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ALL OUR INNOCENCES:

Fredric Wertham, Mass Culture and the Rise of the Media Effects Paradigm, 1940 - 1972

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June 1999

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

"I have sometimes indulged in the fantasy that I am at the gates of Heaven. St. Peter questions me about what good I have done on earth. I reply proudly that I have read and analyzed thousands of comic books -- a horrible task and really a labor of love. "That counts for nothing," says St. Peter. "Millions of children read these comic books." "Well," I reply, "I have also read all the articles and speeches and press releases by the experts for the defense." "Okay," says St. Peter. "Come in! You deserve it.""

-- Fredric Wertham, 1954

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the development of mass communication research in the United States in the years between 1940 and 1972. Central to that investigation is the career of Dr. Fredric Wertham, a psychiatrist whose interventions into debates about the effects of mass communication in the 1950s have remained largely overlooked in received histories of the discipline. By focussing on Wertham's contribution to the development of communications research a number of submerged tendencies are illuminated. A context for the development of the media effects research paradigm is suggested in the first three chapters, each of which highlights a different element which structured postwar communication research. The importance of elitist critiques of mass culture which dominated aesthetic discussions throughout the first half of the twentieth-century are assessed as a foundational factor in the development of communication research paradigms. Postwar concerns about the role of group-mindedness and collectivization are seen to contribute to a conservative political climate which shaped the development of the discipline. Differences between psychoanalysis and behavioral psychology are examined in order to demonstrate the ways in which communication research was consolidated around quantitative and scientistic methodologies. The remaining chapters present two specific case studies of media effects research. Wertham's 1954 anti-comics book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, is examined in detail in order to illustrate an approach to the study of the mass media that was not pursued by communications researchers. The development of a conservative and individualistic media effects paradigm stemming from research on the impact of television on children is presented as the culmination of postwar tendencies in communication studies. This dissertation argues that because the study of mass communication has been largely defined in the United States through reference to research into media effects, the discipline has developed in a manner which emphasizes elitist, conservative, scientistic and administrative tendencies over approaches which are more populist, progressive, impressionistic and critical.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse s'intéresse au développement des recherches sur les communications de masse aux États-Unis entre 1940 et 1972. La carrière du docteur Fredric Wertham, psychiatre dont les interventions dans les débats sur les effets de la communication de masse dans les années 1950 ont été très largement négligées dans les différents historiques de la discipline, figure au centre de cette étude. L'analyse de la contribution de Wertham au développement de la recherche sur le communications permet de dégager plusieurs tendances passées jusqu'à présent inaperçues. Un cadre propice au développement d'un paradigme de recherche sur les effets des médias est proposé dans les trois premiers chapitres, chacun d'entre eux éclairant un élément différent qui a structuré la recherche sur les communications durant l'après-guerre. L'importance des critiques élitistes de la culture de masse qui ont dominé les débats esthétiques pendant la première moitié du vingtième siècle sont évaluées comme éléments fondateurs des paradigmes de la recherche sur les communications. Les préoccupations de l'après-guerre sur le rôle de l'esprit de groupe et de la collectivisation sont perçues comme des éléments qui contribuent au climat politique conservateur qui a modelé l'épanouissement de la discipline. Les différences entre la psychanalyse et la psychologie comportementale sont étudiées de manière à démontrer comment la recherche sur les communications a été consolidée autour de méthodologies quantitatives et scientifiques. Les derniers chapitres présentent deux études de cas spécifiques de la recherche sur les effets des médias. L'ouvrage que Wertham publie en 1954 contre les bandes dessinées, *Seduction of the Innocent*, est étudié en détail pour dégager une méthode d'étude des mass media que les chercheurs en communications ont par la suite totalement négligée. Le développement d'un paradigme individualiste et conservateur sur l'effet des médias découlant des recherches sur l'impact de la télévision sur les enfants est présenté comme l'aboutissement des tendances d'après-guerre concernant les études sur les communications. Cette thèse prétend que, dans la mesure où l'étude des communications de masse a largement été définie aux États-Unis par rapport aux recherches sur les effets des médias, cette discipline s'est développée d'une manière qui insiste sur les tendances administratives, scientifiques, conservatrices et élitistes, au détriment des méthodes plus populistes, progressives, impressionnistes et critiques.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In undertaking a lengthy project such as this one it is inevitable that the research will at times be driven by unforseen circumstances and odd coincidences. Case in point: Fredric Wertham's final book was his 1973 study of comic book and science fiction fandom, *The World of Fanzines*. In that work he quoted a young fan named Will Straw. It is perhaps only coincidence that a quarter of century later Will Straw would supervise this investigation into Wertham's work, but chance played little role in my choice of supervisors. Over the course of the eight years which I have had the opportunity to work with him Will has been a constant source of inspiration, encouragement and support. Without his unwavering enthusiasm for this project its completion would have been inconceivable. I am extremely grateful for the example he has set as a scholar, even if he never did come to grips with the question of violence in Conan's world.

Other faculty at the Graduate Program in Communications also played an important role in shaping this research. Much of the work presented here was refined in Gertrude Robinson's seminar on mass culture and I am grateful for her insights and for the rigourous model of historiography which she presented. My interest in postwar theories of mass communication research was influenced by the courses I took with George Szanto and I would like to thank him for his comments on earlier versions of this work. Outside the Program this work was influenced by discussions with Janine Marchessault and John Jackson which guided me towards my ultimate destination. To them, my thanks.

A number of friends and colleagues have been instrumental in developing these arguments and I would like to particularly thank Keir Keightley for providing research materials and for his ongoing interest in this project. I would also like to express my appreciation to Anne Whitelaw, Danielle Comeau, and Joe Jackson who helped to keep things in their proper perspective.

I would like to thank the small coterie of scholars actively engaged in researching comics related subjects for their ongoing interest in my work. I have found the observations of John Lent, Rusty Witek, Charles Hatfield, Gene Kannenberg, Paul Gravett, Nick Nguyen and Tom Spurgeon extremely helpful. I am grateful to Michael Rhode and Keith Logan for research assistance. I would like to extend a special thanks to Mark Nevins for his insights and his enthusiasm.

At McGill University assistance was provided by Lise Ouimet and Christina Macpherson in the Program offices. This work could not have been completed without the outstanding work of the Interlibrary Library Loan office at McLennan-Redpath Library who worked tirelessly to track down many of the articles which are the basis for my research into the postwar debate about the status of comic books.

This dissertation was completed with the assistance of a fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I acknowledge their financial support of this research.

My parents, Harry and Dianne Beaty, never faltered in their encouragement of my studies and I am extremely grateful for all of their support and assistance during my years at McGill. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of my grandfather, Don Beaty, who never hesitated to lend a hand when it was necessary.

Finally, this dissertation would not exist today were it not for the efforts of Rebecca Sullivan. She has been a constant presence in my life as I undertook this project and the impact of that presence can be felt on every page of this work. In the years which we have been together she has taught me more than she will ever know about how to succeed in scholarship and in life. I am grateful to her beyond measure and I dedicate this dissertation to her with all my love.

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Introduction

The contemporary first time reader of postwar debates on American mass culture encounters a ghost-like figure haunting much of the literature. That ghost is Fredric Wertham, the German-born psychiatrist and once well-known and widely respected expert in the areas of psychiatry, criminality, juvenile delinquency and civil rights. For more than half a century, from the 1920s until the 1970s, Wertham published extensively in both scholarly journals and mainstream newspapers and magazines, emerging in the mid-1950s as one of America's best known commentators on the effects of mass communications. Today, however, the reader must be forgiven if the name rings few bells. The briefest search of library catalogues will turn up only a series of primary sources with vaguely lurid and somewhat threatening titles: *Dark Legend* (1941), *The Show of Violence* (1949a), *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), *The Circle of Guilt* (1956), and *A Sign for Cain* (1966). There is at present little secondary material assessing his contribution to the mass culture debates. Turning to the histories of communications studies imparts little further information. While the first two editions of the textbook *Milestones in Mass Communication Research : Media Effects* (Lowery and DeFleur 1983; 1988) discuss Wertham at length, the most recent edition of the book (1995) entirely omits his contribution to the development of the field. Wertham's name fails to even emerge in more recent histories of communication research (Rogers 1994), suggesting that he has become a non-entity as far as the history of communications is concerned.

