American Culture in the 1950s

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For Mum and Dad

The Intellectual Context

At a *Variety* magazine conference at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2004, film producer Lawrence Bender responded dramatically to a question about media censorship in the United States. Censorship had increased suddenly in February 2004 after the inopportune exposure of singer Janet Jackson's breast at the live televised Superbowl from Houston, Texas, and Bender's response was biting: 'I feel like I'm going back to the fifties here . . . the conservatives are taking over the country'.[1] This unease about censorship was shared by many directors, writers and producers in Cannes 2004, with the rise of the Right on American network television and talk radio, and the threat of the Federal Communications Commission imposing large fines on networks, making it increasingly difficult to debate issues freely or to offer oppositional views to George W. Bush's Republican administration.

Given the widespread dissent from the film industry to Bush's presidency, it was not surprising that in the last year of Bush's first term the satirist and filmmaker Michael Moore won the Palme d'Or for *Fahrenheit 9/11*, his documentary attempt to topple the Republicans. The film received rapturous applause at its Cannes premiere, was seen by over 20 million people in 2004, and was the most discussed film of the year. *Fahrenheit 9/11* argued polemically for the existence of a global conspiracy in which the US government and big corporations did little to prevent the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001. It makes the claim that the government had hoodwinked the American public into believing that the pre-emptive strikes on Iraq represented a just war when the underlying motives were economic ones. Moore champions ordinary people – grieving mothers, reluctant young soldiers, and peace-loving citizens – against the greed of power groups, in his attempt to loosen what liberals see as the corporate stranglehold over the American media.

Bender's reference to the 1950s as a conservative age in this context evokes a decade half a century earlier in which no one asked too many questions of the government. Although the deeply ingrained deception that Moore was keen to expose is in part the legacy of conspiracy theories that emerged following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the ideological warfare that *Fahrenheit 9/11* documents, between 'freedom-loving Americans' (to use Bush's phrase) and hateful Middle East terrorists, is the direct legacy of the early cold war years, with the target now projected onto a different enemy. The fear that the Soviet Union had the capability and the inclination to launch attacks on the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s led not only to the development of the atom and hydrogen bombs in the West, but also to the fear that communists were working to disintegrate American society from within. That physicist Klaus Fuchs and State Department official Alger Hiss were routed out of government circles for being Soviet spies (Hiss was exposed in the famous trial of 1949, Fuchs in 1950) and that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953 on conspiracy charges (without full substantiation) are indications of the political paranoia that grew steadily after 1946. The looming presence of the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, and the Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous list of fifty-seven 'card-carrying Communists' that he claimed in February 1950 to be working within the Department of State (a number scaled down two days before from 205) inflamed the anticommunist hysteria that burnt strongly for eight years.

Cold war ideology is central to understanding 1950s culture but it was also a period in which the economic prosperity that began during World War II started to have tangible effects on middle-class life. Ex-First Lady and New York Senator Hillary Clinton recalled this aspect in her memoir *Living History* (2003). Reflecting on her sheltered midwestern childhood in the 1950s, she remembered 'middle-class America was flush with emerging prosperity and all that comes with it – new houses, fine schools, neighborhood parks and safe communities'.[2] For Clinton it was a decade of rising expectations, the emergence of youth culture, and the unprecedented availability of cultural products. But prospects in the 1950s came at a price: rather than questioning political decisions that contributed to the nation's rise to global eminence, the growth of mass media encouraged consumers to simply enjoy the material comforts that international prestige brought.

Historian Lizabeth Cohen shared a similar upbringing to Hillary Clinton as children of 'the Consumers' Republic', which Cohen

describes as defining 'many more dimensions of life than most of us recognized at the time'.[3] Although liberal and conservative currents blurred in the anticommunist climate of the early 1950s, as Lawrence Bender emphasizes, the decade is remembered for its conservatism. This is evident in the case of Hillary Clinton. Although a moderate liberal in her adult life, Clinton adopted the conservatism of her father in the 1950s, was an active Young Republican and supported the right-wing Senator Barry Goldwater in the early 1960s, and did not find her liberal voice until the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s when she was a student at Wellesley College, Massachusetts. Clinton's story of political re-education is by no means an isolated case, reflecting the transition from inward-looking conservatism of the 1950s to the political activism of the mid-1960s.

Decades, of course, rarely add up to consistent wholes. The 1920s is much more complex than 'the Jazz Age' suggests and the 1930s more culturally varied than its 'Depression Era' tag. The 1950s is one decade that looks flat and uncomplicated, dominated by Joe McCarthy's anticommunist accusations in the early decade and the benign face of Dwight D. Eisenhower in the mid- to late 1950s. For left-liberals the decade is often written off as a low point for oppositional politics, whereas for conservatives, especially since the 1980s, it is a decade of consensus worthy of celebration. Whatever political perspective is adopted it is difficult to evade the shadow of the cold war. But, while it is tempting to read the cold war into all cultural products of the 1950s, this can be a reductive exercise. Art critic Fred Orton claims that 'the Cold War is a constraining notion, a closure, which conditions us not to probe deeper the real determinations of foreign and domestic policy' and he urges us to ask harder questions about the relationship between art and politics.[4]

Although books such as Douglas Field's collection *American Cold War Culture* (2005) continue to frame the 1950s in terms of the cold war, on closer inspection the decade reveals a number of political, social and cultural currents that cannot easily be expressed as 'cold war culture'. In popular memory the decade gave rise to Elvis, high-school romances, Tupperware, the *Peanuts* comic strip, Hollywood blondes, 3-D cinema, and black baseball star Jackie Robinson helping the Brooklyn Dodgers to six World Series finals. No overarching or static notion of culture can do justice to these parallel emergences, a realization that has led recent cultural historians to focus on 1950s culture as a site of dualities, tensions and contradictions. This book develops the idea of American culture in the 1950s in this broader sense, where

a notion of national culture – with 'One nation under God' added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 – jostles with a range of other cultural expressions and practices.

Periodizing the 1950s

One of the earliest periodizing accounts by the historian Eric Goldman takes 1945 to 1955 as 'the crucial decade', whereas philosopher Hannah Arendt characterized the postwar period as one caught 'between past and future'.[5] More recently, in 1986, J. Ronald Oakley described the 1950s as 'a period of puzzling paradoxes': it was 'an age of great optimism along with the gnawing fear of doomsday bombs, of great poverty in the midst of unprecedented prosperity, and of flowery rhetoric about equality along with the practice of rampant racism and sexism'.[6] And, writing in 2004, historian Richard Fried suggests that at first it seems 'a unique era that we think we know and often recall fondly', but it was, in fact, 'a fidgety mix of anxiety and relaxation, sloth and achievement, complacency and self-criticism'.[7]

Looking beyond memories, myths and nostalgia helps to unearth historical tensions that cannot easily be slotted into a unified narrative. The 1950s – or what is often confused with a half-remembered and half-mythical period called 'the fifties' – is no exception. It was the decade of popular and avant-garde music; of abstract and commercial art; of eggheads and dumb blondes; of gray flannel suits and loafer jackets; of ballet and westerns; of bus boycotts and B-52 bombers; and of the growth of big corporations and increased membership of workers' unions. The decade was vilified in the 1960s for its conservatism, particularly by those who saw themselves as its victims: the young, black, female and gay all found collective voices to denounce a decade that promised so much, but delivered little to those on the margins. However, many have claimed that the 1950s was necessary for the social revolution of the next decade to happen; and, while it is important to resist the temptation to read history as teleological (in which everything is a potential foreshadowing of future events), more recent trends suggest that the decade was one of the defining periods of the twentieth century, prefiguring the materialism of the 1980s, the media control of the 1990s, and the ascendancy of the Right in the early twenty-first century.

My intention here is to recover the diversity of cultural forms from the ingrained view that cold war culture is monolithic and one-dimensional, and also to distinguish the historical resonances of the

1950s from the popular memory of 'the fifties'. The theoretical problem, of course, is that any attempt to discuss a period only succeeds in rewriting it in another form – and sometimes with a hidden ideological slant. My agenda here is to examine, as well as look beyond, the 'cold war culture' label to explore the historical, ideological and aesthetic contours of the decade. The purpose of this book, then, is to offer a more nuanced notion of cultural production than suggested by the recycled myths of the decade.

There are various strategies for seeing beyond the mythology of 'the fifties'. One strategy is to focus on 'the facts' as established in historical texts, government documents, economic data and demographic statistics. This is where the 1982 volume *Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945–1960* begins: the US population increased 30 per cent from 139.9 million in 1945 to 180.6 million in 1960; the rural population decreased from 17.5 per cent of the whole in 1945 to 8.7 per cent in 1960 (shifting from 24.4 million to 15.6 million); 31 per cent of children were under 14 in 1960 compared to 24 per cent in 1945; and the non-white population increased by 41 per cent in these fifteen years, from 14.6 million to 20.6 million.[8] Given that suburban development, juvenile delinquency and racial conflict were three hot social issues of the decade (alongside communism), these statistics go some way to characterize its salient features.

A timeline is another indicator of historical trajectory, particularly as the decade began with a new war in Korea and ended with a potent symbol of political détente when Vice-President Richard Nixon travelled to Moscow to engage in a televised 'kitchen debate' with the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, in which the battleground had shifted from bombs to domestic appliances, from the Soviet satellite Sputnik to 'Split-nik' as the model American kitchen was called. There are dangers in pursuing these approaches in isolation, though. The first strategy privileges quantifiable statistics and underplays emerging trends that may not be measurable; and the second strategy often resorts to a top-down version of history in which all cultural expressions are taken under the umbrella of national politics.[9]

Another way of analyzing the decade is to identify hotspots or turning points, the hottest spot being the explosion of the H-bomb in the Pacific on 1 November 1952, generating nine times more heat than the sun. Hannah Arendt claimed that the Soviet launch of the first earth satellite Sputnik 1 on 4 October 1957 was another hotspot, an event like no other that heralded the economic slump of 1958 and the advent of the space race which preoccupied the cold war adversaries

for the next fifteen years. Sometimes turning points do not focus on historic events but on personalities; the deaths of actor James Dean in September 1955 and painter Jackson Pollock in August 1956 – both through car crashes – are often cited as dramatic moments that altered the direction of film and art culture in the second half of the decade.

In terms of vital moments in the decade it is significant that two historians – Lisle Rose and Robert Ellwood – both choose 1950 as the year in which 'the cold war [came] to main street' and the 'crossroad of American religious life' (to quote the subtitles of their two books). Rose focuses primarily on foreign policy and Ellwood on religion, but both accounts identify 1950 as a crucial year – the penultimate year of Truman's Democratic administration which saw the start of two years of conflict in Korea with strong prospects of another world war. Sandwiched between World War II and Vietnam, the Korean War is often overlooked as a fairly short skirmish without a strong war narrative to hold it together. But in many ways the conflict was key to understanding national fears in the 1950s; whereas World War II was an honourable war the reasons for Korea were not as clear cut, with soldiers 'dumbly follow[ing] / leaders whose careers / hung on victory', in the words of poet William Childress.[10]

The Korean War began with the invasion of South Korea by communist North Korea, a potent symbol to the West of the ideological menace that was creeping through East Asia. The US had committed itself to supporting non-communist forces in Asia in 1949, as well as advancing its own national interests on the Asian subcontinent. The promise was of swift military action under the command of the dependable face of World War II: General Douglas MacArthur. But the reality was a war in an unknown land, where geography, language and a new enemy quickly eroded the triumphalism of 1945. Much of the war revolved around the 39th Parallel which separated North from South Korea, without any major long-term gains by either side.

Although the Korean War film *One Minute to Zero* (1952) claimed that 'the American Army does not make our foreign policy it only backs it up', the politics of the war were actually very complex. MacArthur seemed to be making key decisions, but the offensive against the North Koreans was actually directed from Washington by the liberal Secretary of State Dean Acheson; MacArthur blamed the stalemate in Korea on Truman for not letting him take full command; and Truman dismissed MacArthur in April 1951 for his arrogant and bullish military tactics. William Childress's bitter poem 'The Long March' attacks 'the General' for stealing victory from the soldiers, but

two-thirds of the public actually took MacArthur's side in the dispute with Truman. This sway of public opinion and the attacks by Joseph McCarthy on the Democratic administration (he famously called the President a 'son of a bitch') were major reasons why, at the end of Truman's second term in 1952, the guardianship of the country was entrusted to a Republican: the World War II veteran Dwight Eisenhower who had commanded the Normandy invasion of 1944 and accepted German surrender in 1945.

