, Steve has been duped by gangsters who are actually robbing the warehouse. When he realizes that he has been used, he signals the watchman. A shootout ensues. And the watchman dies. Steve is accused of the murder and he must flee with his pregnant wife from both the police and the gangster's vengeance. They are now fugitives from the law and the victims of criminal retribution. Unlike a flâneur-derived figure whom would assume an active role in the modern city, the truck driver chooses to run from his unwanted distinction. Steve, involuntarily, has become separated from the status quo, the everyday world of the ordinary man. He is no longer part of the badaud, but has been forced into an active flâneur-like position. However, Steve lacks any flâneur-like abilities, and he and his wife are unable to fully evade the police or the criminals. They attempt to hide at the bucolic family farm, but even this distant location

does not provide refuge, as both the gangsters and the police easily track them there. Finally, with nowhere else to run, Steve returns to his tenement apartment. He finds the gang waiting for him, and with no other choice available, they shoot-it-out in the rooming house stairwell.

The destabilized central figure is a hallmark of film noir; moreover, he is also a figure of ordinary means trapped into extraordinary situations. The situation is typified by the often quoted line from *Detour* (1945): “That’s Life, whichever way you turn, fate sticks out a foot to trip you.” The fate described by *Detour*’s protagonist, Al Roberts, is the narrative catalyst of an uncontrollable or unforeseen event, which ruptures the everyday life of the noir protagonist. In *The Phantom Lady*, an architect (Alan Curtis) returns home to find his wife has been strangled with one of his neckties. In *Scarlet Street* (1945), a henpecked clerk (Edward G. Robinson) becomes infatuated with a prostitute. In *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) a criminal mastermind (Sam Jaffe) decides to attempt one last big heist before retiring. In *The City that Never Sleeps* (1953), a policeman (Gig Young) decides to run off with his mistress. And in *Out of the Past* (1947), a gas-station attendant (Robert Mitchum) is recognized as having once been someone else, a detective involved in numerous criminal activities. In each case, the central figure is an ordinary man, an architect, a clerk, a crook, a cop or a pump jockey. Each figure is of unexceptional origins, but once the unforeseen events happen, their lives are disrupted and they are forced into active urban positions (all except the architect, whose inability and inactivity keeps him jailed throughout most of the film).

Perhaps no better film noir is exemplary of how the ordinariness of everyday objects and places contain the hidden dangers of modern life than H. Bruce “Lucky”

Humberstone's 1942 film, *I Wake Up Screaming*. A liminal product by Twentieth Century Fox, the film is the story of Frankie Christopher (Victor Mature), a New York City promoter of fighters, baseball players, you name it. On a bet, Frankie attempts to make Vicki Lynn, a waitress in a greasy spoon diner (Carole Landis) into a famous model. He succeeds, but she decides that Hollywood is a better place for her, so she leaves Frankie. The night before she is about to leave New York, she is murdered, and Frankie becomes the number one suspect. However, the New York of *I Wake Up Screaming* is wrought with hidden dangers. The stock footage streets of New York are deeply shadowed and lit by street lamps and neon. In these cavernous shadows are many hidden dangers, including a mysterious stranger who has been stalking the up-and-coming starlet. Frankie, the fight promoter, is forced into the position of the flâneur. In order to prove his innocence, Frankie must become his own investigator and sort through the numerous threats of the city to locate the real murderer. The film follows Frankie's ill-fated endeavours to clear himself of the murder and his attempts to allude the neurotic and sadistic police detective Cornell (Laird Cregar). Along the way, Frankie is aided by the victim's sister Jill (Betty Grable). As an example of Frankie's inability to investigate, he tells Jill to hide in a Times Square all-night grindhouse, while he goes out into the streets. Frankie, unable to completely occupy the position of the flâneur-derived detective is immediately apprehended by the police, while Jill, also wanted, remains safe in the movie theatre.

I Wake Up Screaming is an example of an overlooked film noir which is redeemed by its position within the collection of film noir. Filmed in 1941 and released in January of 1942, the film is one of the earliest examples of film noir. Moreover the film contains

elements that later film noirs have become renown for: flashback narratives, chiaroscuro shadows, location photography, and sexual perversity. As a solitary film noir, the film has received scant critical attention (even Silver and Ward provide an incorrect plot synopsis), but regardless *I Wake Up Screaming* is a venerated object, collected as film noir. For unlike any other collected noir, *I Wake Up Screaming* goes out of its way to stress the ordinariness of the protagonist Frankie Christopher. Christopher appears as a big city, highroller. He's a fancy dresser, hangs out at nightclubs, and knows everyone that is worth knowing. But none of these exceptional characteristics impresses Jill, the small-town, younger sister, until Frankie admits that he is not really a big time gadabout. His real name is Francis Botticelli. He is from Brooklyn. And the one thing he really loves to do on Saturday nights is to go swimming at the local pool, and he does not like to hang out at night clubs. Underneath all of Frankie's glitz and glamour, he is just an ordinary neighbourhood boy. He takes Jill to the local pool (shot on location) and the two fall in love like good wholesome average Americans. Frankie takes the position of a sophisticated urban figure, he appears like a big wheel, but deep down inside, he would rather be an ordinary guy. The film takes special emphasis upon Frankie's ordinariness, not only so that Jill will fall in love with him but to accentuate the instability and terror of the hidden dangers that surrounds them.

Frankie's ordinariness is also stressed in his inability to elude the police. The murder of waitress/sister Vicky Lynn launched Frankie out of the crowd of the big city and into the investigative position of having to clear himself of the murder. However, Frankie is an ordinary guy, who now finds himself in an extraordinary position. And true to form, he is unable to handle the situation. Frankie is doggedly pursued by the obsessive police

detective. No matter which way Frankie turns, Cornell is there waiting for him. One night, Frankie is awakened to find Cornell sitting at his bedside, the detective is just there in the shadows watching him. Eventually, Frankie figures out that the mysterious stranger who had been stalking Vicky was, in fact, the detective Cornell. And in an attempt to confront the deviant detective, Frankie arrives at Cornell's apartment only to find that he has committed suicide. With the death of Cornell, their suspicions shift to the doorman at Vicky's apartment (Elisha Cook Jr.), who eventually confesses to the murdering the waitress turned model.

I Wake Up Screaming is exemplary of the hidden dangers found in the urban spaces of the noir environment. The film is filled with everyday objects: movie theaters, nightclubs, diners, taxi cabs, cigarette lighters, windshields, and switchboard desks. Anything on its own would be mundane, everyday stuff, but when these objects are incorporated into the narrative each takes on sinister proportions. Movie theaters become shadowy hiding places, nightclubs become fronts for lies and deceptions. Even the switchboard at Vicky's apartment building becomes a device to monitor her comings and goings. But the best example of how the ordinary can mask the terrifying is the bedroom scene. When Frankie awakes, he reaches for a cigarette from the night-stand. Quietly, Cornell speaks, and then emerges from the shadows. Here is the precise description of the dangers, which lurk in an ordinary space. A man, in his bedroom, reaches for a smoke, only to find the psychologically disturbed Cornell lurking in the shadows. The detective does not overtly threaten Frankie with an act of violence, he is simply sitting, watching, in a menacing fashion. And once revealed, Cornell speaks "I'm watching you," then he quietly leaves the apartment. The ordinary world of Francis Botticelli is disrupted by the

hidden danger of the everyday. The scene is marked by the repetition of cigarettes and the apartment bedroom, but hidden within this ordinary place is the menace of the insane police detective. Frankie does not have ostentatious furnishing, nor a personal valet, only a modestly furnished room. He is marked as an ordinary man by the surrounding everyday objects in his bedroom.