This is not, however, an entirely recent phenomenon. Even as the field of communication research was in the process of coming into being in the immediate postwar decades Wertham's contributions were marginalized in the face of an ongoing project of professionalization and legitimation. In Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White's *Mass Culture: the Popular Arts in America* (1957), the first significant collection of writings on mass culture in the United States, Wertham's thought had already lost much of

its corporeality and he had begun to assume the form of a spectre whose ideas required little serious contemplation. Throughout the text Wertham's name was repeatedly evoked by the contributors only to be dismissed (White 13; Fiedler 537; Van Den Haag 530). Wertham himself was the subject of Robert Warshow's contribution (199-211) which was flippantly dismissive of the psychiatrist's work. Furthermore nothing written by Wertham actually appeared in the book's section on comic books despite the fact that he was undeniably the best-known commentator on that form of popular culture at the time.

Wertham's absence from current histories of communications research and his negative presence in the canonical texts created at the origins of the field are the structuring poles of this dissertation. In the pages that follow I offer an explanation for the way in which the work of Fredric Wertham has been systematically excluded from the mainstream of mass communication research both as it was consecrated as a legitimate area of academic inquiry in the 1950s and 1960s and as it has been critically re-assessed by the generations that follow. To situate Wertham's work in the history of communications will elucidate many of the submerged connections in the development of the field, most notably the historical association of mass communication research and the media effects paradigm with increasingly conservative Cold War discourses about mass society and the negative aesthetic influences of mass culture.

In determining who has exorcised the ghost of Fredric Wertham from the house of communications research it is incumbent to note the degree to which historical and contemporary commentators on his work agree on its relative valuelessness. Negative assessments of Wertham's arguments can be found in the writings of social scientists beginning only a few years after Wertham published the work for which he is best remembered, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). Writing in 1957, for instance, Reuel Denney suggested that while Wertham may have been sensitive to a real problem when he identified mass culture generally, and comic books specifically, as an influence on juvenile criminality he nonetheless maintained that Wertham's work lacked scientific evidence "of

any weight" and that his appeal lay primarily with cultural low-brows already predisposed to be suspicious of print (164-165). A few years later Joseph Klapper declared in *The Effects of Mass Communication* (2nd edition, 1960), the definitive elaboration of the limited effects thesis which would come to dominate communications research for decades, that:

> Explicit mention must be made of Dr. Frederick [sic] Wertham, who is probably the world's most voluble castigator of media-depicted violence, and in particular of comic books. Wertham claims to have diagnosed or treated numerous delinquent children in whose downfall comic books were the chief impetus. He does not seem to consider that emotional disturbance or abnormal aggressive tendencies are necessary prerequisites to comic book influence but rather seems to believe, as the title of his best known work asserts, that such fare in and of itself achieves "Seduction of the Innocent" (Wertham, 1954). Wertham is not generally regarded, however, as having substantiated his very extreme views. Thrasher (1949), for example, is typical of the critics in pointing out that Wertham provides no description of his samples of comic books or of human cases, apparently deals only with a small and highly deviant minority of both, provides no description of his case study techniques, uses no control groups, and, in short, provides no acceptable scientific evidence for his ascription of comic book influence. (290)

While the substantive disagreement between Frederic M. Thrasher and Wertham on the nature and quality of Wertham's proofs cited by Klapper will be addressed specifically in Chapter Four, of greater importance at this point is the use of the term "apparently" in reference to *Seduction of the Innocent*. The use of this term indicates that Klapper himself had not read Wertham's text and was dependent upon Thrasher's denunciation of it as the basis of his opinion. Klapper erroneously argued that Wertham's conclusions were unfounded because he had studied material that did not qualify as mass media, a claim which could not be supported by a reading of the text itself. Klapper was symptomatic of a dual refusal which would come to characterize discussions of Wertham's work. While Denney had been willing to accede Wertham's good intentions if not his conclusions after reading the argument, Klapper not only denounced Wertham's book but, based on his incorrect assumptions, implied that Wertham's work did not even merit reading before it was to be condemned to the junk-heap of sub-scholarly achievement.

It is unfortunate that for the majority of subsequent commentators Klapper's partially informed dismissals should become the primary template through which

Wertham's work would be addressed. Contemporary fans of comic books, for instance, largely remember Wertham as a McCarthyite, or a censorious moralizing crusader on a witch-hunt against comic books in the 1950s (Daniels 1971) despite the fact that he was an outspoken postwar liberal and opponent of censorship. Some recent scholarship, while failing to address Wertham's work in any systematic way, has tended to view him as emblematic of larger cultural themes in the postwar era: as evidence of a national anxiety over mass culture during the 1950s (Gorman 1996), or as a "forerunner of the kind of media-oriented pop-psychiatrist later to be in vogue on television talk shows and syndicated self-help programs" (Savage 1990:96). That these descriptions and labels obscure more than they clarify goes almost without saying. A small number of recent scholars have sought to come to terms with Wertham's writing within a larger framework of inquiry. Amy Kiste-Nyberg, for instance, rejected traditional fannish accounts of Wertham and his influence on comic books in her history of the American Comics Code. While Nyberg correctly identified Wertham as a part of an ongoing debate in communications research about media effects she was ultimately unable to overcome the temptation to denounce his scholarship as "clearly censorship" and the man himself as a "skilful manipulator" who targeted comic books for investigation because they constituted an easy target rather than a cause for genuine scholarly interest (1996:156-157).

Nyberg's account of Wertham's studies relied heavily on the evaluations put forward by James Gilbert in his study of American concerns about postwar juvenile delinquency, *A Cycle of Outrage* (1986). Gilbert has the distinction of being one of a very small group of commentators to have taken Wertham seriously, and he rooted his analysis not only in his readings of Wertham's published work but also in a survey of his archives and in interviews with Wertham and his colleagues. Unlike other commentators on Wertham's work, Gilbert offered arguments which sought to explain the reasons why a well-known media critic should have fallen so decidedly out of favour with both the general public which had previously embraced him and the intellectual community which at one

time had at least been forced to acknowledge him, if only in negative terms. In Gilbert's analysis Wertham's fall from grace with the public was simply a result of changing times, whereby he was eclipsed by shifting public opinion in the late-1950s and early-1960s as new attitudes towards popular culture developed (9). From this point of view *Seduction of the Innocent* capitalized on a cyclic or recurrent moral panic about youth behaviour and mass culture which focused for a brief period on comic books before dissipating and taking Wertham with it. While there is some merit to the explanation which sees Wertham's postwar fame as a matter of timing, it does not, however, adequately address the ongoing friction between Wertham's conception of media effects and those of his contemporaries in the American social sciences who continued to research questions of media influence even as public interest in the topic abated. On this question Gilbert suggested that Wertham's analyses were "too direct and sweeping, his conclusions too positive for many of the psychologists and sociologists engaged in considering the impact of mass media on American culture" (91). Once again Gilbert's conclusion stopped short of addressing the systematic way in which Wertham has been excluded from the history and practice of mass communication research. Discussing the origins of American psychoanalysis, Peter Berger has argued that "the root platitude of the sociology of knowledge is ideas do not succeed in history by virtue of their truth but by virtue of their relationship to specific social processes" (32). It is the task of this dissertation to demonstrate how Fredric Wertham's conception of media effects has been excluded from the field of communication research. It is not enough to suggest that it is because his conclusions were too positive. Rather, it is because of structural biases which can be located in the specific social processes through which communication research was professionalized and academicized in the postwar period by scholars working in concert with funding agencies, the broadcasting industry and governmental committees investigating the effects of the mass media.