Ike and his fashion-conscious wife Mamie were iconic faces of the decade, and Eisenhower's 1953 inauguration was a major media event, only to be upstaged by the birth of television star Lucille Ball's baby. Eisenhower was not just a golf-loving president and fiscal conservative, but also the benign patriarch that Sylvia Plath satirized in her novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) for having features that were reflected in the face of all the 'Eisenhower-faced babies' born in mid-decade.[11] But, despite Plath's view, early-decade worries receded during Eisenhower's presidency. The temporary waning of cold war fears has led some critics to focus on 1954 to 1958 as a defining period of the consumer boom. In 1954 *Life* magazine proclaimed that never before had the nation achieved so much social abundance and 1955 was described as 'the most frantic year of car buying America had yet experienced'.[12] Nixon and Khrushchev's live 'kitchen debate' at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in June 1959 signalled a possible end to the cold war, which did not fully re-ignite until the Cuban Missile crisis of autumn 1962.

There were key moments in the mid-1950s when cold war fears re-emerged: in 1956 when the Soviet Union invaded Hungary after the Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and in 1957 when the Soviet satellite Sputnik 1 was launched into space. Even though the anti-communist presence of J. Edgar Hoover continued to loom in American public life through the 1950s and 1960s, with the public demise of McCarthy in 1954 following his hubristic attempt to indict the Army, the paranoia and Red-baiting of the early decade ebbed. Three years later McCarthy was prematurely dead from alcohol poisoning and the 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate* depicted him as a crazed careerist, echoing the *New York Post*'s description of him as a 'buffoon assassin'. This transition has led critic Alice Jardine to divide the decade at its mid-point (the 'First American Fifties' covering 1945 to 1955; the 'Second Fifties' spanning 1955 to 1965), while Mark Hamilton Lytle has argued that the historical phase after 1955 is actually part of the 'uncivil wars' of the long 1960s.[13]

But how could a decade be at once 'secure and hopeful', as Hillary Clinton describes it, and also be plagued by such profound ideological and atomic fears? Historian Lisle Rose brings together two such contradictory images in the title of his book, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street* (1999), as two shifting lenses that critics must look through to view the decade clearly. It was at once a period of optimism and high expectations but also the beginning of half a century of 'profound, embittered malaise' that has taught us that we cannot trust 'our neighbors, our workplace colleagues, our sources of information, or our institutions and leadership'.[14] Main Street was the symbol of wholesome Middle America and the central thoroughfare of Walt Disney's new adventure park Disneyland when it opened in Anaheim, California, in 1955. But Main Street was a symbol of a previous era: Disney's was a nostalgic Main Street, *circa* 1900, and it had been usurped in popular imagination by the threatening alleys of film noir, the suburban drives of Levittown, and the interstate highways that were snaking across the land by the late 1950s. While Rose's account is engaging he largely ignores the decade's cultural dynamics; only the parallax view of politics and culture – cold war and Main Street – can hope to do justice to its complexities.

Rose focuses on 1950 as a watershed year in Truman's last term, but a broader perspective of 'containment' is often adopted to explore the contradictions of the decade. Deployed by statesman George F. Kennan, head of Truman's Policy Planning Unit in 1947, as part of his recommendation that the nation should try to stem the communist threat in East Europe and South East Asia, the term 'containment' has since been used more widely to characterize the general climate of the 1950s.[15] Rather than dealing with it in the precise way that Kennan and the cold war policymakers had intended, cultural historians Stephen Whitfield, Lary May, Margot Henrikson, Alan Nadel and Mary Dudziak all treat containment as a general metaphor of social restriction in cold war America. It was central to Kennan's philosophy of political realism in the late 1940s and his warning that the nation must be watchful and vigilant against security threats, particularly from an ambitious Soviet Union. But postwar containment also had negative connotations, suggesting that classified information was being withheld or that citizens were being duped into believing the official line from Washington. The rise of the secret service and the CIA was important for garnering intelligence but also fed fears that a culture of secrecy was developing and that the destiny of the country was controlled by a power elite. To contain external communist

threats was seen by many as a Herculean task (the journalist Walter Lippmann warned that it might well turn into a wild-goose chase across the globe), but to eliminate threats from within was virtually impossible: everyone was potentially a suspect within a global communist conspiracy.

Focusing on political history and foreign policy offers one account of the decade, but the danger is that critics either ignore the broad sweep of American culture to focus on government (as Rose does) or read all cultural forms through the filter of international relations. This top-down reading has its benefits in revealing a subtext to cold war culture, but the danger is that everything becomes an allegory of political events or an embodiment of the Manichean struggle in which the forces of American democracy are pitted against the godless tyranny of communism. This reading has validity when approaching some cultural texts: for example, Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1953) draws parallels between McCarthyite America and the seventeenth-century Salem witch trials, and the first Twentieth Century-Fox film to use the new widescreen format of CinemaScope, *The Robe* (1953), depicts the clash between Christian and Roman values, in which allegories of McCarthyism (some characters are betrayed and others asked to name names) are juxtaposed with the liberal belief in the possibility of alliances between races, with Rome depicted as the prototype of the modern superpower. *The Robe* was part of the cycle of biblical epics that began with *Quo Vadis* in 1951; director Cecil B. DeMille even appeared in person for the prologue of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) to make explicit parallels to the contemporary climate in which he contrasts the 'freedom of man under God' to the man-made tyranny of the state. It is also possible to mount an argument to suggest that the 'soft power' of cold war culture fulfilled the job of promoting values of democracy and freedom of expression abroad in such organizations as the International Congress for Cultural Freedom, where the 'hard power' of politics, coercion and warfare might have had the opposite effect.

It is the legacy of the 1960s to search for conspiracies and subtexts where they may not exist; from this perspective containment is evident in almost every aspect of domestic, political and cultural life in the 1950s. In contrast, the ideological battle-lines of cold war America were laid out clearly by President Truman's proclamation in March 1947 that 'at the present moment nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life', and Eisenhower echoed this in his Inaugural Address of January 1953 by claiming that 'we sense with all

our faculties that forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history'.[16] As Allen Hunter detects, it was very difficult in the 1950s 'to secure standpoints outside its paradigm of neatly aligned binary oppositions: United States/Soviet Union, West/East, capitalism/communism, freedom/tyranny, good/evil'.[17]

However, these presidential statements do not lead the critic to the realm of facts but towards a set of mythic statements and rhetorical half-truths that only add to the sense that historical realities are not as simple as they seem. Were the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock or the colour abstractions of Mark Rothko in the late 1940s an embodiment of free expression or did they hide subversive messages? In the science-fiction film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) does the spaceman Klaatu's long closing speech reassert US defence policy or suggest the communist way is ideologically superior to a weak democratic system? Did the religious revival of the early 1950s suggest that the nation was moving towards spiritual enlightenment or to a self-righteousness that was blind to the need to forge international alliances? Was Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (the bestselling book of 1954 behind the Bible) a genuine attempt to help individuals achieve autonomy or was it a form of cheap commercialism with Peale the master salesman? Of course, none of these questions has a straight answer. But, taking a cue from the popular cold war television series *I Led Three Lives* (1953–6), it seemed that in the 1950s all univocal statements were open to subversion – a reading that strains against the 'right and wrong', 'good and bad' logic of Truman's and Eisenhower's statements.

One of the strongest themes of the decade was that of authenticity, the difficulty of preserving genuine experience in the face of commercial and ideological pressures. The hard economic experiences of the Depression and close-range combat of World War II soldiers fighting for a just cause were favourably contrasted to shallow suburban lifestyles, television quiz shows and the easy musical sentiments of the *Billboard* charts. The image of the 'phoney' runs through 1950s literature: from Holden Caulfield's concerns about the lack of authenticity in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Norman Mailer's exposure of shallow Hollywood culture in *The Deer Park* (1955), to the hidden identity of the carefree socialite Holly Golightly in Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and the lack of authentic religion in the South as portrayed by Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952). Other texts such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Robert Frank's photographic study *The Americans* (1958) attempted to rediscover the

possibility of genuine experience in a decade where everything was open to salesman's spin and Madison Avenue repackaging. And it was this search for authentic experience that led Beat writer Lawrence Ferlinghetti to began his iconic poem 'I Am Waiting' (1958) with the lines: 'I am waiting for my case to come up / and I am waiting / for a rebirth of wonder / and I am waiting for someone / to really discover America / and wail'.

'Experience' has never been a simple concept in American cultural life. At times it has been associated with corruption against the simplicities of an innocent life; at others it has represented the rugged frontier sensibility of the West in contrast to the enclosed patrician communities of the East; and at others has been associated with bitter encounters with economic hardship. Quite what happened to experience in the 1950s is one of the concerns of this book, when the expansion of culture to include commercial television, a popular music industry and the dramatic increase of consumables complicated any idea of 'raw' or 'unmediated' experience. The hankering in Ferlinghetti's poem for a lost America is also a waiting for a rejuvenating experience that would give him a 'rebirth of wonder'. Following a Romantic precedent, Ferlinghetti places experience outside the cultural domain in a realm of spiritual vitality as something pure yet elusive. Ferlinghetti's vision was shared by many writers and artists, and foreshadows the spirit of the New Left and the counterculture of the mid-1960s. But, although thinkers such as Norman Mailer, C. Wright Mills and Erich Fromm were arguing that courage was needed to break through the constraints of conventionality and the 'slow mechanical determinations of society' (as Mailer called them in 1961), it is perhaps more valid to claim that experience in the 1950s could only be found within the cultural sphere.[18] The rhetorical power of Ferlinghetti's poem should not be underestimated, but perhaps one reason he had to wait for a rebirth of wonder is that he is looking in the wrong places for what experience was, or could be, in the 1950s.

In order to explore the theme of experience in and of the 1950s, this introduction will revolve around four primary frames of reference – culture, ideas, spaces and identities – which are discussed in turn and then resurface in the following chapters. Discussion of these reference points help to demonstrate the ways in which American culture, ideas, spaces and identities were all contested in the 1950s, with the view that the decade is best characterized as a struggle between conflicting forces. From a Marxist perspective this conflict is true of all historical periods, but the pull of opposing forces – economic, ideological,

political, cultural and experiential – intensified after World War II and in the Consumers' Republic transformations and contradictions arose at every turn.

In the following discussion, each of the four frames of reference is accompanied by a focused case study which exemplifies key points and gives shape to the broader outlines. The inclusion of case studies is consistent through the five chapters across a range of cultural forms. Their purpose is to demonstrate the diversity of American culture in the 1950s, and to balance broad commentary with detailed analysis of some of the decade's most important texts.

Culture

The concept of culture in 1950s America was not very clearly defined. There was a much sharper sense of what culture meant in Britain, where traditionally it was linked to class identity and the shaping influence of economics. This British tradition goes back at least as far as the Victorian encounter with the forces of industrialization. Although the US Labor Movement had grown apace since the late nineteenth century, and had made real steps forward in achieving workers' rights during the 1930s, it had never shaped the direction of culture to the extent of in Britain. American culture at mid-century was seen variously as everything that people do, but also a special sphere of creative activity for artists, writers, musicians and performers. Culture in the widest sense fed into some of most potent myths about American collective identity. The popular myth of the American Dream, for example, suggested that fame could be achieved in the arts, and the movie industry was particularly keen to exploit this in the studio 'dream factories' of the 1930s. But the American Dream was only a slightly different version of Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches stories in the 1890s which ultimately emphasized social recognition and wealth. On this view, artistic excellence and cultural achievement are only stepping stones in the search for social status.