The presence of ordinary protagonists within film noir delineates the noir phenomenon from earlier detective and gangster films. The central figures of film noir are drawn from the everyday world of the ordinary man and not from the realm of the flâneur. The truck drivers and fight promoters of film noir are emphasized as ordinary and surrounded by the banal objects of everyday life. Moreover, the repetition of ordinary objects within film noir depletes the exceptional elements attributed to film noir: complicated flashbacks, stylistic legacies, and auteurist visions. The ordinariness of the central male figures of film noir renders them unable to control the extraordinary circumstances that they are confronted with. This does not mean that the skills of the flâneur are completely lost in film noir. Often the exceptional abilities of observation and negotiation are transferred to the female protagonist. In a small number of film noir, the female protagonist occupies the active position of the investigator. She becomes the flâneuse of film noir.

The Short Life of the Flâneuse

The extraordinary properties of the flâneur, which are lost to the ordinary noir protagonist, were not initially obliterated from the depiction of urban figures in the modern noir city. The vacuum created by the failure of the central protagonist does not

mean that the extraordinary skills of the flâneur are lost. A survey of the noir collection reveals that several film noirs of the 1940s relocate the skills of flânerie to the female noir protagonist. The most prominent examples are *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940), *This Gun for Hire* (1942), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *The Phantom Lady* and *When Strangers Marry* (both 1944). In these films, the figure of the heroic male protagonist has been rendered ineffectual, impotent, or incarcerated. Consequently, the burden of investigation, and narrative resolution, falls on the shoulders of the female protagonist. The female lead must move into the position of investigator, she must brave the mire of the Macadam to resolve the narrative mystery. Moreover, the active female figure must appropriate the skills developed by the flâneur to successfully negotiate the labyrinth of the city. She becomes the female flâneur, or the flâneuse. However, by doing so she becomes exposed to the hidden dangers within the modern city.

As a reoccurring urban figure within the noir collection, the flâneuse, an autonomous female presence within the noir city, is contrary to much of the accepted theory of women in film noir. Usually the women in film noir are discussed within the division of good and evil female types. As Janey Place illustrates, the women of film noir are divided into two dialectic opposites: the spider woman and the nurturing woman. The spider women, or femme fatales, of film noir are marked by their desire for freedom, wealth, or independence which ignites the forces that threaten the hero, and consequently, they become aggressive, sensual, and dangerous women (46-47). Moreover according to Place, the femme fatale is the central obsession of film noir (47). The spider woman is established as sexual power through visual style and their dominance in composition, angle, camera movement and lighting. However, the femme fatale ultimately loses

physical movement, influence over camera movement, and is often actually or symbolically imprisoned by composition as control over her is exerted and expressed visually (45). Place locates the dark side of the film noir woman as sexually independent, and therefore an object of danger who must be destroyed by film's end. The presence of the evil spider woman is balanced by the figure of the woman as redeemer. This female figure offers the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities. She gives love and understanding, asks very little in return and is generally passive and static (50). Within the visual composition of noir, she is marked as the direct opposite of the *femme fatale*. The nurturing woman is linked to the pastoral environment of open spaces. She is characterized by even, flat, high-key lighting (50). Place creates a dichotomy in film noir between the active, sexual and dangerous *femme fatale* and the passive, loving and safe woman of nurture. Moreover, she links this dichotomy with the status of women during and immediately after World War II.

Place states that the polarized representation of women in film noir is exemplary of the repressed state of women in the 1940s and middle 1950s. During World War II, military production made huge demands upon the limited labour pool within the United States. Many women filled the vacant industrial positions, which provided these middle-class working women a degree of social and economic independence. With the end of the war, the need for labour decreased and the working women were forced to return to their domestic lives and the industrial jobs were filled by returning veterans. Therefore, the dichotomy of noir women was to demonstrate the virtue of the nurturing, homebody woman and destroy the independent dangerous woman. Place states that the polarity of

these women was a direct relation to wartime/post-war ideologies. In other words, the danger of the independent woman and the safety of the nurturing woman were meant to serve as an ideological attempt to reign in the newfound independence of the wartime working woman and return her to the domestic confines of the post-war home (35). However, the basic polarity of Place's dichotomy overlooks the fact that during the war years and shortly after, there was a third female figure in the noir city. The noir collection is populated with many independent, bourgeois, female figures who are neither *femmes fatales* nor redeeming wives but women who assume the active role within the narrative. These urban dwelling women become the investigative heroes. And consequently, they adopt the position and the skills of the *flâneur*.

In the mid-nineteenth century, when the active position of the *flâneur* began to fragment into detectives and criminals, the abilities of the *flâneur* also fractured into an autonomous urban female figure— the *flâneuse*. The new female *flâneur* adopted the *flâneur's* skills of observation and negotiation. Subsequently, she became closely associated with the development of visual culture and consumer society. As the new woman of the modern city, she applied the *flâneur's* abilities to negotiate and observe, but not in the crowded city streets. Instead the *flâneuse* found her domain in the burgeoning sites of consumer society— the department store. As Anne Friedberg explains, when the domain of the *flâneur*, the streets and arcades, began to be supplanted by the department store, this new consumptive space opened to the female *flâneur* (420). The *flâneuse* would occupy the protected space of the late nineteenth century department stores and employ *flâneur*-like skills of observation and negotiation for the sole purpose of shopping (421). In the new department stores, the female *flâneur* was protected from the *movement*

brusque of the city streets. Moreover, as documented by Erika D. Rappaport, department stores deliberately catered to the new woman of the city as a flâneur-derived figure. London department store owner Gordon Selfridge encouraged bourgeois women to experience city life in the role of the traditionally, but no longer exclusively, masculine character of the flâneur, and that Selfridge's advertisements positioned the shopper as a flâneuse whose urban rambles ended at his door (142). Therefore, as a shopper, the new woman of the city followed the trajectory of the flâneur by applying his discriminatory knowledge while negotiating through the traffic of the department store.