Measured in terms of academic units and the quantity of professors and students in the United States, communications is easily the most widely adopted social science to have

emerged in the twentieth-century. Moreover, the emergence of communications as a legitimate field of inquiry has gone hand in hand with the development of the social sciences in this century generally. The professionalization of the American social sciences can be traced to the mid-1890s, with the establishment of both the American History Association (1884) and the American Economics Association (1885). Each of these professional organizations originated in an attempt to screen the more dubious scholars out of the professions and establish what Charles Sanders Peirce has termed "a community of the competent". One consequence of this professionalization was, as Steven Biel has pointed out, the establishment of counter-formations of excluded commentators and researchers. Biel has argued that attempts by professional social scientists to make contact with society — through professional journals, for example — actually led to increased specialization and marginality (1992:19). In a similar vein Jill Morawski and Gail Hornstein have argued that efforts at the turn of the century to establish scientific psychology led to the deliberate exclusion of a large number of researchers whose work could not be accommodated within a framework of professional psychology which was to be differentiated from both biology and philosophy on the one hand and lay explanations of human behaviour on the other. Subsequent efforts to demonstrate the utility of scientific psychology to the public led psychologists to modify and simplify their accounts and omit details of methodology, theory and conceptual analysis in their works written for lay audiences, a strategy which opened the door for mimicry and helped to erode the distinctions which had only just been built (1991:108). It is my contention that we can see a very similar process being enacted in the early history of mass communication scholarship. Just as writings on psychology, economics and history predated the establishment of professional organizations founded to consolidate the study of those topics, it must also be noted that interest in (and anxiety about) the mass media predated the creation of communication schools and research institutes. As those institutes and schools began to breathe life into a professional communication research apparatus, however, large numbers

of commentators and scholars were deliberately disenfranchised from the study of the mass media. The continuing renunciation of a scholar like Fredric Wertham can be seen to originate in this tension between the newly professionalized scholars of mass communication and those whose efforts required disavowal if the field were to be able to distinguish itself from "common sensical" ideas about the effects of the mass media. To put it bluntly, Wertham and his supporters had to be defined as quacks for the project of communications research to be successfully launched.

The received histories of mass communication research which can be found in Klapper (1960), DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975), Comstock (1978) and others have tended to legitimate empirical trends and demonstrate a limited historical consciousness. These histories have tended to adhere to a mythology which posited a collection of four founding fathers whose work created the field of communication studies. The origin of this myth can be traced to Bernard Berelson's 1959 pronouncement that the field was, after a quarter century of life, "withering away" (1). Berelson argued that communication research had been dominated by four major approaches corresponding to four men — Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, Carl Hovland and Harold Lasswell — and his belief has since been reified in a number of histories. Traditional histories of American mass communication research have indicated that the field began to emerge between the wars as social science increasingly turned towards empirical research on topics such as propaganda, motion pictures, radio and the mass media generally. From this perspective the end of the First World War opened up a wide public concern about the mass media, specifically with emergent forms such as motion pictures and radio. Psychologists and sociologists stepped in to address these public anxieties, armed with a general learning theory and conditioning models in behavioral psychology that led to the development of what is now termed the hypodermic needle theory. As psychology and sociology advanced, however, suspicions began to arise about this model of direct effects and newer research posited a number of variables which might influence media effects. These variables included audience

demographics, group dynamics and selective perception, and these suspicions ultimately culminated with the theory of limited effects and two-step flow advanced by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in *Personal Influence* (1955). This evolution shifted the research emphasis away from questions of what the media do to people and toward the question of what people do with the media, ultimately forming the basis for more advanced queries into a variety of areas, including diffusion models, agenda-setting and theories of uses and gratifications. In the received history, therefore, the empirical method of mass communication research was legitimized as the effort to end public anxiety about the mass media by replacing lay misperceptions about the corrupting nature of mass culture with scientific research which could demonstrate empirically the limited effects of mass communication.

However, more recent work in the historiography of the field has thrown this narrative of triumphal empirical science into question in a variety of ways. Gertrude Robinson (1988) and Everett Rogers (1994) have separately pointed to important contributions made by scholars who preceded the institutionalization of communication research but who nonetheless constituted what Rogers termed "the first wave" of communications researchers. Arguing that historiography must account for the false starts and discarded elements in the development of a field of inquiry Robinson has taken particular note of the contribution of sociologists to the shaping of communication studies from Durkheim and Tonnies to the members of Robert Park's Chicago School. These interventions have pointed to the importance of expanding our view of the history of communications beyond the narrow scope of canonical texts. Instead, they have posited that the field was constituted within a series of ongoing dialogues relating to the mass media which mass communication researchers did not themselves originate. Other historians have sought to re-examine the history of communications research in a critical light. Todd Gitlin (1978) has questioned the constitution of the media effects paradigm by critically re-assessing the work of Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates. Gitlin's assessment

of the media effects tradition as administrative, uncritical, and overly dependent on an orientation towards marketing and market research has pointed to the ways in which the media effects paradigm was shaped by influences that lay beyond the scholarly ideal of disinterested research. This critique was taken further by Willard Rowland (1983), whose work on the political uses of media effects research highlighted the utilitarian aspects of communication scholarship, as well as the compromises that ongoing interactions with governmental agencies and the broadcasting industry have had on the direction of research. Cumulatively, these interventions foreground the need to understand the history of the field as an ongoing dialogue with forces both inside and outside of the academy, a dialogue which is both historical and ongoing.

One crucial role for critical historiography is the restoration of excluded voices and forgotten trends in the research. J.D. Peters has observed that a tendency in the received histories of mass communication has been to marginalize aspects of the past which cannot be comfortably reconciled to the research projects of the present: "Self-images now in power may exclude forms of research and ideas which once in fact was [sic] crucial but since have become embarrassing" (1989:201). One such example might be the tradition of the type of propaganda analysis which was initiated in the 1940s by Harold Lasswell but excluded as the decade wore on, and as researchers increasingly followed the lead of Lazarsfeld and Carl Hovland towards research on persuasion and media effects. Rogers has suggested that one reason for the exclusion of propaganda analysis from the development of the field lay in the fact that governments and industry had no desire to fund research that was deemed controversial, non-useful or critical (212). Certainly the question of the economics of research funding must be taken into consideration in any history of academic inquiry. It is crucial to keep in mind that the earliest models of communication institutes and graduate programs were those concerned with developing an applied, practical role for research underwritten by industry and governmental sponsorship (Rogers 1994:479). Rowland has argued that this reliance on outside funding allowed

communication research to be captured by positivistic debates over media effects which drew the field into a politically loaded mass culture controversy in the 1950s that forced researchers to address themselves to nonsensical issues while neglecting their interpretive heritage (1988:130). I will argue that this analysis is correct only to the extent that it overlooks the fact that the media effects paradigm is actually rooted in the mass culture debates that culminated in the 1950s and 1960s. Far from being drawn into the debate about mass culture, communication research can actually be seen to be the very product of the debate. From this perspective it is possible to regard the origins of mass communications research as the specialization of certain forms of psychology and sociology which sought to address specific problems associated with anxieties about urbanization and modernization generally, and the status of culture specifically. It is my contention that the crucial role of debates about high and low culture in spawning the field of mass communications is the once crucial but now embarrassing historical element which has been systematically disavowed by communications historians.