The word 'culture' figured frequently in postwar writings, but was a slippery term, which can be approached from at least four different perspectives. Firstly, it was often used as a marker of national identity. This view was consolidated by the first wave of scholars that helped form American Studies as an academic discipline after the war: the so-called 'Myth and Symbol School'. Enquiries into the American 'character' and 'mind' in an attempt to identify dominant national traits began before the war with Perry Miller's *The New England Mind*

(1939) and F. O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* (1941), and continued afterwards with exceptionalist accounts of American national origins such as Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) and R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955). This school of critics did not disregard historical complexity, but rarely commented on the contemporary moment. Instead of discerning a turbulent past feeding into a complex present, these critics created a mythic framework within which concepts of 'the virgin land', 'the errand in the wilderness', and 'the American Dream' were affirmed as founding myths.

A second view of culture was an experience that ennobles individuals by providing values, skills and social accomplishments. The historian Henry May in *The End of American Innocence* (1959) looked back to the early twentieth century as a time when culture, rightly conceived, showed people how to behave, teaching them 'polite manners, respect for traditional learning, appreciation of the arts, and above all an informed and devoted love of standard [usually British] literature'.[19] On May's model innocent nineteenth-century traditions fell away in the turbulent 1910s with the experience of war and a loss of old confidences. The linking of culture to high art forms re-emerged periodically, particularly in the late 1920s with the revival of interest in the Victorian writer Matthew Arnold's distinction between 'culture' and 'anarchy', and was often linked to ideas of social betterment. The 'new humanists' Irving Babbit and Paul Elmer More were keen to affirm Arnold's high cultural standards to rescue America from what they perceived as moral bankruptcy, particularly with the wave of East European immigrants coming to the US in the mid-1910s. Vestiges of this position were still evident in the 1950s: the emergence of 'mass culture' after the war stimulated some critics to affirm high art as a means for educating readers and securing social order, while for others it helped to ward off foreign threats, expressed most dramatically by J. Edgar Hoover's claim in 1958 that communist culture was spreading through the country 'as an indoctrinal spray seeking to control every part of the member's heart, mind, and soul'.[20]

A third view of culture in the 1950s was a privileged realm of activity at a remove from everyday life. This view locates culture as a specialist activity in which the talented few engage: Jack Kerouac lost in his spontaneous 'typewriter jazz' or Jackson Pollock surrendering his artistic intentions to his semi-autonomous drip paintings. But many of the debates in the 1950s revolved around different levels of culture, with the term 'mass culture' suggesting that 'consumption' had replaced 'activity' as the dominant mode of cultural behaviour. 'Films,

radio, and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part' German émigré thinkers Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer claimed as early as 1944, and they worried about the tendency of American culture to sink to the lowest level in turning out standardized products to consumers: 'under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through'.[21] On this model, mass culture is the product of the 'entertainment business', which grew dramatically with the development of television, popular music, and paperback book industries. In essence, Adorno and Horkheimer wanted to resuscitate high culture with all its complexities as an antidote to the bland uniformity of mass culture.

The fourth perspective on culture was reflected in the work of the historian David Potter, particularly in his book *People of Plenty* (1954). Potter was unhappy with received notions of 'national character' that tended to be riddled with generalizations, folding many different elements into a harmonious whole:

> We [are] told in the same breath that Americans are optimistic (a trait of temperament), that they attach great value to productive activity (a trait of character), that they are fond of jazz music (a cultural trait), and that they are remarkably prone to join organized groups (a behavioural trait which may provide overt evidence of some underlying trait of character).[22]

For Potter, not only do critics often overlook the meaning of 'character', 'nation', 'group' and 'tradition', but they also underestimate the economic, historical and environmental forces that underpin them. Reacting against vulgar materialist notions of culture in which the economic base determines everything else, Potter adopted a flexible view of culture: at times it represents personal expression, at others an interface between individuals and society, and at others an integrative force that enables individuals to communicate, to reach a consensus, or to cohere around symbols of national unity or group loyalty. This is a very different perspective to Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimism, suggesting that consensus and assent are linked closely to 'abundance' as the overriding trait of 1950s American culture.

Potter's particular concern was to identify the complexion of America's culture of abundance, and in *People of Plenty* he discusses equality, democracy and the national mission to emphasize the

historical nature of these themes. He returns at the end of the book to the relationship between abundance and identity in light of the growth of national advertising. Potter called postwar advertising the new 'institution of social control', which Lizabeth Cohen has more recently argued was instrumental in reinforcing the 'postwar ideal of the purchaser as citizen who simultaneously fulfilled personal desire and civic obligation in consuming'.[23] Although *People of Plenty* can be read as an exceptionalist view of an abundant nation, Potter was one of the first critics to understand the power of advertising, which had surpassed the government, school and church after the war as a major social force, particularly through its new powerful outlet of television. Charting the development of the advertising industry, Potter estimated that the amount spent on print advertising alone grew six-fold between 1929 and 1951. This statistic suggests not only that supply consistently outstripped demand, but also that individuals had been transformed into consumers; in Cohen's words 'the good purchaser devoted to "more, newer and better" was the good citizen'.[24] Fifty years before Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic*, Potter concluded *People of Plenty* by claiming the economics of advertising are less interesting than the way that it shapes values, serving 'to enforce already existing attitudes, to diminish the range and variety of choices, and, in terms of abundance, to exalt the materialistic virtues of consumption'.[25]

Potter's focus on advertising as a medium of social control is not quite as bleak as Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of a production-line culture industry, but it does suggest that individuals are ill-equipped to challenge the power of advertising to shape choices and values. It was possible to go against the grain of cultural expectations – a businessman choosing to go the bowling alley when the golf club is his cultural metier, for example – but these cross-class activities were rare, particularly in a decade when advertising encouraged the working class to aspire to middle-class values. We shall see in this book that culture in the 1950s was sometimes used agonistically as a tool to challenge authority, but with the lure of advertising it was difficult for many to resist the pleasures of consumption.

It is important not to underestimate the growth of advertising after World War II for instructing the public in their cultural tastes and aspirations. Potter sketched in the outlines for understanding culture at mid-century, but it was the sociologist Vance Packard who helped more than any other thinker to refine a theory of advertising and assess its impact on American life in the 1950s.

The Hidden Persuaders (1957)

The Pennsylvania-born journalist Vance Packard is often dismissed as a 'pop sociologist', but in *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) Packard wrote one of the first sustained studies of the psychological techniques used by advertisers, and the ways in which 'many of us are being influenced and manipulated – far more than we realize – in the patterns of our everyday lives'.[26] The growth of mass culture after the war, the surplus in disposable income (five times as much in 1955 as 1940) and the fact that by the mid-1950s many families owned basic domestic appliances and at least one car meant that advertising strategies had to become more subtle to convince consumers to replace products on a regular basis. With increased standardization of products, rather than concentrating on durability or sustainability, marketing in the 1950s tried to tap into consumers' desires about prestige, style and the desire to be contemporary. Taking the lead from the postwar boom in fashion, in which the vogue for particular styles of clothing changed much more rapidly than in previous decades (for example, Dior's New Look range from the late 1940s), domestic appliances such as cookers, televisions, showers and refrigerators had begun to be similarly marketed.

The popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1950s and investment in 'motivation research' led firms to invest money in consulting advertising agencies and employing what Packard calls 'symbol manipulators' and 'probers' to feel out 'our hidden weaknesses and frailties in the hope that they can more efficiently influence our behaviour'.[27] A far cry from the depressed and doomed salesman Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesmen* (1949), these jobs seemed in tune with an upwardly mobile mid-1950s, in which the threat of over-productivity encouraged companies to invest heavily in advertising and market research ($53 was spent on targeting each individual in 1955). Although Packard saw something amusing about some research carried out in the name of effective advertising (such as a psychiatric study of menstrual cycles to increase the appeal of certain food items to women), he also believed the trend to have 'seriously antihumanistic implications' putting the consumer at the mercy of invisible manipulative forces.[28] One of the most significant discoveries for companies was that many of the reasons for consuming products are often irrational – such as buying products in a particular colour of packaging – and they realized that only depth-advertising could discover the appropriate psychological hook to tap into these deeper impulses.

In adopting a version of the Freudian model of the mind, advertising linked itself closely to psychological profiling and behavioural research in an attempt to appeal to deeper levels of consciousness. The major points of vulnerability, as Packard described them, were commonly identified as 'the drive to conformity, need for oral stimulation, [and] yearning for security', but ego-gratification and love objects also

awakened deep emotional reflexes.[29] Because the desire for social status often works in tension with these vulnerabilities, advertising strategies had to be varied and subtle to appeal to a range of consumers, so as not to draw attention to the fact that many products were actually superfluous to requirement.

It is worth comparing a 1948 advertisement for the new Hudson automobile, described as 'A Sensation Coast to Coast', with that for the 1953 Roadmaster from Buick, the 'Star of the Silky Way', to see how depth-psychology affected advertising.[30] In the 1948 advertisement, a monochrome drawing of a large black Hudson with a driver and five passengers passes by a large house and well-manicured lawn, presumably on a weekend drive. The copy reads: 'There's something really new in the motor-car world – a daringly designed, gorgeously finished Hudson . . . a new kind of car that fires interest wherever it's seen'. Focusing on the late-1940s vogue for low-framed cars that 'you step down into' and 'a rugged, box-steel foundation frame' that 'gives you a sensation of snug safety and serene smooth going', its appeal to comfort and security is obvious. But compared to the advert for the 'custom built' 1953 Buick Roadmaster with its large colour image of a sleek, aerodynamic and space-age vehicle (gleaming chrome bodywork and bright red upholstery) driven through the milky way by a handsome tuxedoed driver, the 1948 Hudson looks like a bulky funeral car.

Promoting the golden anniversary of the Roadmaster, Buick mention their reputation in manufacturing, but the advert focuses centrally on the power, acceleration, 'velvety luxury' and 'the great and gorgeous going of the swiftest, the smoothest, the silkiest, the most silent automobile' they had yet produced. Attention is directed to the starry image of the car, the promise of luxury, and the possibilities of the future (Buick's logo is accompanied by the tagline 'Then – Now – Tomorrow'), rather than the everyday pleasures associated with the Hudson.[31] Packard argues that these desires are linked not only to childhood memories and fantasies, but also to the search for status in the 1950s. Taking his lead from sociologist Thorstein Veblen's study of 'conspicuous consumption' in the late nineteenth century, Packard considered in *The Status Seekers* (1959) the reasons why consumers 'constantly striv[e] to surround themselves with visible evidence of the superior rank they are claiming'.[32]

There are a number of criticisms that can be made of Packard's analysis, most notably that women, particularly housewives, were among the most vulnerable consumers and easily duped by manipulative advertising. But the fact that some household products became very popular in the early 1950s, such as toasters and time-saving devices, give some, if inadequate, weight to his argument.[33] Packard goes too far in claiming that all advertising is brainwashing, and he rarely credits individuals with the capacity to resist the lure of marketing campaigns. However, Packard was not alone in his position, with critics like C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* (1956) warning against the invisible channels of power in postwar America and Theodor Adorno blaming 'organized culture' for cutting off 'people's

last possibility of experiencing themselves'.[34] Some commentators have called Packard a conspiracy theorist in his deep suspicion of advertising, but certain aspects of his work, such as adverts targeting children, political campaigning and subliminal advertising, predate the interest in the growth of corporate control of the media in the 1980s and 1990s.