It is important to make the distinction between the presence of the flâneuse and the other women of the streets that were so prevalent in the modern city. Previous to the advent of department stores, the female figure most closely associated with the streets of the modern city was the prostitute. Or, as Benjamin has so graciously described them: both seller and commodity in one (1983, 171). But the flâneuse was a different urban figure. She was an autonomous female figure that maintained the observation and negotiation skills developed by the flâneur. However, these abilities were not employed to circulate through the labyrinth of the city, they were only employed within specific and protected middle-class environments. Moreover, the development of department stores, museums, exhibitions, and packaged tourism empowered the gaze of the bourgeois women (Friedberg 421- 422). The flâneuse exercised her abilities to move into city spaces, but only in the subjugated spaces of the middle-class consumer. As Janet Wolff notes the urban spaces available to women were relegated to shopping and the domestic sphere which brings into question the validity of the flâneuse: "There is no question of inventing the flâneuse, the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible

by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century” (154). In other words, the flâneur’s freedom to wander was severely restricted when the gender shifted to the feminine. Therefore, the abilities of the flâneuse were limited to the specific spheres of acceptable bourgeois surroundings, and she was denied access to the “low things” available in the modern city. Hence, the freedoms afforded to the flâneuse were limited and remained restricted to shopping and going to the movies throughout the Teens and Twenties. However, the destabilizing of the middle-class during the Depression and World War II enabled women to achieve a new freedom of mobility, an opportunity to adopt the position of the modern cities’ flâneuse.

The bourgeois woman was no longer relegated to the domestic setting, and through economic necessity she was now able to access urban sites that had been previously withheld. Rabinowitz discusses the new mobilized woman of the 1930s and 1940s who appear in the parallel images of film noir and the photographs of the FSA and OWI. Together, the films and the photos can elucidate the characteristics of the figure of the flâneuse within the noir city. Rabinowitz states that wartime demands changed the position of women and invariably the female takes control of the man and the situation.

Women had experienced a different kind of mobilization during the 1940s when many left poorly paying jobs as domestics or clerks in search of more lucrative employment in factories and in federal government offices. Many of these women ended up living in rooming houses full of other single women with whom they shared meals and chores and movie dates. (27-28)

The economic hardship of the Depression forced many women out into the streets, but it was the wartime economic prosperity and shortage of able-bodied men that enabled them to occupy a flâneur-like position within the city. The new wartime woman was

economically and socially free to occupy urban space. Rabinowitz looks to two photographs depicting women lined up for evening movies as documentation of a female take over of urban space (28). The images feature crowds of women surrounded by the darkness of night but illuminated by the lights of the city. Their compositions easily allude to the chiaroscuro lighting of the film noir aesthetic. However, these photos are also demonstrative of the autonomy afforded the new mobilized woman. These wartime women are independent, but not like the sexually threatening spider woman, they are independent middle-class women. The depletion of the modern city's male population enabled the actuality and solidarity of the restricted nineteenth century *flâneuse* and the emerging depiction of the autonomous female figure in the noir city.

It is important for Rabinowitz to anchor these independent women to a domestic space. The new mobilized female workforce that came to occupy the wartime city consisted of autonomous figures who lived in single rooms. The domestic situation reflected the independence of the *flâneuse*, the wartime working woman maintained her own private living space in boarding houses and women's hotels (28). Therefore, the autonomous female of wartime America was a markedly bourgeois woman mobilized by wartime demands for labour, and made self-reliant through her financial independence and autonomous living arrangements. Contrarily, the film noir *femme fatale* rarely possessed this kind of domestic isolation. She was usually a kept woman—her snarl set her apart from proper domesticity. She didn't need to work a job (28). The *femme fatale* would remain a kept woman. She continued to be both commodity and seller, and dependent upon the objectification of the male gaze. Hence, the differentiation between the mobilized woman of the city and the *femme fatale* is a dichotomy between the

domesticity and middle-class status of the flâneuse and the transient and dangerous position of the kept woman. Moreover, the relation between the independent female figures of film noir and the nineteenth century flâneuse is reinforced by their similar positions as middle-class consumers. Both of Rabinowitz's evidentiary photos place women within the consumptive realm of the movie theatre, a consumer site which paralleled the development of the department store. Moreover, the image of the wartime middle-class woman as consumer is echoed in Bubley's photos of women. The domestic spaces of the rooming house rooms are characterized by everyday objects such as magazines, radios, pictures from home, and drying laundry (33). It is the presence of consumer products (movies, magazines and radio programs) that separate these autonomous urban women from the disengaged world of the femme fatale. The film noir flâneuse exists as an independent urban figure. She is characterized by her social and economic independence, and her willingness to consume everyday products.

However as the investigative figure within film noir, it is essential for the flâneuse to be able to access the "low things" within the modern city. Traditionally, the flâneuse was restricted from such places, and was forced to remain within the confines of safe environments: departments stores, museums, and by the 1940s movies theaters. However, for the flâneuse to become the investigator, she must maintain an inconspicuous presence within the urban crowd. She must undergo the act of *doing* while concealed by the act of *being*. In other words, the middle-class woman must assume the guise of the prostitute in order to loiter in the streets unnoticed and to access the darkest regions of the urban labyrinth. Rabinowitz notes that Kansas, the flâneuse of *The Phantom Lady*, is a good girl who disguises herself as a femme fatale to gain information from Cliff (Elisha Cook Jr.)

the jazz drummer (26-27). Moreover, this act of presenting herself in the position of a prostitute is evident in numerous film noirs. In *Stranger on the Third Floor*, the flâneuse must enter the streets late at night, unprotected, and loiter to attract the attention of the killer. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, only after “Charlie” enters the darkened streets of Santa Rosa, after the library is closed, can Uncle Charlie reveal himself as the killer. And, in *This Gun for Hire*, the female government agent must assume the role of a hussy nightclub singer to gain access into the criminal conspiracy. Therefore, to fully become the investigator, the flâneuse must assume the guise of a kept woman to gain access to the “low things” hidden in the modern city, but by doing so, the flâneuse exposes herself to hidden dangers that lurk within the shadows of the noir city.

As Frank Krutnick notes, it is rare to find female detectives in 1940s thrillers. He considers two exceptions: *Stranger on the Third Floor* and *The Phantom Lady*. Both films present a woman who embarks upon an investigation in order to clear her lover of a murder charge; however in both films, he discounts the woman as an active investigative “hero” by her numerous male counterparts. Furthermore, Krutnick notes that each woman’s placement in the conventional masculine role as detective is motivated by, and ultimately bound within, her love for the wrongly-convicted hero (194). On one point Krutnick is correct, these two female investigators occupy the investigative position because of love, however, Krutnick fails to consider that each woman, reinforced by existence of the other flâneuse-oriented films, is successful in resolving the mystery while her numerous male counterparts are ineffectual as investigators.

Krutnick states that these female figures are in some way supervised by authoritarian male counterparts, who monitor and protect their investigations. With regards to *The*

Phantom Lady, Krutnick states:

Kansas (Ella Raines) is subjected to a tawdry sexualization as she masquerades as a 'B-girl' in order to extract information from Cliff (Elisha Cook Jr.). Whereas in the male-centered investigative thrillers, the detective-hero's impersonations serve often to demonstrate his control over the external world, as a manipulator of appearances, Kansas's masquerade sets her in a context of sexual danger. Not only this, but her detective activity is constrained by the fact that she is 'supervised' by a male figure of the law, Inspector Burgess (Thomas Gomez). (194)

Krutnick is right in assuming that the investigation undertaken by Kansas places her in sexual danger; however, he is incorrect to state that she is supervised by Burgess. In the film, the police detective takes a subordinate role. Burgess openly admits that his hands are tied, and that he can only provide assistance in an unofficial capacity. Moreover, it is only after Kansas's initial investigations, and the subsequent deaths of two witnesses that opens the possibility for another murderer. And only then, does Burgess take interest in aiding the female investigator.