In his analysis of the juvenile delinquency concerns of the 1950s, James Gilbert has suggested that anxiety about mass culture was an episodic notion. This contention unnecessarily minimized the degree to which concerns with the relative valuation of culture form a continuous thread through history. Far from episodic the mass culture debate can be seen as an ongoing background to the intellectual discussions that have characterized American cultural discourse throughout history. In the twentieth-century this debate was amplified by the emergence of a growing number of intellectuals working outside the academy. Termed "public intellectuals" by Russell Jacoby (1987), these men (in the vast majority of cases) were "writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience" (5). Although the specific political objections to the mass media shifted during the course of this century, what has remained largely constant is the attitude that the mass media should be viewed with alarm. Concomitant with these criticisms was the understanding that something could be and should be done to ameliorate the condition of

the mass media. That understanding led in part to the creation of projects that formed the basis for modern communications research. Paul Lazarsfeld's Radio Research Project, for instance, was underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation because the foundation wanted to improve the quality of radio programs by demonstrating that an audience existed for high culture in broadcasting. Yet these efforts to ameliorate the mass media through professional sociological methodologies did little to appease non-academic critics and public intellectuals, who continued to voice condemnations of the mass media even as mass communication researchers entered into agreements with media industries and governments seeking to solve the perceived problems. Quite the contrary, as the social sciences became increasingly practical and wedded to the social engineering policies of the New Deal, public intellectuals stepped up their rhetoric and calls for change, ultimately producing a critique of the bureaucratic policies which their initial objections had helped to bring about. Rowland's argument that, as the media effects paradigm developed, mass communication scholars had increasingly neglected their critical role ignores the crucial ways in which the public intellectuals at journals such as *Partisan Review*, *Commentary* and *The New Republic* fulfilled the critical function at the same time as social scientists limited themselves to practical questions. In a review of the history of media effects scholarship J. D. Halloran noted the degree to which the question of media effects had been taken up not only by professional scholars but by:

> moralizing literati, social philosophers, moralists, artists, and educators who, judging from their comments, often feel that the social scientists are so preoccupied with research techniques and methodological devices that their works lack immediate social relevance and that they suffer further because they are unrelated to the general intellectual discussion of mass culture on the one hand and its historical development on the other. (1971:40)

In addressing the history of media effects scholarship, therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that the debate was enjoined by two distinct groups: mass communication researchers from a social scientific background, whose work revolved around traditional scientific methodologies developed in the natural sciences, and public intellectuals with a literary or aesthetic interest in protecting elite culture from the ostensibly degrading

influence of mass culture. To fully understand the reasons that the media effects paradigm, and by extension the field of communications research, developed in the manner that it did it is necessary to come to terms with the dialectic relationship which existed between these two forces.

To get to the heart of that dialogue it is necessary to focus on a figure who has bridged the divide between the public intellectuals and the media effects researchers. The unique career of Fredric Wertham permits just such an analysis. In Wertham one finds the intersection between a number of figures invested in the shaping of debate about mass culture as it played out in the mid-century era. Wertham himself could, by Jacoby's definition, be cited as a public intellectual. While he wrote dozens of articles for scholarly and medical journals during his career, Wertham should also be remembered for his more popular, accessible writings which include books and articles on psychiatry, criminality, civil rights, television and, most famously, comic books. Furthermore, although he is never counted amongst the important postwar public intellectuals the fact remains that Wertham had important connections with many important intellectuals, whose work shaped the debates about mass society in the mid-century era, including H.L. Mencken, Walter Lippman and Clarence Darrow. On the other side of the mass culture divide it needs to be noted that Wertham dedicated much of his life in the 1940s and 1950s to clinically studying the effects of media on the psychological development of children, and spent much of the 1950s and 1960s trying to have clinical methodologies in mass communication research recognized as valid by proponents of experimental and survey methodologies. Ultimately, of course, Wertham was unsuccessful in these attempts and, despite the important contributions that psychiatry and psychoanalysis have made to the development of communications, the clinical method has never been regarded as scientifically rigourous enough to qualify as valid in the eyes of media effects researchers. Consequently, Wertham's findings have been essentially excluded from ongoing investigations of the media. As a figure who was both a media effects researcher and a public commentator on

the media excluded from the media effects paradigm, Wertham can instructively highlight certain submerged tendencies in the development of the field of mass communications. This dissertation will make a critical intervention into the historiography of mass communication through reference to the development of the media effects paradigm as it intersected with the career of Fredric Wertham, a voice which the dominant histories have heretofore neglected.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each of which will critically engage with some aspect of Wertham's published writings in order to illuminate key tensions in the establishment of the media effects paradigm. For the sake of simplicity each of these chapters proceeds in roughly the same fashion, beginning with a presentation of the broad issues under discussion and concluding with a specific examination of the place of Wertham within that context. The first chapter broadly addresses the long-standing antipathy of American cultural commentators and intellectuals to various forms of mass culture on grounds which are primarily aesthetic. Following Patrick Brantlinger (1983), this chapter argues that the division between elite and popular cultures is a centuries long tradition which culminated in the debates over the status and effects of television as they were played out in the postwar decades. The specific postwar anxieties about the role of mass culture in society, anxieties rooted in a rhetoric of democracy and inclusiveness, will be contrasted with earlier elitist conceptions of mass culture which feared the effects of political enfranchisement, particularly in the thought of critics such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Vilfredo Pareto and José Ortega y Gasset. Furthermore, distinctions are drawn between liberal, conservative and radical critiques of mass culture in the postwar period. The primary emphasis in this chapter will be the coterie of writers collectively known as the "New York Intellectuals", and the contributors to Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White's textbook *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (1957). By focusing on Rosenberg and White's comprehensive and inter-disciplinary text as the single best summation of postwar anxieties about mass culture a foundation is laid for examining

the breadth of the debate during this period of increasing intellectual accommodation to consensus politics.

Wertham's writings enter into this chapter through an analysis of his relatively limited yet nonetheless informative writings on the role of high culture in shaping society. These efforts include extensive commentaries on the interpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, psychological analyses of the fiction of Richard Wright and Arthur Miller and Wertham's explanatory notes in the book *The World Within: Fiction Illuminating the Neuroses of Our Time* (1947), a short story collection edited by Mary Louise Aswell. Wertham's thoughts on the social responsibility of the artist are addressed in an examination of his conception of artistic and literary production as either pro- or anti-violence. It is suggested, ultimately, that while Wertham shared many of the same traits and aesthetic predispositions as the New York Intellectuals, he was never actively integrated into that circle and was in fact often criticized by them. Chapter One, therefore, outlines the critical discursive backdrop out of which the media effects paradigm emerged and identifies the specific ways in which Wertham can be seen to be both working inside and outside of that tradition at various points in his career so that his position as a mass culture critic is placed into question.

Chapter Two explores how Wertham's association with the mass culture critics who dominated the American intellectual scene in the postwar period was further jeopardized as attention turned away from purely aesthetic concerns towards the political underpinnings of the critique of mass society. The immediate postwar years were characterized by a culture of affluence and consumption that witnessed the culmination of the Progressivist goals for the nation. As the Truman administration began to put into place the final elements of the New Deal, critical intellectuals who had called for mass involvement in the state during the 1920s and 1930s increasingly began to see government itself as a potentially totalitarian threat to individual liberties. As American social problems were increasingly regarded as having been solved by postwar accommodations between

government, industry and organized labour, the intellectuals of the 1950s transferred their attention from labour to leisure and placed their emphasis on the need for individuals to free themselves from the threat posed by society itself. Shifting their emphasis from the social structure to the individual allowed intellectuals to displace economic problems with questions that were increasingly moral and psychological. The difficulty of achieving autonomy within a mass society was conceptualized in a variety of ways. New conceptions of bureaucracy led to the elaboration of several important critiques of American society including William Whyte's conception of the organization man (1956) and David Riesman's other-directed man (1950). These transformations took place within an increasingly conservative Cold War political climate and helped to lend an immediacy to concerns about mass culture that otherwise might have been absent had the critiques remained at the level of the abstract or aesthetic. In an era in which intellectuals were increasingly loathe to criticize American social and economic organization, it was the perception that the mass society posed an inherent threat of totalitarianism that energized concerns over the shape of American culture and fostered an interest in ongoing research into the effects of the mass media.

If Wertham was sometimes at odds with other intellectuals where aesthetic questions were concerned, he was truly the odd man out in terms of political orientation. At that time that the majority of intellectuals reconciled with the American Cold War consensus in the 1950s, Wertham increased his calls for reform and actively supported causes that were seen as unpopular or even unpatriotic. The individualistic political underpinnings of the media effects paradigm is contrasted here with Wertham's call for broad-based collective social reforms, particularly in his 1966 book *A Sign for Cain.* To this end, Wertham's support of Ethel Rosenberg will be examined in the context of the increasing anti-communism of the New York Intellectuals. Wertham's important contributions to the desegregation trials in Delaware, which culminated in the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, are discussed in relation to the tendency of Cold War rhetorics to

displace civil rights efforts following the Second World War. It is argued that Wertham occupied a position independent from those variously held by the New York Intellectuals. It is further suggested that Wertham's political differences of this group ultimately enabled the marginalization of his arguments about mass culture as the media effects paradigm was consolidated in harmony with the Cold War consensus of the postwar period.