Ideas

If the 1950s was a decade of new American experiences, then at first glance it also seems to be a decade lacking in any major ideas – certainly in comparison to the more radical politics of the 1960s. While the group of New York Intellectuals from the late 1940s (among them Lionel Trilling, Clement Greenberg, Dwight Macdonald and Philip Rahv) continued to find outlets for their ideas in mainstream publications and émigrés connected with the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm) found North America a much safer placer to live than Central Europe, there was nevertheless a widespread suspicion of the intellectual's social role. There was a general mistrust of ideas in the 1950s and a reluctance to speak out on controversial issues. CBS broadcaster Edward Murrow worried that television entertainment would erode public debate: as he claimed in October 1958 in a speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, 'just once in a while let us exalt the importance of ideas and information'.[35] This mistrust was, in large part, stimulated by Joseph McCarthy's accusations that the enemy had already infiltrated deeply into public institutions, and right-wing publications such as *Red Channels* emerged with the intention of naming subversives within the broadcasting industry. One contributor to the liberal magazine *The Nation* noted that in 1952 'the fear of speaking out is the most ominous fact of life in America today. The virus of McCarthyism chills the heart and stills the tongue . . . and destroys its victims' resistance'.[36]

Writing as late as 1967, Michael Paul Rogin noted the ongoing effect of McCarthyism on the intellectual community. Rogin argued that it is feasible to claim either that McCarthyism 'symbolized the death of radical protest in America', or that it was itself a manifestation of the radical Right, with the knock-on effect of making intellectuals in the 1950s and early 1960s wary of any form of radicalism.[37] It is also possible, as Rogin notes (although it is not his opinion), to argue that McCarthyism was a brand of populism that pitted 'a democratic revolt of dispossessed groups against the educated, eastern elite' of intellectuals and academics.[38] The cold war consensus, as it is often

Figure I.1 Senator Joseph McCarthy on CBS Television in 1954.

termed, brought together liberals, moderates and conservatives in an alliance against the excesses of communism on the one hand and the reckless accusations of McCarthy on the other. To affirm the socially cohesive qualities of American culture, or its 'vital center' as the liberal intellectual Arthur Schlesinger Jr called it in his 1949 book, was a way of offsetting forces that undermined the vitality of culture. But the danger was that, as C. Wright Mills detected in 1954, there was no viable opposition to the consensus of the centre: disappointed radicals, tired liberals 'living off the worn-out rubble of [their] rhetoric' and conservatives who had 'no connection with the fountainhead of modern conservative thought' all seemed to accept the status quo, while 'political decisions' were being made 'without the benefit of political ideas'.[39]

Rogin's study *The Intellectuals and McCarthy* suggests that, whether or not McCarthyism was itself a 'radical specter' (as Rogin's subtitle calls it), McCarthy tapped into widespread 'feelings of uneasiness over a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, urban, industrial society' by appealing across the political spectrum.[40] Until he was discredited in

the live broadcast of the Army hearings in spring 1954, McCarthy was approved by between 30 and 40 per cent of the population, suggesting a widening gulf between the public and intellectuals. To be an intellectual in the 1950s was usually to be part of the eastern patrician world that McCarthy's midwestern populism attacked. McCarthy's aim was to purge institutions of those deemed to be holding subversive ideas, but it was his ability to manipulate anticommunist sentiments, particularly during the Korean War, which explains his widespread appeal in the early decade. While many liberals were afraid to oppose McCarthy for fear of being recast as radicals, the newspapers helped to inflame matters by reporting unfounded claims as facts. Straight intellectual discussion could not compete with the dramatic assertions of Tail Gunner Joe and public polemic against him was in danger of being seen as un-American.

Although television quiz shows in the 1950s revealed a widespread desire for factual knowledge (see Chapter 4), another aspect of the bad press that intellectuals received was the sense that there were, it seemed, few connections between academic life and mainstream culture. The mass media helped to widen the perceived gulf between the two arenas, often pushing intellectuals like Trilling and Adorno into defending high culture in strong moralistic tones. In 1953 art critic Clement Greenberg revised his early opposition between 'avant-garde' and 'kitsch' from 1939, claiming that middlebrow culture (including fiction, concerts and museums) provides a bridge between the elites and the masses to reveal a more variegated culture than suggested by the 'high culture v. mass culture' model. But others such as Dwight Macdonald disagreed, arguing that 'Midcult' was little better than mass culture in preventing consumers from thinking clearly about the reasons behind their chosen pursuits; indeed 'Midcult' offered a 'special threat' to Macdonald in exploiting 'the discoveries of the avant-garde' and in degrading modernist culture.[41]

The intellectual community's distrust of the masses was mirrored by unease among the general public concerning intellectuals. Even thinkers who made links between different spheres of American life were either ignored or treated with scepticism. Sociologist C. Wright Mills, religious thinker Reinhold Niebuhr and physicist Albert Einstein were among other public figures that stepped out of the academy to address pressing social issues, but in moving outside their specialist fields they aroused the suspicion of those that guarded those specialisms. Public intellectuals were often unfavourably contrasted to experts – particularly technical experts – working within the fields of

science, law or business, and the culture of technical expertise and big business was particularly worrisome for them.

Primarily due to this anti-intellectual climate, one of the major reasons that the Democrat candidate Adlai Stevenson lost twice to Eisenhower in the 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns is that he came across as too cerebral and serious. Where Stevenson received support from voters in 1952 for his intellectual acuity, in 1956 Eisenhower had greater popular appeal across the political divide as head of state and successful military leader in World War II. One journalist, John Alsop, described Stevenson in the first election clash as having a 'large oval head, smooth, faceless, unemotional, but a little bit haughty and condescending'; he coined the word 'egghead' to describe Stevenson and his supporters: 'all the eggheads are for Stevenson', Alsop commented, 'but how many eggheads are there?' [42] In 1952 the anticommunist film *My Son John* did nothing to challenge this distrust of intellectuals, suggesting that too much education is responsible for leading John Jefferson (Robert Walker), the son of honest church-going parents, into an un-American world of atheism, espionage and treason. In this climate it was no surprise that Eisenhower won the election that year, leading Arthur Schlesinger to declare that the intellectual 'is on the run today in American society'.[43]

The flipside was a wariness of 'Madison Avenue packaging', as Stevenson called it, and the popularization of ideas at the expense of rigorous debate. Popular books of criticism had been published before the war. For example, Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (1942) examined the phenomenon of 'momism' by applying psychoanalytic ideas to a perceived malaise in family life. Wylie's book was selected in 1950 as The American Library Association's nomination for one of the major works of non-fiction in the first half of the century, and was re-released in paperback in 1955. Wylie saw his jeremiad as perfectly suited to 1955, 'a year more threatening to American freedom, American security and even to American existence than the year 1942' in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor.[44] But, while some of Wylie's ideas are unfounded and others unpalatable (such as his claim that 'mom' is 'cinderella . . . the shining-haired, the starry-eyed, the ruby-lipped virgo aeternis'), *Generation of Vipers* is actually anti-Madison Avenue in the respect that it is a noisy book lacking the polish of many cultural products in the mid-1950s.[45]

Advertising culture and the bright surfaces of 1950s commodities were, for most, more attractive than thoughtful discussion about labour value, overproduction and regulating markets. Ideas seemed much more appealing when given the Madison Avenue treatment,

particularly religious ideas at a time when church-going had risen dramatically. Norman Vincent Peale's spiritual improvement manual *The Power of Positive Thinking* was one of the bestsellers of the decade, and the Catholic priest Fulton Sheen was a regular on television to hand out spiritual advice.[46] Lone voices such as Reinhold Niebuhr spoke out against Peale's evangelism as a product of the Eisenhower era with its 'techniques of modern salesmanship', and he dismissed popular preachers like Billy Graham for ignoring pressing economic and racial issues, with Graham trying to convert his audience into good Christians through oratory.[47]

Perhaps it was unfair (and much too easy) to blame the popularization of ideas on advertising, as even Eisenhower was accused of selling out to Madison Avenue and key members of his administration John Foster Dulles and Richard Nixon were criticized for indulging in 'double-talk and word-magic'.[48] In an attempt to dispel the myths of advertising, Martin Mayer provided an insider's view of the industry in *Madison Avenue U.S.A.* (1958), noting that many workers are faced with 'brutal hours' and dogged by 'psychological insecurity'.[49] But Mayer's description of the advertising industry is telling: he compares it to a complex game of chess with the ad man 'a cog in a little wheel that runs by faith inside a big wheel that runs by the grace of God'.[50] These metaphors actually help to reinforce the theory that advertising quickly became a culture of deception where no one really knew the rules of the game except executive elites. It was this point that really worried critics: the postwar promise of self-determination often degenerated into subservience to a technocratic society run by a power elite intent on hoodwinking consumers.

In one of the defining postwar studies, *The Affluent Society* (1958), the economist John Kenneth Galbraith characterized the decade as representing a high point for free enterprise and a widespread faith that all 'social ills can be cured by more production'.[51] It could be argued that the emphasis on productivity was itself a potent idea, but Galbraith argued that this emphasis goes back to John Maynard Keynes immediately after World War I and had only recently become 'the *summum bonum* of liberal economic policy'.[52] It was the passive absorption of these ideas that worried Galbraith, leading him to write a chapter of *The Affluent Society* on 'conventional wisdom' and the general acceptance of the belief that increased productivity was the marker of social achievement. Whereas in the communist world doctrine and dogma were regulated by the state, Galbraith noted an informal – but nevertheless endemic – enforcement of American social

values through the promulgation of 'conventional wisdom'. In Marxist terms, whereas the economic base was readily discernible in the Soviet Union (at least up to Stalin's death in 1953) or in Red China (following Mao Tse-tung's overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek in 1949), the complex superstructure of postwar US society often hid economic realities behind the veil of entertainment. Galbraith thought that ideas were often at odds with ingrained values, claiming that to have currency, ideas 'need to be tested by their ability, in combination with events, to overcome inertia and resistance'.[53] More radical critics of 1950s America, such as Norman Mailer and C. Wright Mills, would have agreed with Galbraith that there was too much coming 'to good terms with life' in postwar America, and not enough questioning of what is at stake when the vast majority of citizens concur with conventional wisdom.

It may seem that Galbraith was intent simply on combating conventional wisdom, but he was, in fact, suspicious of ideas as a whole, perhaps because they were too easily co-opted for ideological ends. While Robert Oppenheimer was arguing in 1955 that 'the integrity of communication' and free exchange of ideas across national boundaries was vital to ensure the health of the country, four years later Richard Nixon in his kitchen debate with Khrushchev came very close to downgrading international communication to the gimmickry of colour television.[54] Galbraith, though, believed that ideas are only powerful 'in a world that does not change', and he had a suspicion that the opposite of ideas is not conventional wisdom at all, but 'the massive onslaught of circumstance with which they cannot contend'; if the mantra of the 1950s was the pursuit of happiness, it was not an exact idea but more 'a profound instinctive union with the stream of life'.[55] Galbraith was worried by the instinctual acceptance of 'the social good' in times of prosperity, particularly when accompanied by only a vague sense of the rules of the game. For this reason, *The Affluent Society* ends with an urgent call for 'resources of ability, intelligence, and education' to overcome the passive acceptance of conventional wisdom and the 'grandiose generalizations' of the day.[56]

Galbraith's study touches on two of the central nerves of 1950s America: first, the mistrust of intellectuals and, second, the idea of consensus bound up with the myth that the whole nation was moving in the same direction 'in union with the stream of life'. Public scepticism for ideas runs through the decade: from the ridiculing of Adlai Stevenson as an egghead, to the shift from Abstract Expressionism to an aesthetic interest in manufactured goods in the mid-1950s, to a film

like MGM's *The Band Wagon* (1953) in which Fred Astaire's song-and-dance routine is portrayed as more authentic than a theatrical revival of Faust. One argument would be that the democratization of culture facilitated a shift from highbrow to middlebrow and increased the accessibility of cultural products. But there was still a mistrust of intellectuals, which the historian Richard Hofstadter formalized in 1962 with the publication of his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*.

Hofstadter contended that the 1950s was one of the peaks of American anti-intellectualism, in which 'men of culture' and 'intellectual accomplishment' were treated unfavourably as the Stevenson versus Eisenhower election contests demonstrated. Hofstadter argued passionately that to preserve the critic's 'freely speculative and critical function' intellectuals must separate themselves from government, business and science. However, the danger in operating outside institutions was a 'state of powerlessness', leaving the running of the country to businessmen such as Charles Wilson, Chairman of General Motors and Eisenhower's Defense Secretary from 1953.[57] Critical distance is vital for illuminating matters to which business leaders and government advisors are blind, but it can also lead to a failure to tap into channels of power or to be heard in the cultural mainstream.