Moreover, Burgess is rendered ineffective in his position as an official figure of the law. As a policeman, it is his duty to follow the circumstantial evidence and ensure that the wrongly-convicted architect is executed. Moreover, his assistance to Kansas is performed outside of his official capacity as a police detective. The repetition of the secondary position of an authoritative, but ineffective, member of a law enforcement agency is evident in each of these female investigative film noirs. For example, in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, two government agents (MacDonald Carey and Wallace Ford) have been tracking the "Merry Widow" killer (Joseph Cotton) across the United States. When they finally corner him in the small town of Santa Rosa, they are waylaid by interference of a "red herring" and unable to arrest the proper killer. Therefore, the burden

of proof falls upon the young niece (Teresa Wright). “Charlie” is the only one capable of gathering evidence against her Uncle Charlie, and by doing so she puts herself in sexual danger. The proper investigative authorities remain in the background. Even as affection grows between Carey and Wright, the authorities remain fringe characters and they are completely absent at the final confrontation between the insane uncle and the endangered niece.

The pattern of ineffectual male investigators is evident in all the flâneuse- based film noirs. In *Stranger on the Third Floor*, the young reporter (John McGuire) has been wrongly convicted of murder and subsequently jailed; therefore, his girlfriend (Margaret Tallichet) must undergo the tracking of the real killer. In *Third Gun for Hire*, the government agent (Veronica Lake) finds that the most effective investigative partner available to her is the psychopathic hit-man Raven (Alan Ladd) and not her police detective boyfriend (Robert Preston). In fact, as the film progresses, the detective begins to serve more as comic relief than a representation of competent law enforcement. In *When Strangers Marry*, the detective (Neil Hamilton) is also a supporting figure and does little to find the missing husband or to trap the real killer instead leaving the investigations to the young flâneuse (Kim Hunter). Certainly these films are infrequent occurrences in the noir collection, but seeing how they were all produced in the concentrated period of the war years, they take on special meaning. These films come to represent the new mobility of the working middle-class “good” girl within the modern city space and an overlooked aspect of the representation of women in noir criticism.

The rise of the autonomous urban female figure in film noir was directly correlated to the freedom afforded the working middle-class woman during the war years and not

necessarily dependent upon Krutnick's narrative motivation of love and devotion. Although limited primarily to the war years (there were a few straggler films like *Abandoned* and *Follow Me Quietly* [both 1949] and Douglas Sirk's pseudo-noir *Lured* [1947]), the presence of an independent middle class female protagonist opens the noir collection to greater considerations of the modern experience of urban life. The noir flâneuse is characterized by her bourgeois status, her economic autonomy, and her everyday domestic environment. Moreover as the "good" girl, the noir flâneuse is also restricted to similar socially acceptable urban environments as was the nineteenth century flâneuse. Therefore in order to access the "low" places of the modern city, to pursue the criminal element, the noir flâneuse must be able to adopt the guise of the prostitute, the kept woman, or the femme fatale, to gain access to the city's underbelly. However, when she adopts the guise of the lowly prostitute, she is no longer protected by her social station and she becomes open to the sexual dangers of the modern city. The investigations of the noir flâneuse unlock the netherworld of the noir city, but the flâneuse does not expose the machinations of various criminal enterprises. The flâneuse reveals the hidden danger of the everyday urban experience. Her investigations reveal that under the banal exterior of some of the ordinary men in the crowd hides the beast of the city.

The Minotaur at the Heart of the Labyrinth

As the urban space occupied by the flâneur was being partitioned between detectives, criminals, and shoppers, the modern city also saw rise of another flâneur-derived figure. However, this flâneur figure would take the most monstrous position in the modern city. He would become the serial killer. Like the other urban descendants of the flâneur, the

serial killer takes his place amongst the crowded throng of the modern city and he employs the *movement brusque* of the crowd to hide his identity. From this obscured position, the serial killer is able to practice his heinous endeavours. He can observe and stalk his victims, while blending into the domain of the ordinary man. However, the serial killer does not find his ancestry in literature, his origins are situated in the actuality of the modern city. Consequently, as an actual urban predator, the serial killer becomes a consistent figure within the realistic cities of film noir. Many film noirs centre around the murder sprees of serial killers, and a survey of the noir collection reveals that there are two distinct narrative patterns. The first serial killer narrative is closely tied to the neo-realist police procedural films. These films concentrate upon the technical skills used by law enforcement to hunt down various urban malefactors: counterfeiters, jewel thieves, heroin smugglers, communist agents, and serial killers. Examples of these films would be *The Naked City*, *T-Men* (both 1948), *He Walked by Night*, *C-Man*, *Port of New York* (all 1949), *Southside 1-1000* (1950), and *Walk East on Beacon* (1953). The procedural films concentrate on the activities of the police and their investigations, and feature long explanatory sequences about the implacability of their officers, or the latest in equipment. The emphasis of these films is upon the personnel and gadgetry. The criminal enterprise, whether it is dope pushers, enemy agents, or mass murder, is secondary to the activities of John Law. The activities of the serial killer become lumped together with other un-American activities of the post war era. Serial killers, like Communist agents, are simply negative elements that must be hunted down and destroyed. Therefore, I will provide only this brief consideration because in the procedural film the serial killer is incidental. He remains an enigma and he serves only as an object of a police manhunt.

The second form of serial killer narrative, and most relevant to this study, is the film noir where the serial killer is a prominent urban character. These films do not concentrate upon the details of the police investigations, but rather they centre upon the activities of the killer and his place within the modern city. In these films, the audience knows the identity of the killer, and they follow his movements through the noir city. Although these films have seldom been considered as serial killer narratives, these unknown murderers demonstrate many of the serial killer's unique characteristics. The multiple murders, the psychological impediments, and the killer's ominous presence, all lend these films to be interpreted as serial killer narratives. Some early examples of film noir where the murderer can be construed as a serial killer are *Among the Living* (1941), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Christmas Holiday*, *When Strangers Marry* (both 1944), *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), *Born to Kill*, and *Railroaded* (both 1947).

However, the finest example of the serial killer in film noir is *The Phantom Lady*. In this film, the murderer is a psychologically deranged individual who conceals himself within the crowd of the modern city. As a predatory figure within the modern city, the serial killer can be considered as another derivative of the nineteenth century flâneur. Like other flâneur-derived characters, the serial killer exhibits the specialized abilities of urban observer and negotiator to stalk his unsuspecting victims and conceal his identity. Moreover, the serial killer must locate his hiding place within the crowd, where he can conceal his monstrosity from the urban throng. This ever present, yet unseen, position within the crowd makes the serial killer the ultimate hidden danger of the modern city. He becomes the Minotaur lurking deep in the heart of the urban labyrinth, watching and waiting for his next unsuspecting victim.