Chapter Three addresses another foundational element of Wertham's thinking in his training as a psychiatrist. Gilbert's argument that Wertham's writings were representative of a European tradition of criticism that was alien to the United States could be considered correct only if he was discussing Wertham's training in psychiatry. Laura Fermi has argued that the intellectual migration from Europe to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s represents the most significant event of the second quarter of the twentieth-century. She identifies the two biggest forces brought from Europe to America as atomic science and psychoanalysis (1971:141). While it is true that American psychoanalysis predated the waves of German and Austrian psychiatrists that arrived in the United States between 1932 and 1941 it is undeniable that this rapid influx shifted the center of global psychoanalysis from Europe to America. This chapter outlines the history of American psychoanalysis and psychiatry beginning with Freud's lectures in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1909 and following the sudden growth of the field in the 1920s and the 1930s. Furthermore, it examines the close connection between psychiatry and social reform movements. Attention is paid to early efforts by psychiatrists to link psychiatry to the study of juvenile delinquency and the ways in which psychoanalysis became an important factor in American jurisprudence as psychiatrists were increasingly called to testify in criminal trials as expert witnesses. This history is tied to the experiences of Fredric Wertham as an immigrant psychiatrist in the United States in a number of important ways, and Wertham's arguments about the relationship between the legal system and the psychiatrist will be examined in light of his book length studies of psychiatry and criminality, *Dark Legend*, *The Show of Violence* and *The Circle of Guilt*. The link between psychoanalysis and criminality is

further investigated through an analysis of Wertham's ongoing debate with the conservative psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg about the future direction of American psychiatry as it pertained to the criminal act generally and the Durham ruling on criminal insanity specifically.

Chapter Three also examines the crucial split between American psychiatry and academic psychology and the ways in which each was taken up by various forces in the media effects debates of the postwar period. Particularly in focus is the turn in academic psychology towards behaviorism under the influence of John Watson, and the rising tide of psychological research concerned with questions of stimulus response which helped to shape the media effects research methodologies. By the 1930s behavioral psychology had come to dominate the American school of psychology and to inform the research with an empiricist and functionalist bent which rendered it distinct from the equally popular psychoanalysis in a number of ways. Among the key differences between the two approaches was the fact that the problem-directed psychoanalysis did not fit within the scientific experimental methods demanded by academic psychology and, consequently, lacked scientific validity in the eyes of many researchers. This distinction between the qualitative and quantitative approaches meant that even though both psychoanalysis and psychology had a common ancestry, in physiology, the former would increasingly come to be defined as inadequate by the latter in debates about media effects. I argue that it is Wertham's reliance on a qualitative and clinical psychiatry revolving around the life histories of patients that ultimately causes him to be so fully excluded from the dominant histories of empirical media effects studies influenced by behavioral psychology. I further argue that this can best be seen in the contradiction between Wertham's evidential findings about the psychological damage created by segregation, which were accepted by the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the rejection of entirely similar findings relating to comic books by media effects researchers and government agencies. This contradiction calls into question the degree to which the reformist pretensions of the

mass culture critics and communication researchers should be regarded as genuine and legitimate.

Chapter Four brings the elements discussed in the first three chapters together around a single case study. It examines Wertham's claims about the effects of comic book reading on children in various articles and in his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent.* These claims are contrasted with competing analyses of comic books from a vast array of commentators including literary critics, educators, librarians, psychologists, sociologists and communication scholars. In total, more than 200 separate articles written between 1938 and 1960 are surveyed, so that Wertham's place within this one aspect of the mass culture debate can be thoroughly assessed. Additionally, governmental and industrial reactions to the work of Wertham and others concerned with the comic book question are documented and Wertham's role in shaping changes in the field of comic book publishing is addressed critically. By addressing Wertham's specific objections to American crime comic books in the postwar period it is possible to come to terms with the particular reasons why his work would be excluded from the media effects paradigm. This chapter demonstrates the fact that Wertham's theoretical foundations in reformist psychiatry and progressivist liberal political traditions allowed his work to be doubly discounted by social scientists. In the first instance, Wertham's work was assailed as non-scientific and impressionistic because of its failure to rely on the dominant experimental and survey methodologies. In the second instance, Wertham's reformist politics allowed critics to characterize him as a moral crusader rather than as a researcher. Wertham's detractors suggested that he had done no scientific or legitimate research but had merely helped to foster what Stanley Cohen would later term a moral panic, or an irrational fear caused by social change. It is in this way that media effects researchers in the social sciences began the process of disengaging themselves from the critical intellectuals whose denunciations of mass culture had helped to spawn the field of communication studies. By characterizing commentators outside the dominant media effects paradigm as moralizing crusaders and aesthetes, the field of

communication research was ultimately able to mark itself as a distinct area of study with a unique set of research methodologies which could be used to study the media.

This shift is best seen through a comparison between various governmental hearings on media effects. In 1954 the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency investigated the role of comic books, television and other social factors in fostering youth criminality. Wertham was one of the experts called to testify at the hearings on comic books, which were attended by a number of industry professionals and a very small number of social scientists, few of them communication scholars. The 1972 Senate Subcommittee on Communication hearings to investigate the Surgeon General's report on the relationship between violence and television, on the other hand, was largely dominated by communication scholars. This shift in emphasis indicates the degree to which the quantitative social scientific media effects paradigm had triumphed as a way of thinking about mass communication in the intervening decades. Chapter Five specifically addresses the rise to dominance of this paradigm through reference to ongoing investigations of the effects of television on the lives of children, from the end of the Second World War until the follow-up hearings on the Surgeon General's report in 1972. Key to the development of mass communication research as a field of study has been the historical split between critical and empirical schools of thought. The critical school which viewed the mass media as manipulative of society focused its attention over time on macro-level studies of media ownership and control. The empirical school, on the other hand, viewed the media as potentially ameliorative of social problems and was consequently more amenable to working with the broadcasting industry in an effort to direct social change through micro-level investigations concerned with effects. While the critical school has remained a constant force in American mass communication research over time, the empirical school has come to dominate the field. As the field was constituted in the 1950s at midwestern universities such as Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin, the desire for scientific respectability led to the privileging of empirical methodologies which closely resembled other aspects of the

established social sciences. This chapter explains the ways in which the intersection of industrial interests, the scientific method and the desire to legitimate communications in the eyes of university presidents and funding agencies led to a focus on the phenomenistic approach to the media best exemplified by the work of Joseph Klapper (1960). It traces the debate over the status of television by examining the foundational texts in the sub-category of television studies — Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) and Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958). Additionally this chapter will examine the debates about television at the Senate hearings of 1954 and the Surgeon General's report of 1972 in order to map the transition in the role of the mass communication researchers in the television debate over time. Wertham's commentaries on television from the late-1950s and 1960s are discussed in order to demonstrate the degree to which they were incommensurate with the emergent paradigm of quantifiable research methodologies. Finally, Wertham's work on fanzines is introduced in order to suggest the full degree to which his work diverged from the dominant modes of conceptualizing relations to the mass media. This work enables the clearest possible picture of the extent to which Wertham's research represented the potential for an alternative paradigm which failed to materialize in his lifetime.