Whichever perspective is adopted, the intellectual posture was all but excluded by the centripetal pull of the postwar consensus. Hofstadter's claim that 'the critical mind was at a ruinous discount' in the early 1950s mirrored Philip Wylie's assertion in his 1955 introduction to *Generation of Vipers* that 'the critical attitude . . . is mistrusted in America' because it is 'thought by millions to border on subversion especially when it becomes criticism . . . of popular American attitudes'.[58] Wylie believed that advertising, business and censorship were responsible for a narrow consensus of acceptable views that had replaced a critical stance: '"Boost, don't knock," has replaced the Golden Rule as the allegedly proper means to the American Way of Life'.[59] Underlying Wylie's rhetoric is the suspicion that consensus is less about informed agreement and more about fears that differing views would arouse censure or punishment. Even critics who applauded the pluralism of American society against the narrow materialism of communist countries only tolerated diversity within a fixed range; as Michael Rogin argues, pluralists championed individualism over group pressure but also feared 'the unattached individual' and the potential disruption of social order that radical behaviour brings.[60] It was for this reason that communism, juvenile delinquency and race

relations were the hotly debated topics of the decade. We will come back to these fears in the next section, but it is first worth dwelling on one of the defining documents of the early 1950s consensus.

'Our Country and Our Culture' (1952)

A handful of liberal and left-wing intellectuals in the early 1950s continued to position themselves as critics of modernity. The architect and social critic Lewis Mumford, for example, bemoaned the shift towards consumption, arguing that individuals were becoming imbalanced and increasingly mechanised in their habits. 'Like a drunken locomotive engineer on a streamlined train, plunging through the darkness at a hundred miles an hour', Mumford suggested in 1952, 'we have been going past the danger signals without realizing that our speed, which springs from our mechanical facility, only increases our danger and will make more fatal the crash'.[61] But Mumford differed from the widespread opinion that US culture in the 1950s was much more affirmative than it had been before World War II.

The key document that signalled this trend was the symposium 'Our Country and Our Culture' published over four issues of *Partisan Review* in 1952. *Partisan Review* was closely connected with the Communist Party when it was founded in 1933, but it was re-launched in 1937 under the editorship of Philip Rahv and William Phillips, shifting away from communism whilst keeping its leftist agenda into the 1940s. In 1946 literary critic Lionel Trilling was claiming that the purpose of *Partisan Review* was 'to organize a new union between our political ideas and our imagination', and by the late 1940s the journal was publishing social commentary alongside fiction and reviews and was more moderate in its politics.[62] *Partisan Review* had its most influential phase from 1946 to 1955, moving from quarterly publication to bimonthly, and briefly to monthly in 1948–50. The editors sensed that 'the ideal reader' believed that 'what happens in literature and the arts has a direct effect on the quality of his own life'.[63] Although it remained opposed to 'all varieties of know-nothingism' and Mumford's critique was echoed by other contributors, many in the 'Our Country and Our Culture' symposium agreed that the adversarial stance of the modernists had given way to a general affirmation of national culture.[64]

Perhaps because the country had become a haven for European émigré intellectuals in the face of political hostility in Europe, most of the twenty-five contributors felt more at ease with American culture than they would have done thirty years earlier. But it is misleading to think that the contributors were entirely uncritical. They argued that the intellectual has a crucial role for ensuring national balance and contributing to the country's international prestige. Some contributors shared Trilling's view that the national situation had vastly improved over thirty years and that American culture was no longer inferior to Europe: not since before the Depression, Trilling claimed, has the public thinker had 'a whole skin, a full stomach,

and the right to wag his tongue as he pleases'.[65] Other critics such as David Riesman, Arthur Schlesinger and Leslie Fiedler offered more modulated responses. Fiedler claimed that the separation of affirmative and oppositional currents was actually a false distinction: Americans have always held these two views at the same time.

Despite the general consensus, there were some outright rejections of the editors' premise, with some arguing that the critic's role is always to oppose the cultural establishment. Irving Howe, Norman Mailer and C. Wright Mills (all three to become important figures in the New Left in the early 1960s) stood firm as nonconformists suspicious of the lures of American culture, believing that to give up a critical stance would be to surrender to the reckless course of postwar capitalism. All three writers discussed what Mills termed 'social drift' and the barely visible changes that most citizens could not detect, and Irving Howe followed up his critique with another *Partisan Review* article in 1954, arguing that intellectuals had been tamed by returning to 'the bosom of the nation'.[66]

While these dissenting critics were far outweighed by accepting voices, there were others such as the poet Delmore Schwartz and religious thinker Reinhold Niebuhr who occupied the middle ground that Leslie Fiedler had identified. For example, Niebuhr disliked mass culture and the marriage of business and technology, but he argued that as a young nation the United States could not hope to possess the spiritual treasures of much older ones. Instead, he discerned that the country had cultured 'qualities of robustness' and he was proud of the way in which American social criticism had developed without becoming weighed down by dogma. However, Niebuhr worried about whether this kind of criticism was actually helpful for the nation in its new role as global leader, claiming that the 'ruthless and intransigent foe' of communism forces 'even the most critical and sophisticated patriot' in an 'uncritical' stance towards America.[67] Niebuhr thought that the stand-off with the Soviet Union had closed down intellectual possibilities – it was now a matter of deciding whose side you were on rather than exploring the complex political and cultural terrain between opposing worldviews. While he claimed patriotism was right and necessary, Niebuhr went on to warn against flag-waving, arguing that the 'foes within America' (including McCarthy) offer greater danger than 'the foe without', adding that one must be vigilant against 'hysteria, hatred, mistrust, and pride'. The nation's cultural legacy, for Niebuhr, was no defence against the potential 'destruction of the spirit of democratic liberty' in the face of communist hysteria or foreign policies 'frozen into inflexible rigidity'.[68]

The title of the 1952 symposium 'Our Culture and Our Country' suggests inclusivity – what Norman Podhoretz has described as 'a radical declaration' and 'a major turning point in American intellectual life'.[69] However, while the symposium presented a mixture of Jewish and Christian opinion, the contributors were mainly white men; only two women (poet Louise Bogan and anthropologist Margaret Mead) and no black critics were involved. It is clear that the 'our' of the title was intended to suggest a generosity of spirit, but the group of contributors reveals that intellectual

culture in 1952 was far from inclusive, with black and female public thinkers a rarity into the late decade.

  Partisan Review organized a fifty-year conference in 2002 to assess the historical impact and the theoretical limitations of the original symposium, with speakers noting that the 1952 contributors were unsure about what to do with mass culture and that their liberal politics and cultural conservatism did not sit easily. But the prominence of right-wing voices in the early 1950s, epitomized by William F. Buckley's argument in *God and Man at Yale* (1951) that Ivy League alumni should determine university syllabi to ward against dissent being taught in the classroom, was a major reason why 'Our Country and Our Culture' was so important as a public document promoting intellectual freedom and the open discussion of ideas.

Spaces

By the end of the decade the spatial configuration of the United States altered when the forty-ninth and fiftieth states Alaska and Hawaii joined in 1959 after a long struggle for statehood. Although it had been an official territory since 1912, the strategic addition of Alaska, the 'great northern and western citadel', during the cold war brought the nation closer geographically to the other global superpower and the nation's most feared postwar neighbour: the Soviet Union. The narrow Bering Straits was all that separated the USA from the USSR, with the frozen lands of Alaska virtually a continuation of the wastes of Siberia. CBS broadcaster Edward Murrow tried to start a public debate on the issue of statehood, given that there were strategic reasons to either include or omit Alaksa and Hawaii from the Union, with some claiming that they should be excluded because they were non-contiguous states and the inhabitants had 'no direct knowledge of life in the United States'.[70]

  Both Alaska and Hawaii were strategic military bases after Pearl Harbor, but one theory for the delay in granting statehood was that Eisenhower, in 1954, feared that Alaska would vote Democrat in the next presidential election despite its huge military contingent. The outcome was a joint statehood bill: Alaska entered the Union on 3 January 1959 and Hawaii followed on 21 August. Racial prejudice also played a part in arguments against the statehood bill, as segregationists in the South were fearful of the mixture of races and nationalities in both states. On the positive side, in May 1959 the popular magazine *Look* ran a feature on racial mixing in Hawaii, with one nineteen-year-old Hawaiian claiming 'I'm Filipino, Chinese, Hawaiian, North American Indian, English and Spanish. I'm all mixed up' and the

Governor of Hawaii promoting the island as a microcosm of democr-
acy: 'the Hawaiian is the man of the Pacific, bearing the seeds and fruits
of the cultures of East and West. In the age of the H-bomb, the East
and West must live in peace'.[71] Whatever the underlying reasons for
delay and eventual admission, these debates concerning American ter-
ritory are crucial for understanding social and political developments
in the postwar years.

   The mid-1940s had seen an almost complete reversal of the alliances
of World War II: the Germans and Japanese were no longer the sworn
enemy, even though West Coast Japanese Americans had been interned
and relocated *en masse* in the late 1940s, causing widespread resent-
ment. Now Red China and the Soviet Union were perceived as grave
threats with a combined land mass that dwarfed the US. When George
Kennan and the State Department called for the containment of com-
munism in 1947, it was born out of the fear that other countries in Asia
and East Europe would succumb to communism and that, in time, the
world's democracies would be outnumbered. While some feared that
Kennan's recommendation to hold back the spread of communism
would be a wild-goose chase, containment policy informed many of
the political decisions in the late 1940s: the Marshall Plan to bring aid
to war-torn Europe; the formation of NATO in 1949; and the decision
in 1950 to help the South Koreans push back the advancing armies of
North Korea and China, leading to over two years of skirmishing on
the 39th Parallel.

   Fears of an attack close to home did not come to a head until the
Cuban Missile crisis of 1962, but the sense that spies and informers
had already secreted themselves into influential institutions fed
anticommunist fears through the first half of the decade. For this
reason, spaces and international travel were policed vigilantly, even if
it meant the denial of civil liberties. The black singer Paul Robeson
had his passport confiscated in 1950 for being a Russophile, warning
that blacks would not fight for the United States against the Soviet
Union, and during the previous summer in Paris speaking favourably
about the absence of discrimination in the Soviet Union; the passport
of activist W. E. B. DuBois was cancelled in 1952; the Caribbean intel-
lectual C. L. R. James was deported in 1953; and the 'father of the
atom bomb' physicist Robert Oppenheimer lost his security clear-
ance in 1954 for casting doubts over the wisdom of developing the H-
bomb. There were others as well, such as left-liberal playwright
Arthur Miller who, although never a communist, was refused a visa
in 1954 that prevented him from seeing a performance of his own

play *The Crucible* in Brussels. Paradoxically Europe was much closer for many Americans with the development of air travel and the extension of the GI Bill for veterans wanting to study abroad, but it was also further away for perceived subversives like Miller, whose marriage to Marilyn Monroe in 1956 conveniently shifted the media spotlight away from his politics.

Paris had been a haven for a generation of writers and artists in the 1920s and after World War II became a strategic American entry point into Europe and the most important site for the transfer of artistic ideas to and from the US. France was vigorously promoted in tourist brochures in the early 1950s, and the favourable exchange rate encouraged many Americans to sojourn in Europe. The iron curtain that the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill detected was moving steadily west across Europe was blocked by the divided city of Berlin, but also halted by the spread of American culture across the Atlantic. There was European opposition though. Anti-American sentiments and French cultural superiority were rife. The French writer and statesman André Malraux claimed that there was no such thing as 'American culture'; a Sorbonne literature professor René Etiemble claimed that France was being corrupted by American exports and by the bastardised language 'franglais'; and many agreed with President Charles de Gaulle that France should embody a third way between the political alternatives of the two superpowers.[72]

Nevertheless, many Americans saw Paris as their point of connection to Europe, both geographically and culturally. It is significant that the reason why ex-GI and wannabe painter Jerry Mulligan, played by Gene Kelly in *An American in Paris* (1951), is befriended by Parisian boys is that he brings bubble-gum and optimism to the war-torn city. Other musicals such as *April in Paris*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Funny Face* use a Parisian setting to emphasize romance and glamour, but the city was also used for more strategic reasons as the gateway for American culture into Europe. For example, Paris was not merely the setting but also a strategic site in the MGM musical *Silk Stockings* (1957), the retelling of Ernst Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka* (1939), in which the carefree optimism of the American producer Steve Canfield (Fred Astaire) is thrown into conflict with the iron discipline of the Russian emissary Nina Yoshenka (Cyd Charisse). Sent to Paris to bring back three commissars and a deserting pianist who has sold out to Western decadence, Nina Yoshenka embodies the will of the Party, only to find her discipline slowly eroded by a metropolis combining American free enterprise with French elegance.