Consider quickly the first appearance of the serial killer in *The Phantom Lady*. When Kansas lowers herself to the position of the prostitute to enter the underbelly of the city to gain information, she spends the night chewing gum, drinking cheap liquor, and clinging to Cliff the disreputable drummer. She returns to his tenement apartment to seduce him and to gaining valuable information. However, she is unaccustomed to placing herself within sexual danger, and flees after being unable to completely debase herself. Immediately after her departure, the killer arrives. At this time, the audience does not know who this figure of death is, nor do they know where he came from. He just appears ominous and omniscient. Only Cliff recognizes him, but it is too late and Cliff is strangled with a silk scarf. Later, the killer's identity is divulged to the audience. It is Jack Marlow (Franchot Tone), a sculptor, a man of the world, a friend of the wrongly convicted architect, and a serial killer. Jack is couched in the everyday world, he is marked by his boxy suit and unassuming demeanour. However, Jack is the embodiment of what Paula Rabinowitz describes as the menace of the mundane (15). Jack appears like any other ordinary urban figure, however, under his surface of banality lies the menacing, the beast of the city, the serial killer.

The connection between the noir serial killer and the noir flâneuse is essential to seeing the greater body of film noir as the representation of modern life. Both of these urban figures are derived from the flâneur and each possesses the inherent abilities of observation and negotiation. However, the flâneuse employs these abilities to establish a domestic environment and consume everyday goods. The serial killer employs the skills of the flâneur to conceal his presence within the crowd and to pursue his victims through the labyrinth of the modern city. The ability to observe is essential for the serial killer to

stalk and murder his victims. Moreover, his pursuits are aided by his ability to do so unnoticed, to negotiate through urban space without calling attention to himself. Like the flâneur, the serial killer must be able to perform the activity of *being* while being obscured by the position of *doing*. Therefore, the abilities of the serial killer to move through the streets of the modern city are predominately derived from the flâneur and his urban meanderings. Moreover, the serial killer's homicidal tendencies are the result of the flâneur's social alienation.

As the activities of the flâneur began to stagnate, he became a figure of suspicion, even menace. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin includes an unusual comment about the decay of the flâneur. He states "The case in which the flâneur completely distances himself from the type of the philosophical promenader, and takes on the features of the werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness, was fixed for the first time and forever afterwards by Poe in his story "The Man of the Crowd" (1999, 417-418). This is particularly strange comment, for Benjamin links the flâneur in Poe's tale to the mythical beast of the European forests. However, the bestial connotations of the werewolf negate the possibility that Benjamin is referring to the flâneur who is spurred to become the detective. Therefore, we must turn our suspicions to the titular figure, the mysterious and unknown man of the crowd. As Poe concludes, this figure is involved in deep criminality, which is so heinous that the detective can no longer pursue him. Poe's flâneur turned detective is unable to fathom the criminal depths of this mysterious urban figure and relinquishes his chase and the human monster disappears into the crowd. It is not certain whether or not Poe was establishing this figure as a serial killer (he was writing a few decades before Jack the Ripper) but Poe's intonation is that the criminal enterprise of this

mysterious figure was of a most heinous sort. Therefore, the presence of the serial killer in the modern city becomes a position concealed within the crowd. He is a werewolf roaming the social wilderness of the modern city. And as the traditional figure of the flâneur would become increasingly alienated and fragmented into new urban types, there would be a small contingent that would break off and assume the most vile and heinous form of urban loiterer: the human monster, or the serial killer.

As the modern city became increasingly dangerous, and the network of streets more complex, it became the perfect location for the development of urban predators. Although the actual link between the flâneur and the serial killer was not made by Benjamin, he did create the psychological guide lines for the emergence of the urban sexual predator. Elizabeth Wilson has used Benjamin's article "Central Park" as an outline to describe the modern serial killer, which she describes as the Minotaur (74). The contemporary serial killer's negotiation through the modern city echoes the movements of the mythical beast who roamed the ancient labyrinth of Knossos. She states:

The city is a labyrinth, and the flâneur an embodiment of it. The labyrinth has a specific sexual meaning: male impotence. It is, suggests Benjamin, 'the home of the hesitant. The path of someone shy of arrival at a goal easily takes form of the labyrinth. This is the way of the (sexual) drive in those episodes which precede satisfaction'. Voyeurism and commodification lead to attenuation and deferral of satisfaction . . . This mood or temperament determines his vision of the city . . . And yet the routines of the flâneur are entirely monotonous, and Benjamin observes ominously: "for people as then as today there is only one radical novelty, and that is always the same: death . . . The repetitive monotony of the flâneur's regime of strolling is an instance of 'eternal 'recurrence' – the eternal recurrence of the new, which is 'always ever the same'. And the monster at the heart of the labyrinth is the Minotaur, the monster waiting to kill. (74)

It is important that Wilson distinguishes the beast of the city as a descendent of the

flâneur, or more correctly, the decay of the flâneur. She establishes that as the flâneur loses his detached position of the observer and he becomes a sinister and dangerous figure. The flâneur becomes the Minotaur (75). Hence, the hidden dangers of the modern city are the flâneur-derived figures, whom through the attenuation of their satisfaction must resort to the final transgressive thrill of death. Not their own death, but the death of someone else.

Moreover, the decay of the flâneur into monstrosity is associated with the developing consumer society. The human monsters of the modern city become frustrated by the lack of satisfaction initiated by the commodification of sexuality within the urban space. In the nineteenth century, the prostitute was the embodiment of the commodified woman. As Benjamin states, the nineteenth century began to incorporate women wholesale into the process of commodity production (1985, 39). Furthermore, he states:

Prostitution opens up the possibility of a mythical communion with the masses. The rise of the masses is, however, simultaneous with that of mass-production. Prostitution at the same time appears to contain the possibility of surviving in a world in which objects of our most intimate use have become increasingly mass-produced. In the prostitution of the metropolis the woman herself becomes an article that is mass produced.”
(1985, 40)

Hence, as the prostitute becomes the object of mass-production, she undergoes a process of dehumanization and objectification in the modern city. And as a commodity, the prostitute no longer presents satisfaction, but only attenuation. Therefore, the deadening of gratification and the rise of impotency escalate the need for the radical novelty of death and transform the flâneur into the Minotaur.

However, as Benjamin and Wilson points out, the mere presence of a woman in the streets was not enough for the flâneur to become the Minotaur. The city itself must

become a labyrinth for the beast to reside. As with the flâneur, the Minotaur interiorizes the city space. He is at home within the labyrinth and can negotiate through the complexities of the modern city with ease. However, in the noir city, the level of complexity is increased. The city in film noir reaches beyond the constrictions of Sue's Mohicanized Paris to become a multi levelled urban environment. The noir urban space expands across the globe and the noir city can be found in any modern urban centre: London, Havana, Vienna, Quebec City, or even a desert ghost town. Moreover, the noir city also turns inward to include temporal fluctuations within the narrative and various psychological states of the unconscious. Nicholas Christopher describes film noir's urban space as containing several interlocking layers. First is the actual physical maze of the city: streets sidewalks, bridges, automobiles, and subway tunnels, underpasses, docks and piers, airport runways and in the post-war years, the expressways. Moreover, the city is a tangle packed with millions of unique warrens: office buildings, apartment houses, department stores, tenements; warehouses, hospitals, prisons and parking garages; casinos, night clubs, cafes, and bars; museums, theaters stadiums, and even factories and refineries on the fringes of the city limits (17). The physical representation of the noir city is no longer a dangerous Parisian *faubourg* but now the perils of the modern city include the entire expanse of the modern urban space.