J. D. Peters has argued that the media effects paradigm developed in a scientific culture which emphasized the cleavage of facts and values (213). The rules of the social sciences, Peters argued, insist that when political content is explicit in research objectivity has been relinquished, and, further, that authority rests on the ability of the researcher to bracket values out of his or her findings. For someone like Fredric Wertham, concerned as he was with the ongoing and urgent need for progressive social change, such a bracketing was all but an impossibility. As a consequence, Wertham's work was generally degraded by communication researchers whose interests remained tied to traditional notions of scientific validity and authority. However, Wertham was also denied the possibility of emerging as a critical voice amongst the humanistic cultural commentators of his era insofar as those critics had occupied political positions which were at odds with Wertham's

reformist intentions. The creeping neo-conservatism of the New York Intellectuals and the insistence on valueless and quantitative methodologies from communication scholars left someone like Wertham without any ground to occupy in the postwar debates about mass culture. Insofar as he was to have any influence, therefore, it was to be found at the level of the lay reader, in particular with inflamed parents organizations and other crusaders caught up in a furor over comic books which quickly subsided in the wake of industrial self-regulation. Unacceptable to his would-be colleagues, and quickly passed over by a fickle public moving on to newer concerns, it is no wonder that Wertham remains little more than a ghost in the history of American commentaries on the mass media. Yet where Wertham failed, the media effects paradigm thrived. Shaped by industrial needs and political ambivalence, communication researchers promised that the methodologies of the behavioral and social sciences would provide predictability, generalizability and conclusiveness that would solve the problems of public anxiety about mass culture through science. As Willard Rowland has pointed out, this was a false hope that ultimately forced communication research down a narrow and limiting path without resolving any of the questions which were intended to be solved:

> The accommodations during the process of legitimizing mass communication research meant that short-term practical research such as audience attendance levels, communication and political persuasiveness, and reliable, readily administered methodologies came to displace long-term, more complex issues of societal and cultural impact and significance. The service of those interests militated against any comprehensive, intellectually grounded discussion of the role and meaning of mass communications in society and culture. (294)

This dissertation will demonstrate that the "comprehensive, intellectually grounded discussion" that Rowland calls for were dependent on the ability of mass communication researchers to include the non-scientific and humanistic critical voices, such as those of the New York Intellectuals and others, within the debates and research which put communications as a scholarly field on the map in the 1950s. In short, such a nuanced version of communication research would have necessitated the inclusion and recognition of alternative scholars such as Fredric Wertham, whose qualitative methodologies and

reformist tendencies were regarded as beyond the pale by the majority of effects researchers. Until such time as that research can be recognized as a historically important and potentially productive alternative to the dominant communication paradigm it seems unlikely that the ghosts which haunt the study of the mass media will be fully exorcised. It is hoped that the work presented here will be an early step in this demanding process.

Fredric Wertham: A Biographical Sketch

This dissertation situates the work of Fredric Wertham within a series of cultural and critical histories in the twentieth-century. It is in no way intended to be a comprehensive biography of Wertham as a scholar or as a man. Nonetheless, a certain level of familiarity with Wertham and his career will assist the reader by allowing developments in his writings to be understood more easily. Born on March 20, 1895 in Nuremberg as one of five children of Sigmund and Matilde Wertheimer, non-religious, assimilated middle-class German Jews, Fredric Wertham was raised in Germany and England. He was studying medicine at King's College, London University when he was briefly interred as a German national at the outbreak of the First World War. After the war he continued his studies at the Universities of Munich and Erlangen in Germany and ultimately received his MD from the University of Würzburg in 1921. He did post-graduate work in psychiatry in Vienna, London and Paris before landing in Munich as an assistant to Emil Kraepelin, Wertham's first significant mentor. Kraepelin (1856-1926) was one of the leading authorities on brain physiology as it related to the study of psychopathology. He rejected the dominant psychiatric orthodoxy of the day in which psychiatrists would made diagnoses based on symptomatic readings and theoretical assumptions. Instead Kraepelin believed that context — family history, culture, environment, economic and social factors — had to be considered in the treatment of a patient. In 1922 Wertham moved to the United States on the invitation of Adolf Meyer, Kraepelin's best-known student and the director of the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Wertham became an American citizen in 1927 and remained at Johns Hopkins for seven years. His positions during that time included chief resident in charge of psychiatry and assistant in charge of the Mental Hygiene Clinic. He also taught psychotherapy and brain anatomy. During that period he married Margaret Hesketh, a sculptress and illustrator, who collaborated with Wertham on some of his earliest medical publications. Wertham was the first psychiatrist in

the United States to receive a National Research Council fellowship and he used the funding to return to Europe and complete the research he would publish in 1934 in the medical textbook *The Brain as an Organ*. While at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore Wertham became friendly with Clarence Darrow because he was one of the only psychiatrists willing to testify in court on behalf of indigent blacks accused of crimes.

Wertham moved to New York in 1932 where he became a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York University as well as the head of the Court of General Sessions psychiatric clinic, which gave examinations to every convicted felon in the city. From 1932 to 1936 he worked as the senior psychiatrist at Bellevue Hospital in the alcoholic, children's and prison wards successively. In 1936 Wertham became the director of Bellevue's Mental Hygiene Clinic, but left that position in 1940 to become the director of psychiatric services at Queens Hospital Center. During this period his interests had gradually shifted from brain physiology to forensic psychiatry and he became well-known as an expert witness in criminal trials. Wertham published three books and a large number of articles on the role of the psychiatrist in judicial proceedings between 1941 and 1956. In 1946 he opened a psychiatric clinic in Harlem, the Lafargue Clinic, in the basement of a church which was operated by 14 volunteer psychiatrists and 12 social workers and in 1947 he opened the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center which specialized in the treatment of sex offenders. In 1951, Wertham studied the effects of segregation on school children in Delaware and his testimony was cited in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision which desegregated American schools. Wertham also used his influence to interject himself into a number of public debates, acting as the psychiatrist to Ethel Rosenberg and as an advisor to the Hendrickson/Kefauver committee hearings on juvenile delinquency in the 1950s. Wertham continued to work in New York until the 1970s when he retired to a farm in Pennsylvania. Wertham passed away on November 18, 1981 at the age of 86.

Throughout his career Wertham circulated on the outskirts of America's dominant intellectual circles. In the 1920s, for instance, he was a frequent correspondent of Walter Lippmann, who was dispatched on the American's behalf to unsuccessfully persuade Sigmund Freud to author an article for the *Saturday Review.* During his years spent at Johns Hopkins in that decade, Wertham became a member of H. L Mencken's Saturday Club in Baltimore. He was also a friend of the playwright Arthur Miller, the psychiatrist to the both Richard Wright and Zelda Fitzgerald, and the brother-in-law of Lincoln Steffens. Wertham's popular writings on crime and criminality were generally well-received and press reviews were mostly positive. *Dark Legend* was particularly successful, attracting attention from a variety of notable sources, including Thomas Mann and Arthur Miller, who wrote to congratulate Wertham on a "profound and to me a deeply significant work" (in Reibman 14). In 1952 the book was adapted into a stage production by Helene Frankel and Reuben Mamoulian expressed an interest in turning the book into a film. Wertham's connection with the arts was lengthy and involved and, although his critical writing in the area of the fine arts remained a minor aspect of his life's work in comparison to his writings on mass culture, his thoughts on the arts illuminate his overall philosophy in a significant manner. Notably, Wertham was a collector of modern art and his collection included a number of pieces by Chagall and El Lissitzky, the latter of which Wertham was a leading collector. Wertham himself dabbled in theater criticism, writing on the subject of psychodrama and audience participation in drama for the journal *Theater Arts* (Wertham 1947a). He interviewed Arthur Miller for the *New York Times Book Review* after *Death of a Salesman* had won the Pulitzer Prize (Wertham 1949b). Wertham's writings, therefore, can be seen to have crossed a number of disciplinary boundaries, ranging from literary criticism to medical textbooks, and from psychiatric analyses of criminality to critiques of the postwar Cold War consensus.