Figure I.2 Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse act out the cold war in *Silk Stockings* (MGM 1957). Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

Paris was also one of the strategic sites for the International Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which worked against censorship to promote cultural expression across the globe, epitomized by a festival of arts held in Paris in May 1952. Leading American thinkers were allied to the US branch of the Congress, including Lionel Trilling and Reinhold Niebuhr who spoke out when the Russian writer Boris Pasternak was barred from receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958 and condemned the discrimination of Jews in the Soviet Union in autumn 1960.

One of the directives of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom was to promote American values in Europe, but that did not mean that the American Committee saw eye to eye with the international organization. In 1951 the secretary of the CCF Nicolas Nabokov was worried that the American branch was out of touch with the central international principles; he realized that a lot of work needed to be done to prevent Europeans from simply thinking Coca-Cola and Hollywood when they thought of Americans.[73] The political complexities of the CCF and the fact that the CIA later turned out to

be a hidden benefactor of the Committee have been well documented. However, while Richard Pells argues that during the 1950s members of CCF 'believed they were engaged in a project that was politically necessary, morally ennobling, and entirely theirs to superintend', more recent critics like David Caute and Penny von Eschen argue that culture did not always behave in the way that its political advocates wanted it to.[74] For example, von Eschen claims that while the jazz tours of the mid- to late 1950s in Europe, the Middle East and Asia were encouraged by the government for promoting Americanness, 'jazz musicians didn't simply accept the way they were deployed by the State Department'; rather, 'they slipped into the breaks and looked around, intervening in official narratives and playing their own changes on Cold War perspectives'.[75]

    If Paris and Moscow provide important international sites for viewing American culture from afar, back at home the development of cities was heavily influenced by the International Style of modernist architecture. This was widely in evidence through the building of high-rise office blocks and epitomized by the German émigré Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's thirty-eight-storey Seagram Building on Park Avenue, New York City. The Seagram Building followed the twenty-four-storey Lever House (completed in 1952) in making use of new zoning laws in the city that permitted high-rises to no longer be set back (as had been the previous law), provided that the building did not cover more than a quarter of the lot. Completed in 1958 the Seagram Building was a classic example of all-glass office high-rise with simple clean lines and a plaza front. Some critics (including the editor of the magazine *House Beautiful* in 1953) were concerned that the International Style was linked to communist ideology, but the Seagram Building was widely copied as the template of corporate modernism and a symbol of a well-ordered nation.

    There were variations on corporate architecture such as the futuristic Alcoa Building, Pittsburgh, with its aluminium skin (completed in 1953) and the multi-cellular Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1956). Price Tower was architect Frank Lloyd Wright's only skyscraper, using glass and copper – Wright's attempt to bring back organicism to the postwar built environment (even though the tower's small cells were not very practical). Some grand building projects never came to fruition like the planned new headquarters for the World Trade Center on the waterfront in San Francisco, which had a projected cost of $750 million.[76] But other completed buildings, such as the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (for which Eisenhower

Figure I.3 Lever House, 390 Park Avenue (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 1952).

broke the ground in May 1959), were seen as architectural symbols of an upwardly-mobile and culturally vibrant nation, in this case helping to regenerate a slum area around Columbus Circle in Manhattan.

Figure I.4 Seagram Building, 375 Park Avenue (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1958).

While some public spaces in the 1950s, particularly in the segregated Deep South, were slow to change even after the *Brown* v. *the Board of Education* ruling of 1954 (see the following section), the new geography of the decade is best viewed by focusing on the built environment in the Northeast. A changing demography was linked closely

to shifts in living spaces in the 1950s, with many Puerto Ricans and African Americans migrating to northern cities in search of work (over 5 million blacks migrated to the urban North and West between 1950 and 1965), at the same time that many white middle-class city dwellers were moving out to the suburbs. The Federal Housing Administration Program (FHA) was established in the mid-1930s, but after World War II it went into overdrive to re-house families and returning veterans, concentrating on the growth of the suburbs in the second half of the 1940s to prevent city centres becoming overcrowded. The lure of newly created suburbs such as Park Forest, Illinois, and the three Levittowns in Long Island, Pennsylvania and New Jersey (named after planner William Levitt) was particularly strong for parents wanting to bring up children in a clean and safe environment.

The safety of surburbia was promoted by property investors and glossy ads, stressing that new Levitt houses were 'out of the radiation zone' beyond the reach of atom bombs.[77] Low prices and favourable interest rates enticed many lower middle-class families to purchase homes rather than rent, but moving to the suburbs meant almost total reliance on a car because public transport links were poor and general services often a drive away from housing areas. The zoning of suburban areas tended to push economic groups closer together, with the middle class moving to medium- and low-density housing and the working class to high-density dwellings. This created homogenized environments marked by identikit houses and similar lifestyles, with television drawing the family into the home where a diet of sitcoms provided 'how-to lessons' for 'organizing marriage and child raising'.[78]

In many ways the homogeneity of Levittown's population was planned, with African Americans barred from renting or buying property in certain areas up to (and even after) the *Brown* v. *the Board of Education* ruling. Before this, integrated neighbourhoods did exist, but they were rare in the early 1950s and many banks resisted making large loans to finance integrated housing. Although Levittown was often described as the largest all-white community in the country, *Look* magazine ran an article in August 1958 of the first black couple, William and Daisy Myers, to move into Dogwood Hollow (a section of Levittown, Pennsylvania); they were subject to vandalism, physical threats, a flaming cross on the lawn, and 'KKK' painted on their friendly neighbour's house before state authorities could intervene.[79] The FHA actually encouraged the zoning of neighbourhoods along class and race lines, arguing that 'if a neighbourhood is to retain sta-

bility . . . it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes'.[80]

Urban problems in inner cities and grey-belt areas were masked by firms wishing to encourage young couples to suburbs like Levittown, such as in magazines like *Redbook* that focused on the need to balance the responsibilities of home and work. In 1957 *Redbook* produced a short promotional film *In the Suburbs* dealing with the pleasures of a suburban lifestyle and its suitability for starting new families.[81] Because around 2.5 million new families were involved in this social trend it was not surprising that there were initially few negative voices about the downside of suburbia, which Lizabeth Cohen argues 'became the distinctive residential landscape of the Consumers' Republic'.[82] Civic pride in city centres was also high in the mid-decade, with *Look* running a long feature in February 1958 on New York as a city of 'incredible contrasts', although behind the façade of Manhattan were slums and segregation that ran 'the length of the island'.[83] Several concerned reports on city centres were published in 1959, followed by the critical study *Anatomy of a Metropolis* in 1960 and Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961, and a scandal arose when the city developer Robert Moses turned over many Manhattan tenement areas to private developers, forcing poor families to live in derelict buildings.[84] A watchful eye was also turned on suburbs: the critic John Keats satirized the lifestyles of John and Mary Drone in *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1956); in *The Split-Level Trap* (1960) Richard Gordon renamed the suburbs 'Disturbia'; and Richard Yates offered a harsh critique of a typical Connecticut suburb in his satirical novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

There were some alternatives to suburbia such as modernist designer Joseph Eichler's designs for innovative homes for the Californian middle class, but the options were more limited in the Northeast. Lewis Mumford was particularly scathing of suburban developments, coining the phrase 'anti-city' to describe areas of sub-urbanization. Back in the 1920s Mumford had looked upon the suburb favourably for renewing the natural environment that the modern city had swallowed up, but his early dream of an organic regional community (or garden city) conflicted with the homogenized topographies after World War II. Mumford was horrified that suburban dwellers were heavily reliant on car transport to commute to cities, making suburbia into a 'bedroom community' that lacked any kind of organic coherence.[85] In his major work *The City in History* (1961) Mumford described contemporary suburbia as:

> A multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at
> uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste,
> inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age
> group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same
> tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in
> every inward and outward respect to a common mould, manufactured
> in the central metropolis.[86]

It was not the growth of suburbia that worried Mumford, but the low-
grade unimaginative lifestyles that it encouraged, with the promise of
freedom ('the open basket-work texture of the suburb') being replaced
by a contained environment ('the solid stone container of late neolithic
culture').[87] Rather than finding a mixed culture in suburbia, Mumford
discerned only an 'over-specialized community' where 'compulsive
play' became the natural analogue of 'compulsive work', reinforcing 'a
standardized and denatured environment' bereft of self-sustaining
resources.[88]

   Sociologist Herbert Gans argued in *The Levittowners* (1967) that
Mumford's reading of suburbia was too critical, reducing all postwar
developments to an abstract model that contrasts unfavourably with
his ideal of a garden city, whereas Keats' *The Crack in the Picture
Mirror* and Yates' novel *Revolutionary Road* were too cynical in sug-
gesting that there can be no escape from the low-grade life of subur-
bia. It is, of course, the exact opposite of the happy and optimistic
images of the *Redbook* promotional film *In the Suburbs*, but provides
another example of the ways in which popular culture and intellectu-
als (with a streak of urban snobbery) were going their separate ways.
If culture was on the move in the mid-1950s, it was moving against the
direction that many intellectuals wished to see. It was, in fact, a
triumph for popular culture that commerce and imagination came
together to give rise to the decade's most distinctive new geography on
the West Coast: Disneyland.

Disneyland 1955

The most iconic manufactured space in the 1950s was Disneyland, built in
160 acres of orange grove in Anaheim, California. The creator of the new
theme park was Walt Disney, the animator and self-styled uncle of all
young Americans. Disney had designs for a theme park before World War
II and originally planned to use an eight-acre site adjacent to Burbank

Studios which he initially intended to call Fantasia after his 1941 musical animation and then, later, Mickey Mouse Park. Disney was disappointed with other amusement parks and wanted to create 'a place that's as clean as anything could ever be' that would appeal to both children and adults.[89] This emphasis on the cleanliness of the park is itself significant given that Eisenhower and Nixon used the image of the 'clean house' in their presidential campaign of 1952 (to eradicate suspected subversion in the government), but the specific idea that Disney could transform the dreamlike worlds of his animation into spatial forms was almost unthinkable. But the war halted his initial plans and it was not until August 1953 that the Anaheim site was found, twenty-seven miles from Los Angeles. Much of the finance for the theme park (which exceeded $17 million) came from the ABC network, and was given in exchange for Disney's commitment to the eight-year television show *Disneyland*. He made good promotional use of the ABC show, premiering with 'The Disneyland Story' (17 October 1954) which pulled in over 30 million viewers, and he followed this with regular bulletins as the site developed.

Disney's passion was to bring to life characters and experiences that existed only in the imagination. Although Disneyland is often seen as the epitome of mass culture, as a 2006 exhibition on Walt Disney at the Grand Palais in Paris suggests, Disney can be seen as a pioneering figure in breaking down the boundaries between fact and fiction and between high and low culture (he even collaborated with Salvador Dali in 1946). In his first television show Disney expressed his hope that Disneyland would be 'unlike anything else on this earth: a fair, an amusement park, an exhibition, a city from Arabian Nights, a metropolis from the future . . . of hopes and dreams, facts and fancy, all in one'.[90]

Even though he had relied for many years on his co-animator and one-time partner Ub Iwerks for the success of his animations, Disney prided himself on 'gathering pollen' and stimulating everybody to work towards the same goals. One *National Geographic* writer recalled Disney's admission that 'I certainly don't consider myself a businessman, and I never did believe I was worth anything as an artist'.[91] Nor was Disney an architect or planner, but he had an ear for folklore and a cinematic vision of his theme park split into four realms that radiated like 'cardinal points of the compass' from a main access route, Main Street, USA. Main Street was deliberately nostalgic in recreating a typical Midwestern main street circa 1900 that Disney hoped would bring back 'happy memories' for those that had lived through the innocent years (as historian Henry May called them), and for children it would be 'an adventure in turning back the calendar to the days of grandfather's youth'. When Disneyland opened on 17 July 1955, Main Street was filled with recreated buildings five-eighths full size, a fire wagon and horse-drawn streetcars; it housed a city hall, kinetoscope, shooting gallery, and fire station; and connected up to the old-style Santa Fe and Disneyland Railroad.