Secondly, Christopher states the labyrinth of the noir city is also the human condition or situation in which the characters intersect and interact in the city. This level of the labyrinth is constructed of plot twists and stratagems, metaphysical conundrums, or bewildering and inscrutable enmeshments of time, space and chance (17). For Christopher the maze of the noir landscape can encompass the past, present and future

which, are illustrated in the convoluted plots and flashbacks found in so many film noirs. And finally, there is the labyrinth of the hero's inner workings, his mental and physiological condition, which can be subjected to brutal stresses and strains that mercilessly reveal his flaws. His anatomy is a kind of corollary to, and reflection of, the city's inner workings, in all their rich complexity (17). In this level of the urban labyrinth, the city space invades the subconscious of the character. These psychological city spaces take the form of dream sequences or drug induced hallucinations, and they are often set within distorted urban spaces. For Example, in *Stranger on the Third Floor*, the young reporter, guilt ridden, has a nightmare, which moves from his tenement apartment to a courtroom, to the death chair. In *Murder, My Sweet*, a doped up Philip Marlowe runs through a series of decreasing sized doorways as he is chased by a giant hypodermic needle. Even plot construction can occupy the subconscious realm of the dream. Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window*, Robert Siodmak's *The Strange Affair of Uncle Charlie* (both 1945), and Anthony Mann's quasi-noir *Strange Impersonation* (1946) conclude with the revelation that the central character has fallen asleep in a living room chair and had a nightmare. Often considered being a cheater ending, these "it was only a dream" noir narratives are completely immersed within the subconscious dream state of the protagonists and present the modern city on a purely psychological level throughout the entire film. Therefore, when examining the complexities of the noir urban landscape, the physical, temporal, and psychological levels of representation must be combined to reveal one multi levelled urban space.

On the physical level of the noir urban labyrinth, the serial killer is in total control of his urban space. He is unrecognisable and unstoppable. And his victims fall easily and

frequently. However, the noir urban labyrinth is greater than just the physical level of the city. It also includes the psychological level. Unlike the noir protagonist, the ordinary hero of the crowd, who finds his ineffectiveness and inadequacies on the physical level of the modern city, the noir serial killer finds his attenuation and impotency on the psychological level of the modern city. It is this inability to negotiate through the city on a psychological level that drives the serial killer to commit his crimes but also initiates his downfall. In the noir city, the serial killer has no problem eliminating members of the *badaud*. Travelling salesmen, sleazy musicians, coffee shop proprietors are all easily dispensed with. As well, the kept women of noir are quickly eradicated. For the serial killer, the elimination of these ordinary urban figures is little challenge. Furthermore, the ineffective noir protagonist provides no opposition to the endeavours of the killer and his extermination of the mass-produced urban population. However, the *flâneuse* becomes a psychological stumbling block for the noir killers. She presents herself in the guise of the commodified prostitute, however she is in actuality an autonomous bourgeois woman. Her contradictory presence creates an anomaly for the noir killer. For the serial killer recognizes the presence of the prostitute as mass-produced and a potential victim. However, the autonomous urban position of the bourgeois woman in the street becomes an impasse for the murderer. He can pursue her like the commodified woman, but she has an autonomy, which he cannot overcome. The bourgeois woman of the street is a guarded figure, protected from the hidden dangers of urban life. Certainly from the *flâneuse's* perspective she is in sexual danger, but from the serial killer's perspective, she is a rupture on the psychological level of the urban labyrinth. The misinterpretation of the *flâneuse* as prostitute renders the noir serial killer impotent on the psychological level, as

he cannot overcome the attenuation of his sexual desires and enjoy the radical novelty of killing the flâneuse. In each flâneuse/serial killer film noir, the plot builds to the final confrontation between the two. But each time, the serial killer cannot murder the flâneuse. He either kills himself or falls under the wheels of a speeding vehicle.

In *The Phantom Lady*, Jack the serial killer murders the architect's wife after she ends their affair. As Jack's mistress, Mrs. Henderson represents the kept-woman; she is a commodified woman. Her rejection of Jack attenuates his sexual desires and Jack kills her in an attempt to satiate his desires. His sexual dissatisfaction has led to the radical novelty of death. The noir protagonist, architect Scott Henderson, is rendered impotent by his inability to comprehend the situation around him. And, he is immediately arrested and spends the majority of the film in jail. Jack begins his murder spree as he moves through the city to eliminate anyone who could connect him to the dead Mrs. Henderson. He observes Kansas as she begins her investigation at the bar where Scott drank on the night of his wife's murder. We cannot see him, but as he reveals later, he has been watching everything since the moment of the first murder. The bartender has already been threatened by the yet unseen Jack, and while trying to avoid Kansas's pursuit, he is hit by a truck and dies. The next move for the flâneuse is to question the hapless Cliff. Again, unseen, the serial killer awaits his move and Cliff becomes the next victim. But Kansas's investigations are getting too close. Therefore, Jack must finally reveal himself, but he does so in the guise of the concerned friend. On the physical level of the noir city, Jack has been able to anticipate everyone of Kansas's moves. As her tenacity grows he realizes that he must accompany her to properly observe her investigations. He does so unnoticed and unsuspected. But as Kansas gets closer and closer to the real killer, she remains

unaware that she is sitting next to him. Jack demonstrates his skilful decent from the flâneur. He is able to observe the movements of everyone in the film, all the while hiding his identity as an ordinary man within the crowd.

However, Jack is not an ordinary man. He is a serial killer, whose murder spree has been initiated by his unfulfilled sexual desires. He has been rejected by his mistress, and it has driven him to the radical novelty of murder. He has become the Minotaur within the labyrinth of the noir city. On the physical level, Jack has been successful in observing his mass-produced victims and he has been able to negotiate through the city unnoticed. But on the psychological level, Jack is tormented by his sexual rejection by his kept woman. Moreover, his initial observations of Kansas have led him to believe that she is a prostitute too. He sees her hanging out in a downtown bar, and then continuing her disguise as a “bad” girl; he sees her cavorting with Be-bop musicians. But then when Jack allegedly returns from South America, and he makes his presence known to Kansas, he is disturbed to discover that Kansas is a “good” girl, an autonomous bourgeois flâneuse, and not Scott’s kept woman. This revelation that Kansas is a dutiful and doting secretary and not a woman of the street accentuates Jack’s unstable state. He begins to have psychotic episodes, which he claims as dizzy spells and headaches.

Eventually, Jack traps Kansas in his swanky apartment complete with his fascist sculptures and a portrait of Van Gogh missing an ear. Jack delivers his justification for his killing spree. He was driven to commit the murders after being rejected by his mistress, the architect’s wife. But more than his amputated sexual desires, Jack is motivated by his disdain for modern life. He explains as he rambles:

I never liked cities— noise, confusion, dirt. They hate me because I am

different from them. I don't belong here. Neither do you [Kansas]. It isn't fair for someone like you to be suffering. You should be happy. If only you never came to New York . . . never met Scott. This world is full of men like him. You can buy nice, stupid people a dime a dozen.