Finally, I would like to make a passing note about the title of this dissertation. Wertham's most famous book, and the central object of study for this dissertation, was his

1954 volume on the question of the relationship between mass culture and media effects, *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham's original title for this work had been "All Our Innocences", and the title was subsequently changed at the request of the publisher to the more lurid and alarming title under which it was eventually brought to the market. In the 1955 *Saturday Review* article which served as a bookend to Wertham's initial published commentary on comic books, he cited the quotation from Henry Steele Commager from which the original title had been derived: "The ideals that grown-ups think should obtain are to be found more readily in children's literature than anywhere else. All our innocences are there" (Wertham 1955b:11). I have chosen to adopt that title for this dissertation for two reasons. In the first instance, I did so as an effort to restore Wertham's intentions in some small manner into the debate about which he is best remembered. In researching this work I have read several thousand pages of the man's writings and I have come to believe that a close attention to Wertham's beliefs and goals has rarely characterized discussions of his work. By adopting his rejected title I hope to signal my own intention to read Wertham's work as if his efforts and goals were a legitimate intervention into postwar debates about the status and effects of mass culture. Second, I find the reference is an apt description of this dissertation as well because it seems to me that there is indeed a connection between the ideals of a given society and the culture which that society produces for children. Moreover, I would argue that the debates about mass culture and media effects which characterized the postwar era are centrally concerned with the question of innocence, particularly in relation to notions of corruptibility and debasement. Indeed, the notion of childhood innocence is a crucial component of the debates which this dissertation will address. It is my hope, therefore, that the title of this project will serve equally as a reminder of one of the central presumptions upon which the study of mass communication was founded as well as a small nod to the influence of a neglected scholar upon whom I hope to shed some light in the pages that follow.

Chapter One:
The Twentieth-Century Critique of Mass Culture

To understand the specific ways in which the career of Fredric Wertham illuminates the development of the media effects paradigm in the United States it is necessary to acknowledge the intellectual climate operative at the time. Twentieth-century analyses of culture in the United States have been dominated by a single framework, which has tended to cast the tastes of various audiences in opposition to each other. This conception of culture has elevated so-called high culture, the preferred culture of a minority of Americans who comprised a cultural elite, to a level of prestige and legitimacy while denigrating the cultural choices of the majority public. The critique of mass culture has been shaped by a variety of forces at it has been played out in the twentieth-century and prior. Commentators who have had a hand in shaping the direction of the mass culture have ranged across the political spectrum from ardent conservatives to liberal reformers and radical Marxists. Similarly, critics of mass culture have approached the subject from a number of disciplinary perspectives including the social scientific — specifically the anthropological and sociological — and the humanistic, primarily literary and philosophical. Each of these groups has addressed themselves to a variety of questions pertaining to the development and structure of the mass media, as well as their relationship to their audiences and to society. Because the questions remain fairly limited and the binaristic opposition between high and low cultures has been such a constant in the discourse across political lines, it should not be entirely surprising that a considerable degree of overlap existed, causing Marxist and conservative critiques to resemble one another and sociological and literary interpretations of culture to use the same sets of assumptions. Despite these considerable overlaps the work of Fredric Wertham can be seen to fit the mass culture critique only unevenly. Thus, while he shared a large number of interests with the intellectuals who framed the cultural debate in his own time, he was never particularly

well-received by those critics. The establishment of the dominant intellectual framework for understanding culture in the postwar period is the specific task of this chapter, and in relating that framework to the writings of Wertham it will be possible to begin to come to terms with the ways in which his work both illuminates and problematizes the development of the media effects paradigm in communications research.

During a 1957 discussion panel at New York's Museum of Modern Art, examining "The Role of the Intellectual in Modern Society" W. H. Auden surveyed the panelists and remarked upon the fact that all of the assembled commentators were literary critics. In centuries past, Auden noted, similar panels might have brought together clergymen or, later, natural scientists. However, in the postwar period it seemed that the widely held synonym for intellectual was cultural critic. Jackson Lears has argued that, during the 1950s, the "touchstones of cultural criticism became questions of style and taste — questions, it was assumed, that literary intellectuals were well-equipped to answer" (Lears 1989:46). The fact that the intellectual field was dominated by men of letters is evidenced by the extraordinary importance of mass culture criticism in the public debates of this era. Herbert Gans has argued that in the United States the longest-running cultural struggle has been the one which has taken place between advocates and consumers of high and low cultures (Gans 1974:3), and in the postwar period this long-standing and one-sided debate emerged among public intellectuals as the single most important question facing the nation. Shaped by a variety of influences both ideological and disciplinary over the first half of the twentieth-century the anti-mass culture discourse emerged in the mid-century period as the only viable lens through which it seemed possible to examine questions relating to the intersection of culture and society. As such, the anti-mass culture point of view exerted a phenomenal influence over every area of scholarly investigation in the humanities and social sciences in the United States at that time. In order to come to terms with the development of the media effects paradigm in the field of communications as a way of conceptualizing cultural relations, therefore, it is necessary to turn our attention to the

important structuring elements of the mass culture debates which elevated Auden's literary men to the position of supreme cultural commentators for the entire nation.

In a 1959 essay on the relationship between the intellectual and the mass media, Leo Rosten conceded that "the deficiencies of mass media are a function, in part at least, of the deficiencies of the masses". However he also suggested that a problem remained insofar as intellectuals were unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that their own tastes and predilections were not shared by the vast majority of the population and never would be (1961:72). While Rosten's derogatory remarks about the qualities of the so-called masses were in tune with the general intellectual sentiments of the postwar period, his condemnation of the narrow-mindedness of the intellectuals, however timid, was at odds with the general tenor of the times. In suggesting that part of the problem be laid at the feet of the critics rather than the criticized, Rosten challenged one of the more common assumptions of the mass culture critique. As he pointed out, mass culture criticism has always been shaped more by the social concerns, biases and presuppositions of the critics than by actual empirical research into the varying uses and effects of the mass media. Insofar as criticism of mass culture in the postwar period constituted, as Gans has argued, an attack by the culturally powerful upon the culturally weak (1974:4) its purpose can perhaps best be understood as an attempt, however clumsy, to negotiate the proper relationship of intellectuals to the public in a democracy. Rooted as it is in the intellectual's disdain for the aesthetic component of the content of the mass media, the mass culture critique can be understood as an argument on behalf of an ideal way of life which traces its roots to the Enlightenment (Gans: 1974 52). Gans identified the four major themes of the mass culture critique as they appeared in the debates of the postwar period: mass culture is profit-minded and mass-produced; mass culture has a negative effect on higher forms of culture through its tendency towards debasement; mass culture has a negative effect on its audience; and, mass culture has a negative effect on society and can lead to anti-democratic or totalitarian tendencies (1974: 19). These assumptions will be interrogated throughout the

course of this dissertation. The question of the effect of mass culture on society will be examined in chapter two, and the assumption that mass culture has a negative effect on its audiences will be taken up in a specific discussion of media effects in chapter five. In this chapter the issues pertaining to the intellectuals' evaluations of the status of mass culture and its relationship with other taste cultures will be foregrounded in order to provide a background for understanding the cultural and political discourses which influenced the development of the media effects paradigm.

Interestingly, despite its lengthy history in the United States the anti-mass culture point of view has long been associated by scholars with a particularly European way of conceptualizing social and class distinctions through culture. Gans, for instance, argued that because the roots of the critique were European, most mass culture critics have been Europeans or Americans who modeled themselves on the European elite (1974:54). The argument which seeks to displace the origins of the mass culture debate far away from the traditions of American pluralism and democracy has continued to find safe havens. There is a tendency in the historiography of comic books, for instance, to dismiss Wertham's critique of that industry as foreign to American ways of conceptualizing the mass media, as an alien — specifically European or Germanic — critique at odds with American postwar sensibilities. Recently, for instance, this thesis was advanced by Amy Kiste-Nyberg when she wrote that "Wertham's arguments were a popularization of 'some of the most radical European criticisms of mass society'" (1998:97). Nyberg extended that argument to suggest that Wertham deliberately de-emphasized the radical and European roots of his argument "in order to ally himself with the conservative groups who seemed to be most willing to take action against comic books" (1998:97). Both of these arguments have their origins in James Gilbert's 1986 book *A Cycle of Outrage*. Gilbert's original argument was fuller than Nyberg's paraphrase of it, insofar as he suggested some actual, albeit glancing, connection between Wertham and the Frankfurt School scholars. Yet neither Gilbert nor Nyberg actually demonstrated this supposition through evidence. Gilbert asserted the claim

and Nyberg repeated it without any supporting documentation despite the many vast and obvious differences between the theories of culture advanced by Wertham on the one hand and scholars like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse on the other. What I would like to do in this chapter is argue a position which is at odds with the analysis put forward by Gilbert and Nyberg, and suggest the degree to which Wertham's writings generally, and *Seduction of the Innocent* specifically, were rooted in particularly American anxieties about the status of mass culture in the postwar period. To do this I will outline the history of the mass culture critique in the United States, from its emergence following the Revolution until its culmination in the postwar era, in order to suggest the degree to which episodic models of the circulation of the mass culture critique overlook the consistency of the criticisms in the United States. Furthermore, this chapter will draw distinctions between various specific formulations of the mass culture critique in order to suggest that the argument put forward by Wertham can be best understood in the history of American progressivism rather than in a generally European articulation of the relationship between cultural levels. Finally, this chapter will stress the important role that a small group of intellectuals had in directing the shape of postwar evaluations of culture and in determining the subsequent development of social science research into the field of culture.