Radiating from Main Street were four lands with their own identity. Each land was familiar to viewers of the television show – with Disney careful to

theme his shows from the start. Frontierland took visitors back to pioneer-
ing America complete with wagons, a stagecoach, an Indian village and the
Mark Twain riverboat; Adventureland was 'nature's own realm' in which was
to be found a jungle cruise and (in the early 1960s) the pioneering anima-
tronics of the exotic birds in the Tiki Room; in Fantasyland were recreations
of Disney's animations: Casey Jr's Circus Train, Dumbo's Flying Elephants,
Alice's Mad Tea Party and Mr Toad's Wild Ride; and Tomorrowland brought
to life the science of the future in Autopia, Rocket to the Moon, Space
Station X-1 and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, which tied in with Disney's
Cinemascope live-action film of that year. The four lands promised
adventures into the past (Frontierland), to elsewhere (Adventureland), into
dreams (Fantasyland), and into space (Tomorrowland), all within '160 acres
of fantasy'.[92]

Eighteen rides were showcased to nearly 30,000 visitors on the opening
day, virtually half of whom had been sold counterfeit tickets at $15 each.
The ninety-minute ABC show of the opening celebrations, 'Dateline
Disneyland', projected the dreamlike space of the park into the homes of
90 million viewers. The excited hosts Bob Cummings, Art Linkletter and a
young Ronald Reagan mingled with the invited celebrities – Frank Sinatra,
Sammy Davis Jr, Debbie Reynolds, Eve Arden, Kirk Douglas – and with
Disney himself, who introduced some of the attractions. But the reality of
the opening is hard to gauge by watching the show, which is slightly
chaotic but portrays a day of jubilation. In reality Tomorrowland was incom-
plete; Fantasyland had to be shut down after a gas leak; some rides did
not work; cafés ran out of food; high-heeled shoes stuck in the newly-laid
asphalt; paint was still wet; trees were still being planted; and water foun-
tains did not work, which was especially disastrous given that temper-
atures had risen to 110°F. Disney was not aware of all this at the time, but
he later referred to the opening day as 'Black Sunday'.

Disney was very careful in the first six months to ensure that the prob-
lems of the opening day did not recur, and he was rewarded by the public's
unprecedented excitement for Disneyland: it took only seven weeks to
receive its millionth guest and less than two-and-a-half years to reach ten
million visitors. To many the park epitomized everything good about the
nation: it demonstrated Disney's resourcefulness and vision; it rewarded
ABC's sound investment, virtually rescuing the network from bankruptcy;
it provided a clean and wholesome place for children to pursue their imag-
inations; and mixed entertainment with education in its exploration of past
and future. Disney's major features *Cinderella* (1950), *20,000 Leagues
under the Sea* (1955), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and *Sleeping Beauty*
(1959) all had box office success, *The Mickey Mouse Club* and the Davy
Crockett television shows were very popular, and the Disneyland project
developed swiftly.

Some critics have looked to Disneyland with a much more jaundiced
eye, though: one critic in 1977 called it a 'degenerate utopia'; for years
Uncle Walt had been at odds with his workforce, demanding rigid and
consistent performances from his Disneyland workers; and Disney's anti-

communist sentiments seep into the moral polarities of his postwar ani-
mations.[93] While Disneyland offered a space for new experiences – one
could move between Davy Crockett's frontier and a rocket launch within
half an hour – visitors and critics offered polar views of the magic kingdom,
with the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard arguing in the 1980s that
Disneyland only offers simulated experiences that throw into doubt the
whole notion of 'reality' in America.[94] Karal Ann Marling sums up this
double vision of Disneyland: 'the tension between perfection and reality,
between the real and more or less real, was the primary source of the
visitor's delight' whereas critics saw 'only plastics and profits in a society
hopelessly corrupted by TV, suburbia, tail fins, and too few distinctions of
caste and class'.[95]

Figure I.5 The Sleeping Beauty Castle, Disneyland, Anaheim CA. © David Halliwell, 1974.

Identities

Just as corporate architecture and suburban developments dominated the built environment in the 1950s, so have standardized versions of gender and class come to epitomize the decade. This standardization has not been helped by satirical portraits of middle-class lives: the long commute to work in the city for the 'organization man' and a day perfecting the home for housewives 'smiling at they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor', as Betty Friedan mocked in *The Feminine Mystique*.[96] Rigorous advertising campaigns promoted this suburban ideal and it was not until late in the decade that rigid gender roles were widely questioned.

As the following chapters will explore in more depth, there was some unrest in the mid-1950s as can be gauged by uneasy representations of gender roles in film and fiction: in Jack Arnold's film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) domesticity becomes an oppressive prison for the shrinking white-collar protagonist Scott Carey, while in Sloan Wilson's novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) the organization man, Tom Rath, feels uncomfortably caught between the demands of work and the home; he cannot ever fully settle down to suburban life, with memories of active combat and a wartime affair dragging him back into the past.

The figure of the returning war veteran feeling uncomfortable in his new 'gray flannel' life became a stock character. The general sense at the time was that too much domesticity would make returning soldiers soft and erode their masculinity. This is a thesis that Steven Cohan develops in his book *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (1997), in which he argues that threats to masculinity reached its apogee in the 1959 poster of Alfred Hitchcock's film *North By Northwest*. Cohan interprets the image of Cary Grant falling helplessly through space as a prime symbol of emasculation during a period of loss of national confidence late in the decade.[97]

Despite the popularity of Mickey Spillane's cycle of crime novels featuring the tough, fast-living and, at times, brutish detective Mike Hammer, from the mid-1950s onwards the American male was seen to become increasingly complex. Following articles such as 'Uncertain Hero: The Paradox of the American Male' in a November 1956 issue of the *Woman's Home Companion*, in which the gray flannel male is pictured leading a beleaguered life of 'quiet desperation', *Look* magazine published a series in 1958 on new pressures facing American men.[98] One contributor claimed that the nation was in danger of

becoming 'too soft, too complacent and too home-oriented to meet the challenge of dynamic nations like China and the Soviet Union'.[99] Cohan argues that these fears of 'going soft' in peace-time suburbia were linked to cultural fantasies of remasculinization, particularly evident in the cycle of film epics which displayed the manliness of Moses and Rameses (Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner) in *The Ten Commandments* and made spectacles of the broad chests of William Holden and Rock Hudson. Despite the boom in television westerns in 1957–8, that masculine identity was in crisis late in the decade, or was not all that it purported to be, is given weight by the fact that Rock Hudson, the epitome of strong masculinity, was confirmed as gay following his AIDS-related death in 1985; that James Dean and Marlon Brando had homosexual inclinations; that the moralistic J. Edgar Hoover later turned out to be a cross-dresser; and that the gay subject matter of Robert Anderson's play *Tea and Sympathy* (1953) was drastically toned done in Vincente Minnelli's MGM film version of 1956.[100]

If masculinity was contained in the early 1950s, then American women suffered even more from gender standardization, with most of the important sociological texts – *The Lonely Crowd*, *White Collar* and *The Organization Man* – largely ignoring women's experiences. The likes of anthropologist Margaret Mead, writer Mary McCarthy, and civil rights activist Jo Ann Gibson Robinson were busy in the public sphere, but the fact that the phrase 'public woman' in the 1950s was more likely to be associated with prostitution than intellect is one marker that the home became the naturalized habitat for many women.[101] Recent historians have challenged the theory that women were simply victims of the decade, but widespread college engagements and falling marriage ages were sure signs that motherhood and housework had become sanctified.[102] Standardization was not linked only to the domestic sphere but also to class, region and ethnicity; advertisers focused almost exclusively on the white middle-class ideal: the housewife in the suburban Northeast and the 'golden-haired girl of plantation mythology' in the South.[103]

While many magazines were portraying the domestic housewife as stylish and glamorous, issues of sexuality were often implicit in discourses on women. This was underlined by the outcry on the publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Report on Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), which claimed that sexual relationships outside marriage were much more frequent than was commonly thought. Kinsey's report on male sexuality in 1948 had led to many negative responses, but the female volume outraged those that associated femininity with

moral purity and thought sex was the exclusive domain of marital rela-
tionships. But, although the Church was particularly outraged by
Kinsey's findings, other sectors of American culture seemed to change
around 1953 following Kinsey's 'atom bomb' publication.

Sex was everywhere. Hollywood blondes Marilyn Monroe and
Jayne Mansfield and the growth of male magazines *Playboy* and *Esquire*
offered a model of ostentatious sexuality, epitomized by New York-
based Bettie Page, 'the pin-up queen of the universe', whose explicit pic-
tures led to the anti-pornographic hearings of 1955.[104] This double
image of women – the devoted housewife and glamorous diva – is less a
paradox than a duality in the 1950s. Media interest in body shape found
its way into films such as the neo-noir *Niagara* (1953) in which
Monroe's dangerous and hyper-sexualised character is contrasted to the
modest and sensible Polly Cutler (Jean Peters), and *Vertigo* (1957) in
which the homely Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) survives while the
shape-shifting femme fatale Madeleine (Kim Novak) eventually per-
ishes. The film industry realized that displays of female sexuality gave
Technicolor movies an edge over small-scale television, but many films
concluded with a reassertion of traditional feminine modesty against
glamorous and superficial figures. The MGM musical *Singin' in the
Rain* (1952), for example, harks back to the beginning of sound film in
the late 1920s and ends with the swanky movie star Lina Lamont (Jean
Hagen) exposed as a fraudster while the demure and faithful Kathy
Selden (Debbie Reynolds) is revealed as the true musical talent.

Hollywood was keen to exploit female sexuality but was also
worried by it and repeatedly drawn to plots in which dangerous sexu-
alities led to death or dissolution, such as the beauty-obsessed fading
movie star played by Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).
Monroe's sexualised image was contrasted to the more wholesome
Doris Day whose comedies with Rock Hudson pictured a world of
girl-next-door romances, notwithstanding the fact that bedrooms
often came into play in films such as *Pillow Talk* (1959). Even
Monroe's roles after *Niagara* moved away from threatening sexuality
to the more 'innocent' dumb blonde characters of *The Seven Year Itch*
(1955) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959).

But when it came to lifting the veil off gender roles, it was down to
the first-time writer Grace Metalious in the notorious bestseller
Peyton Place (1956) to suggest that what went on behind closed doors
revealed female sexuality to be more complex than many thought.
While critics dubbed the book sordid and filthy, and Canada banned
its exportation into Commonwealth countries, sales were phenomenal

with many readers commenting that the fictional Peyton Place was just like their home town. In *Peyton Place* Metalious succeeds in turning the mythologies of New England into a story of 'female sexual agency, hypocrisy, social inequities, and class privilege' that many conservatives could not accept as truthful.[105] But, despite the novel's assault on the assumed moral purity of womanhood, it was not until 1963 that Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and novels such as Mary McCarthy's *The Group* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* fully explored the postwar experience of women.

This is not to suggest that the historical reality of women in the 1950s can be reduced to film representations, but that more challenging acting roles at the turn of the 1960s reveal that female identity was changing during a decade in which it looks inert. Gender identity is inflected in different ways when linked to issues of class and race: as Joanne Meyerowitz argues, women were not just mothers or entertainers but also workers and activists, while unwed mothers, abortionists and lesbians offered different female experiences even though many were socially disenfranchised. These 'uncontained women' suggest a variety of subcultures 'beyond the feminine mystique' that are often neglected when focusing on white middle-class identity.

Wini Breines asserts that these 'other' women were restless and sometimes dissident, inspired by the Beat writing of Jack Kerouac but aware that women were often excluded from bohemian lifestyles as they are in Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), or from radical studies of youth culture such as Paul Goodman's book *Growing Up Absurd* (1960).[106] It is perhaps no surprise that, in 1955, J. D. Salinger's heroine Franny Glass comments that 'if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way', as more women were looking for subtle ways to bend or subvert constraints of class and ethnicity to find creative outlets.[107] Gender identity was being widely questioned by the time artist Ed Kienholz used bloody doll's heads to satirize male and female American archetypes in his assemblages *John Doe* (1959) and *Jane Doe* (1960).