Jack's discourse reveals that he sees himself as an alienated product of modern life. Once he would have been a flâneur observing the wonders of modern life, but now the crowded city, the noise and dirt, have driven him to become a Minotaur. He sees the ordinary people that surround him as worthless. However, he also recognizes that Kansas is different from the others, she maintains her own autonomy with the city. She is not part of the crowd, but like Jack, an exceptional and extraordinary urban figures. They are the descendants of the flâneur and not part of the mass-produced badaud. However, Jack also realizes that the actuality of the noir city, its essential link to the real modern American city, is not the place for the descendants of the flâneur. Unable to kill Kansas, Jack takes his own life and jumps out of the window.

As the flâneur became increasingly alienated from the spectacle of modern life and intolerable of the modern city, he became the Minotaur, a monstrous element hidden within the urban labyrinth. In film noir, this human monster manifests himself in the killing sprees of the serial killer. Although hateful of the traffic, the noir serial killer is able to move through the crowded modern American city. He is able to disguise himself within the crowd and covertly pursue his heinous crimes. *The Phantom Lady* is demonstrative of how the serial killer in film noir finds his origins with the flâneur of the nineteenth century. As the beast of the modern city, the serial killer draws from the abilities of the flâneur to circulate through the physical labyrinth of the noir city. Jack, the serial killer, is omnipresent. He pursues his victims, undetected, throughout the modern

labyrinth of New York City. He hides his menace under the cloak of the ordinary man. However, as the distortion of the flâneur, his crimes are driven by the inability to satisfy his sexual desires. He commits murders out of sexual frustration and the need to satiate that desire through the radical novelty of death. The presence of the serial killer in film noir comes to represent the menace of the mundane concealed just under the surface of the everyday world of modern life. He is the hidden danger, which overturns the ordinary world of the film noir protagonist. In addition, the presence of serial killer narratives in the noir collection reinforces the consideration of film noir as the continuation of the representation of modern life through the use of nineteenth century principles.

Conclusion

Film Noir and the Legacy of Nineteenth Century Modernity

In 1949, RKO Pictures released a lowly B film titled *Follow Me Quietly*. The film starred William Lundigan as the noir protagonist, a less than effective police detective; Dorothy Patrick as the flâneuse, an overly curious newspaper reporter; and Edwin Max as a serial killer known as “the Judge.” In the film, every time it rains, “the Judge” prowls the streets of L.A. seeking out an unfortunate citizen and kills them. Each time he leaves a clue for the police: a cigarette butt, a pair of eye glasses, a description of his suit and hat. But despite all these clues, the police do not have a face. And the weather forecast says “tonight it is going to rain, again.” Out of desperation, the police gather their clues and build a mannequin replica of “the Judge.” Every detail is considered, however the dummy remains faceless. After another murder, Lundigan, the detective sits in his office, pondering the shortcomings of his investigation. The mannequin is propped up in the corner of the office. Rain begins to hit the window, as Lundigan’s partner calls him away. The camera lingers on the room, as the mannequin slowly turns around. It is “the Judge” standing unnoticed in the detective’s office. For such a cheap film, running only fifty-nine minutes, this is one of the most spine-chilling scenes in the entire noir collection. Eventually, the police track down the serial killer, not through the extraordinary abilities of the detective, but through the inevitability of the department’s plodding investigation. They discover that “the Judge” is an ordinary man. He lives in an ordinary tenement apartment, and spends his time reading second-hand pulp novels and killing innocent people whenever it rains. After his discovery, he struggles with the detective, and falls to his death from the scaffolding at a L.A. gasworks.

Follow Me Quietly embodies everything that excites me about film noir. First, the film is a B studio production and other than being based upon a story suggestion by Anthony Mann, the film's credits contain few recognizable names. It was shot on a hodgepodge of studios sets and L.A. locations which characterize the conflict between style and realism in film noir. The film is included in most noir filmographies, but it has been ignored critically. It is an obscure entry in the noir collection and the film has been seldom seen. But the most interesting aspect for me is found in Carl Macek's commentary in *Film Noir*. He states that the film depicts the bizarre and decadent underworld that surfaced after World War II (105). Macek's comment on the film ignores aesthetic issues and focuses upon the representation of post-war L.A. The city is not the site of aesthetic concerns, but the revelation of the bizarre and decadent underworld. Recognizable city spaces are abundant with hidden dangers and ruptures of Nazi-like brutality. *Follow Me Quietly*, like all film noir, is about the dangers of the lived experience of the modern city. And regardless of how overlooked the film is, it fits seamlessly into the noir collection, when the collection is focused upon the depiction of the urban environment.

When the film noir collection is seen as a coherent accumulation of films, which present a similar representation of the lived urban experience, the collection opens itself up to the principles of nineteenth century modernity. By employing the flâneur as the model of urban figures, the film noir collection demonstrates its affinity with modernity and its representation of the city. To continue with *Follow Me Quietly*, the film provides further illustrations of the flâneur-derived urban figures. The noir protagonist is an ordinary man. He works for the police department as a detective. However he could just as easily be working as a clerk in a department store. He demonstrates no extraordinary

abilities, and his one innovation, the mannequin, turns out to be his own folly. Additionally, the detective's apprehension of the serial killer is not due to his exceptional skills. His success is only initiated through his circumstance within the bureaucratic police department's investigation. The female lead is a throwback to the wartime noir flâneuse. She is an autonomous, middle-class urban woman. Moreover, she is a newspaper reporter, and she employs her flâneur-derived abilities of negotiation and observation by following the detective looking for her next big scoop, instead of tracking the serial killer. The killer also exhibits the skills of the flâneur. He assumes the guise of the ordinary man, and hides in the crowd. He is so adept at concealing his identity that he can enter and exit murder scenes unnoticed, except for the several clues left behind. Moreover, his extraordinary skills are demonstrated when he switches places with the mannequin in the office. The continued presence of these urban figures in *Follow Me Quietly* and in film noir serves to unify the collection around the principles of modernity.

As stated at the beginning, I collect film noir. And I will not stop until I have accounted for every possible noir film. Moreover, as my collection grows, the further my perspective of film noir gets from the established discourse of noir criticism. For me, the great fascination of films like *Abandoned* and *Follow Me Quietly* is that they do not fit within the accredited noir discourse, but yet they are still included in so many filmographies and continue to be considered noir. Therefore, the more films that I am able to collect, and incorporate into my noir collection, the less these films are indicative of an autonomous cinematic movement, and the more these films demonstrate that film noir is the legacy of nineteenth century modernity.

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In a Lonely Place. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perf. Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame,

Frank Lovejoy, and Carl Benton Reid. Columbia, 1950.

Inner Sanctum. Dir. Lew Landers. Perf. Charles Russell, Mary Beth Hughes, Lee

Patrick, and Roscoe Ates. Film Classics, 1948.

Johnny Eager. Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. Perf. Robert Taylor, Lana Turner, Edward Arnold,

and Van Heflin. MGM, 1942.

Journey into Fear. Dir. Norman Foster (Orson Welles). Perf. Joseph Cotten, Dolores Del

Rio, Orson Welles, and Ruth Warrick. RKO, 1943.

The Judge. Dir. Elmer Clifton. Perf. Milburn Stone, Katherine DeMille, Paul Guilfoyle,

and Jonathan Hale. Film Classics, 1949.

The Killers. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Perf. Burt Lancaster, Edmond O'Brien, Ava Gardner,

and Albert Dekker. Universal-International, 1946.

Kiss of Death. Dir. Henry Hathaway. Perf. Victor Mature, Brian Donlevy, Colleen Grey,

and Richard Widmark. Twentieth Century Fox, 1947.

The Lady Confesses. Dir. Sam Newfield. Perf. Mary Beth Hughes, Hugh Beaumont, Edmund MacDonald, and Claudia Drake. Producers Releasing Corporation, 1945.

Lady in the Death House. Dir. Steve Sekely. Perf. Jean Parker, Lionel Atwill, Douglas Fowley, and Marcia Mae Jones. Producers Releasing Corporation, 1944.

Lady in the Lake. Dir. Robert Montgomery. Perf. Robert Montgomery, Lloyd Nolan, Audrey Totter, and Leo Ames. MGM, 1947.

Laura. Dir. Otto Preminger. Perf. Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Clifton Webb, and Vincent Price. Twentieth Century Fox, 1944.

Leave Her to Heaven. Dir. John M. Stahl. Perf. Gene Tierney, Cornel Wilde, Jeanne Crain, and Vincent Price. Twentieth Century Fox, 1945.

The Long Night. Dir. Anatole Livak. Perf. Henry Fonda, Barbara Bel Geddes, Vincent Price, and Elisha Cook Jr. RKO, 1947.

The Lost Weekend. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. Ray Milland, Jane Wyman, Phillip Terry, and Howard Da Silva. Paramount, 1945.

Lured. Dir. Douglas Sirk. Perf. George Sanders, Lucille Ball, Boris Karloff, and Cedric Hardwick. United Artists, 1947.

The Maltese Falcon. Dir. John Huston. Perf. Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, and Elisha Cook Jr. Warner Brothers, 1941.

Murder My Sweet. Dir. Edward Dmytryk. Perf. Dick Powell, Claire Trevor, Mike Muzurki, and Otto Kruger. RKO, 1944.

The Naked City. Dir. Jules Dassin. Perf. Barry Fitzgerald, Howard Duff, Don Taylor, and Ted de Corsia. Universal-International, 1948.

Notorious. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Cary Grant, Claude Rains,

and Louis Calhern. RKO, 1946.

On Dangerous Ground. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perf. Ida Lupino, Robert Ryan, Ward Bond, and Charles Kemper. RKO, 1952.

Out of the Past. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Perf. Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer, Kirk Douglas, and Rhonda Fleming. RKO, 1947.

Panic in the Streets. Dir. Elia Kazan. Perf. Richard Widmark, Barbara Bel Geddes, Walter (Jack) Palance, and Paul Douglas. Twentieth Century Fox, 1950.

The Phantom Lady. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Perf. Ella Raines, Franchot Tone, Thomas Gomez, and Elisha Cook Jr. Universal, 1944.

Port of New York. Dir. László Benedek. Perf. Scott Brady, Richard Rober, Yul Brynner, and Neville Brand. Eagle-Lion, 1949.

The Postman Always Rings Twice. Dir. Tay Garnett. Perf. Lana Turner, John Garfield, Cecil Kellaway, and Hume Cronyn. MGM, 1946.

Quicksand. Dir. Irving Pichel. Perf. Mickey Rooney, Jeanne Cagney, Barbara Bates, and Peter Lorre. United Artists, 1950.

The Racket. Dir. John Cromwell. Perf. Robert Mitchum, Robert Ryan, Lizbeth Scott, and William Talman. RKO, 1951.

Railroaded. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. John Ireland, Sheila Ryan, Hugh Beaumont, and Jane Randolph. Producers Releasing Corporation, 1947.

Raw Deal. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. Dennis O'Keefe, Claire Trevor, Marsha Hunt, and John Ireland. Eagle-Lion, 1948.

Scarlet Street. Dir. Fritz Lang. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett, Dan Duryea, and Samuel S. Hinds. Universal, 1944.

The Set-Up. Dir. Robert Wise. Perf. Robert Ryan, Audrey Totter, George Tobias,
and Arthur (Weegee) Fellig. RKO, 1949.

Shadow of a Doubt. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Per. Joseph Cotten, Theresa Wright,
MacDonald Carey, Wallace Ford. Universal, 1949.

Shock. Dir. Alfred Werker. Perf. Vincent Price, Lynn Barri, Frank Latimore,
and Anabel Shaw. Twentieth Century Fox, 1946.

Side Street. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. Farley Granger, Cathy O' Donnell, James Craig,
and Paul Kelly. MGM, 1950.

Southside 1-1000. Dir. Boris Ingster. Perf. Don DeFore, Andrea King, George Tobias,
and Barry Kelley. Allied Artists, 1950.

The Spiral Staircase. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Perf. George Brent, Dorothy McGuire,
Ethel Barrymore, and Rhonda Fleming. RKO, 1946.

The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Perf. George Sanders,
Geraldine Fitzgerald, Ella Raines, and Samuel S. Hinds. Universal, 1945.

Strange Impersonation. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. Brenda Marshall, William Gargan,
Hillary Brooke, and George Chandler. Republic, 1946.

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers. Dir. Lewis Milestone. Per. Barbara Stanwyck,
Kirk Douglas, Van Heflin, and Lizbeth Scott. Paramount, 1946.

The Stranger. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Orson Welles, Loretta
Young, and Philip Merivale. RKO, 1946.

Stranger on the Third Floor. Dir. Boris Ingster. Perf. John McGuire, Margaret Tallichet,
Peter Lorre, and Charles Halton. RKO, 1940.

Strangers on a Train. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Farley Granger, Robert Walker,

Ruth Roman, and Patricia Hitchcock. Warner Brothers, 1951.

The Street with No Name. Dir. William Keighley. Perf. Mark Stevens, Richard Widmark, Lloyd Nolan, and Barbara Lawrence. Twentieth Century Fox, 1948.

This Gun For Hire. Dir. Frank Tuttle. Perf. Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake, Robert Preston, and William Bendix. Paramount, 1942.

Union Station. Dir. Rudolph Maté. Perf. William Holden, Nancy Olson, Barry Fitzgerald, and Lyle Bettiger. Twentieth Century Fox, 1950.

When Strangers Marry. Dir. William Castle. Perf. Dean Jagger, Kim Hunter, Robert Mitchum, and Neil Hamilton. Monogram, 1944.

White Heat. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Perf. James Cagney, Edmond O'Brien, Virginia Mayo, and Margaret Wincherly. Warner Brothers, 1949.

Walk East on Beacon. Dir. Alfred Werker. Perf. George Murphy, Finlay Currie, Virginia Gilmore, and Karel Stepanek. Columbia, 1952.