If women's identity was 'the problem that had no name', as Betty Friedan called it in 1963, then an articulation of class identity also disappeared off the national radar. The labour disputes in Hollywood in the mid-1940s were diffused by the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 which outlawed picketing, sympathy strikes and boycotts, with the growing fear that all union activities were a shield for communist

conspiracy. The main initiative was the merging of the two main union organizations, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) in December 1955 to form the AFL-CIO which at the time had 16 million members, about 30 per cent of all employees (although this figure dipped in 1957 after evidence of union corruption). The AFL-CIO produced numerous public-service films, particularly through the newly formed Committee on Political Education (COPE) which encouraged the working-class vote and called for the donation of $1 from all members to fund aid to schools, health care and pensions.

The very beginning of the decade also saw workers' films in cinemas, such as the leftist *With These Hands* (1950) which deals with union activity since the 1910s and *Salt of the Earth* (1954) based on a miners' strike in New Mexico and using blacklisted actors. But contemporary representations of activism were rare, with two instructional films for schools, *The Labor Movement* (1959) and *The Rise of Labor* (1968), ending their narratives in 1914 and 1932 respectively: 1914 saw the emergence of company unions that prevented unlawful monopolies and restraints against workers and 1935 saw the passing of the Wagner Act during President Roosevelt's first term that granted the right to organize and join a union.[108] The truncated narratives of these documentaries are two indications that the 1950s was an uncomfortable decade for the working class.

The 'disappearance' of working-class identity was in part due to the rigorous promotional campaign to encourage workers to aspire to the same consumer lifestyle as middle-class Americans, with traditional working-class consciousness undermined by the Taft-Hartley Act. Working-class families in television sitcoms such as *The Goldbergs* (an immigrant Jewish family that moves from New York City to the New Jersey suburbs) and *The Honeymooners* (with Jackie Gleason playing a working-class New York bus driver) both illustrate this trend of status aspiration. But Lizabeth Cohen argues that while the mass media (and Eisenhower himself) promoted the benefits of middle-class lifestyles, other legislation reinforced 'class distinctiveness', including zoning laws for new housing, the difficulties of working-class war veterans gaining the same benefits from the GI Bill as their middle-class compatriots, and an uneven tax structure discriminating against working-class families.[109]

The disappearance of the working class was only apparent, though (the middle class only rose from 37 per cent to 44 per cent from 1952 to 1964); it was just that working-class issues were rarely dealt with in

any depth by the mass media. Even Betty Friedan had to play down her leftist sympathies; in the early 1950s she had fought against wage discrimination, but in *The Feminine Mystique* she focuses almost exclusively on the problems of the suburban housewife. Years of writing for middle-class magazines *Mademoiselle, McCall's* and *Ladies Home Journal* led Friedan to deal with 'the feminine mystique' as a national issue, with class distinctiveness fading from view, alongside race and regional identity.[110] This was also true of much 1950s fiction and cinema, with authors and filmmakers much less ready to deal with class conflict than in previous decades, mainly for fear of reprisals from the government investigating body, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which became a standing committee in 1946 initially to investigate labour disputes in Hollywood. The result was that Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning film *On the Waterfront* (1954) focuses less on the travails of Hoboken dockers and more closely on mob rule, which the testimony of Terry Molloy (Marlon Brando) helps to break up. The fact that *On the Waterfront* is often read as a thinly veiled allegory of Kazan's and screenwriter Budd Schulberg's testimonies in front of HUAC (in which they named names, although Kazan initially refused) suggests that the film dealt with the anticommunist climate rather than focusing closely on workers' lives.[111]

If working-class life was all but absent in popular cultural representations then African Americans were even more marginalized. After the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lobbied in 1953 for the removal of 'racist' sit-coms *The Amos 'n' Andy Show* (1951–3) and *Beulah* (1950–3) there was almost a complete absence of African American representations on television (see Chapter 4). In the film industry the presence of black actors was very limited, with only Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte and Dorothy Dandridge breaking through to mainstream success. And although Harlem gave rise to some young black dramatists in the mid-decade, not until 1959 with Lorraine Hansberry's groundbreaking play on Broadway *A Raisin in the Sun* did the Black Arts Movement find momentum (see Chapter 2). But this is only a partial picture. We find a quite different story when we turn to regional music and local radio, revealing that African American culture was very influential in moulding broader musical and performance styles through the decade. The importance of black music in the 1950s has led music critic Ben Sidran to claim that it ushered in a 'new visibility' for African American culture which

counters the lasting image in the title of Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel
Invisible Man.[112]

Some very interesting studies of postwar black cultural forms have
emerged since the early 1990s.[113] But the history of African Americans
in the 1950s is less often traced through cultural representations
(which were largely problematic in film, television and national
theatre) and more frequently through major social events, such as
NAACP member Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat on
1 December 1955 (which sparked off the Montgomery Bus Boycott)
and the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
in 1957 under the presidency of Martin Luther King Jr (which pro-
vided a focus point for the student sit-ins of 1960 and the Freedom
Rides of 1961). There were some historic advances in the struggle for
civil rights, but racial discrimination, abuse and loss of life character-
ized the decade, most notably in August 1955 when 14-year-old
Emmett Till from Mississippi was brutally beaten and shot in the head
for reputedly whistling at a white woman. The 1950s can be seen as a
germinal time for black activism but, as Richard King discusses,
through the decade many critics, both black and white, were offering
'a largely negative, or at best ambivalent, view of African American
culture', from the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier's attack on the con-
formity of middle-class blacks in *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957) to tensions
embedded in black identity explored by novelists Richard Wright and
James Baldwin writing in exile from Paris after leaving the US in 1947
and 1948.[114]

Even progressive responses to 'the Negro problem' had faded
from view by the mid-1950s. For example, Trinidadian intellectual
C. L. R. James was calling for a 'revolutionary answer' in 1948 in his
proposal to join together the energies of the proletariat and black
movements, but he became warier a few years later, arguing that the
lure of middle-class lifestyle was eroding the radical edge of the move-
ment.[115] Despite these internal critiques of African American culture,
it is crucial not to underestimate the changes that desegregation
brought about in the second half of the decade, initiated by a truly his-
toric moment in US federal law.

Brown v. *the Board of Education* (1954)

The single most important judicial decision of the decade was the 1954 case *Oliver Brown et al.* v. *the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* that made the racial segregation of schools unconstitutional. Following two years of legal cases led by Howard University and the NAACP, the declaration made by the Supreme Court on 17 May 1954 proclaimed 'separate educational facilities are inherently unequal' and called for the desegregation of schools across the country. Led by attorney Thurgood Marshall, *Brown* v. *the Board of Education* turned on an interpretation of the 10th and 14th Amendments, with segregationists arguing that the constitution did not require white and black children to attend the same school, while desegregationists claimed that the 'separate but equal' policy that followed the 1896 *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* case was a misreading of the 14th Amendment and that the government should prohibit states from establishing segregation policies in public places. Given that at the beginning of the decade 70 per cent of African Americans lived in states which had some form of segregation, *Brown* was not just abstract legislation but deeply bound up with the identities of children and students throughout the country.

One important piece of evidence that the desegregationists used in court was the results of research by the New York psychologist Kenneth Clark in the 1940s. Clark tested the different psychological reactions of children aged three and upwards in a range of schools, noting that most children in segregated schools expressed their negativity towards coloured dolls and showed favourable responses to white dolls. Delivered as a conference paper at the White House Mid-Century Conference on Children and Youth in 1950, Clark was sceptical about whether the tests provided scientific proof, but the NAACP realized their worth and Thurgood Marshall used them in the trial as evidence of the psychological harm done in segregated schools.

The response of the court in the *Brown* case was unanimous and elicited much optimism from NAACP members, but the ruling gave rise to far-reaching social and cultural problems. Eisenhower wanted to defer the implementation until the next administration and retaliation arose in many southern states. Questions about how to implement *Brown* led Chief Justice Earl Warren to push through a second court ruling in 1955 (known as *Brown* II), allowing for a transitional period for some states to adjust to full integration. The phrase 'all deliberate speed' was intended to minimize this period of adjustment, but brought an element of uncertainty into the time needed to phase in the changes: deliberation suggested a cautious response, rather than immediate action demanded by NAACP activists. Eisenhower's hesitancy to reinforce *Brown* stemmed from his fear that the consequences of massive resistance – stretching from closing schools and relocating pupils to white supremacist propaganda and the racial purification of beauty pageants – would combine to

create more contentious social problems than those that the court ruling sought to redress.

Almost as momentous as *Brown* were the events of September 1957 when Eisenhower was compelled to call in 11,000 federal troops to protect a group of nine black students in Little Rock, Arkansas. The 'Little Rock Nine' had been prevented from entering Little Rock Central High School by state police acting on orders from Governor Orval Faubus on 2 September. After the Mayor took out an injunction against Faubus, on 23 September the students again tried to enter the school only to be met by a thousand embittered townspeople. The use of Federal troops to permit school access to the nine students was a symbolic moment that gave national sanction to *Brown*, but caused even more unrest among white Southerners who read the judicial decision as a direct attack on their traditions.

If *Brown* represented a historical crossroads, then the case was also a crossroads for liberal intellectuals, although signs of immediate change were hard to detect. Historian Walter Jackson argues that discussions of civil rights in national journals such as *The New Republic*, *Partisan Review* and *The Atlantic* tended to 'have an air of unreality, a lack of comprehension of the changes that were building up within black America'.[116] Liberal reactions to *Brown* were almost as hesitant as Eisenhower's response. Rather than concurring with Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal's opinion in 1944 that America's 'moralistic optimism' would solve the race issue, Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur Schlesinger Jr were advising Democrat candidate Adlai Stevenson in 1956 to take a gradualist approach to desegregation because it was politically prudent in an election year. Niebuhr is an interesting figure to assess the ambivalence of 1950s intellectuals. In 1956 he called *Brown* 'not only a milestone in the history of relations between races in our country, but also in the wholesome interaction between the abstract concept of human rights and the specific rights of the American citizen'.[117] However, Niebuhr worried that *Brown* promoted 'heedless action' instead of allowing the organic development of 'law and custom' to gradually improve race relations. And not until the early 1960s did African American thinkers begin to publish regularly, prompting northern white intellectuals to recognize that race conflict was more than just a problem in the South.

African American writers were also divided on *Brown*. Singer and actor Harry Belafonte was involved centrally in civil rights activism from an early stage and in May 1954 Ralph Ellison applauded the 'wonderful world of possibilities' that biracial classrooms promised. However, James Baldwin was arguing in 1962 that 'white Americans are not simply unwilling to effect these changes' but they have become 'so slothful' that they are 'unable even to envision them'.[118] Sidney Poitier, the most iconic figure of black integration in Hollywood and a prominent figure at Brown's sixth and tenth anniversary celebrations in 1960 and 1964, was also worried that the democratic system was proving hypocritical in its hesitant response to Brown.[119]

Conclusion

As this Introduction has shown, a detailed consideration of race, gender and class reveals that cultural production in the 1950s was much more diverse than is often credited. In order to explore this diversity, the following chapters interlink the four frames of reference discussed in this Introduction: culture, ideas, space and identities. Rather than taking a static notion of culture, the chapters focus on the cultural transitions of the 1950s and are organized to maximize connections between cultural forms, dealing in turn with (1) fiction and poetry; (2) drama and performance; (3) music and radio; (4) film and television; and (5) the visual arts. And, as I begin to discuss in more depth in Chapter 1, the cold war and modernism provide twin lenses for exploring how American experiences and social patterns were themselves changing. While critics such as Daniel Bell were arguing that modernism had become exhausted after World War II, the following chapters demonstrate that modernism actually re-emerged in the 1950s in more diffuse forms, partly in a response to cold war pressures but also partly free from them.[120]

This discussion culminates in the focus of the fifth chapter, in which the visual arts offer the clearest indication that modernism was undergoing a metamorphosis in the 1950s. Sometimes this took the form of the social modernist dream of standardization and at other times reflected a more eclectic genre-bending modernism in which high and popular culture crossed over in complex ways. Together with the Conclusion, the chapters develop the view that the decade was, to recall two earlier descriptions, 'a period of paradoxes' and 'a fidgety mix of anxiety and relaxation, sloth and achievement, complacency and self-criticism'.[121]