Paradigms of the Mass Culture Critique

An interest in the origins of the critique of mass culture has accompanied the development of that same critique, generally as an intellectual aside which sought to defuse the ferocity of criticisms by pointing out that mass culture itself is nothing new under the sun. Leo Lowenthal, for instance, argued that while popular culture was not a strictly modern phenomenon (because it could be dated back to the era of feudalism and earlier), specific controversies about popular culture were in fact particular to modernism. Controversy about the popular arts, Lowenthal suggested, arose only after cultural contact

between the elite and masses became a reality (1961:28). Lowenthal's observation reinforced the suggestion that the basis for the intellectual's critique of mass culture was primarily political rather than aesthetic and was rooted in apprehensions about their own cultural status. Patrick Brantlinger, whose 1983 book *Bread and Circuses* traced the evolution of the critique of popular culture across time, has argued that the specific concern of cultural critics with mass culture is linked to the emergence of the perception that the masses posed a revolutionary threat in the nineteenth-century and a totalitarian threat in the twentieth (1983:30). The term "mass culture" emerged just prior to the Second World War and similar terms such as "mass art", "mass entertainment" and "mass communication" also stem from the 1930s where they were framed in reference to totalitarian political movements, giving the terms negative connotations from their origins. Brantlinger has suggested that all critical theories of mass culture have implied the existence of a superior culture which can be judged positively, and further that that culture is usually located historically in the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, the Middle Ages or in Periclean Athens (1983:17). These backward glances at mythically utopian cultures constitute what Brantlinger has termed "positive classicism". The corollary to that phrase is "negative classicism", an umbrella term which signifies a concern with the "decline and fall" trajectory associated with ancient Rome and other extinct civilizations (1983:9). According to Brantlinger negative classicism has been the major myth of our time since at least the time of the French Revolution. A form of utopian recollection and sentimentality, negative classicism is expressed as the debate between an ancient high culture and a contemporary mass culture which ultimately is used to disparage the latter (Brantlinger 1983:42-44). In seeking to protect the image of intellectual transcendence associated with Athens while at the same time avoiding the sense of Roman decay, negative classicists promote simultaneous critiques of democracy, the common individual and mass culture. Because the common or average contradicts the good, the true and the beautiful, negative classicism has posited that the best is the few, the bad is the many and the worst is the mass. The point of

view which presumes that an individual can be good while many individuals together must be bad has led to a rejection of pluralist and democratic values. Furthermore, negative classicism has been unable to conceptualize the mass of the population in positive terms, relying instead on images of barbarians and animals to frame discussions of the broad public (Brantlinger 1983:53-55). That these images have historically contributed the underlying justifications for political theories which privilege monarchies, oligarchies and aristocracies goes almost without saying. What requires reaffirmation, however, is the way in which these elitist conceptions of the relations between social groups permeated — consciously or unconsciously — the mass culture debates in the United States at the mid-century period.

Cultural Conservatives: The Pre-History of the Mass Culture Critique

The theoretical undergirding of the mass culture critique in the postwar era was both elitist and dependent on a number of previous conceptions of mass culture which can be traced back centuries. Lowenthal, for instance, traced the origins of the controversy to eighteenth-century England when he suggested that the emergence of writers as a distinct category of professionals established a shift in the make-up of the reading audience (1961:30-32). Similarly, Brantlinger pointed out a number of specific writers whose work betrayed a level of unease about the increasingly industrialized societies in which they found themselves, including French novelists Flaubert, Stendhal and Balzac and the English Romantic poets such as William Blake (1983:127-128). Nonetheless, the most important influences on the development of the mass culture critique in the United States were aristocratic writers and critics specifically concerned with political and social questions. While it is true that, in the nineteenth-century, warnings about the threat of the masses could be found in the thought of men such Jakob Burckhardt, Friedrich Nietzche and Henry Adams, perhaps the most influential commentary on the American mass culture question originated with Alexis de Tocqueville and his 1835 book *Democracy in America.*

De Tocqueville's comments, which were excerpted by Rosenberg and White in their 1957 textbook *Mass Culture*, outlined a number of the ideas about the relationship between artistic production and democracy which would come to dominate nineteenth and twentieth-century thinking about culture in the United States. He argued, for instance, that the creation of a mass audience for culture had shifted the emphasis of cultural producers away from quality and towards cheapness. Where once an artisan had sold his or her wares to a small audience for a large price broad societal changes in the nineteenth-century allowed that same artisan to sell at a reduced price to a greater number of people in order to earn even greater profits. This led, De Tocqueville suggested, to an emphasis on mass production and a reduction in quality which came to dominate American culture. He concluded by suggesting that in an aristocracy great exertions are required by the artist while in a democracy it was relatively easy to be successful as a cultural producer insofar as one only needed to be liked, not admired. De Tocqueville concluded, therefore, that democracy would never create great literature (1957:27-34). Of course the culture which was produced in the United States of the nineteenth-century came to be legitimated in other ways, specifically as a promotion of the nation's normative and moral values. Paul Gorman has pointed to the important role played by the English philosopher John Rushkin in this process of linking beauty and divinity in a standard for aesthetic appreciation. Thus harnessed for moral purposes the arts increasingly became seen as aids in developing or steering public behaviour and shaping values (1996:29). To this end cultural worth was determined by groups with social and political influence and the old social order embraced the arts as symbols of authority and legitimacy, a development which led to the rise of a more rigid cultural hierarchy in the United States in the Reconstruction era.

The beginning of the twentieth-century brought a number of changes to American culture and also to the ways in which it was regarded by its supporters and critics. The sheer quantity of the mass media in the first decade of this century — with more than 2,500 daily newspapers in the United States and 6,000 magazines, for instance — alarmed a

number of conservative cultural critics. Gorman has drawn attention to the ways in which the mass media of the twentieth-century were accused of pandering to base passions and interfering with social discipline, qualities which drew the scorn of genteel intellectuals (1996:13). In denouncing the mass media for its reliance on the twinned evils of criminality and sensuality the genteel critics sought to defend valued social institutions which had arisen in the previous century and which were generally rooted in ideas of moral fitness and dependent on the uplifting and enlightening aspects of high culture. As Brantlinger has observed, theories of mass culture often led to religion and many of the most frequent objections to mass culture are in fact religious (1983:84). Both T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold tried to unite high culture with religion, for instance, and conservative critics have often cited Juvenal's idea of "bread and circuses" as an analogy for a secularized mass culture. Eliot's specific concern was the erosion of the sacred in modern society and the development of what he regarded as a new paganism, which found its origins in modernity and liberalism. In adopting a specifically anti-liberal viewpoint in *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (1948) Eliot suggested that culture and the masses were opposites and that the masses could never be educated into culture. For Eliot only high culture was genuine and mass culture posed a threat of a uniform or leveled culture in an increasingly classless society. Eliot was convinced that society was on the precipice of a total decline into a state of no culture. To this end he offered what Brantlinger has identified as a triple defense of cultural elitism, based on divisions between classes, elites and "*the* elite", which bore considerable resemblance to the work of Italian thinkers like Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto who were staples of fascist thought (1983:206). In his anti-democratic and anti-socialistic writing on the perceived problem of mass culture, Eliot brought to light a specifically religious form of conservative authoritarianism, echoes of which can still be found in some critiques of American culture generally.

The general question of cultural leveling posed by Eliot has played an important structuring role in the debate about mass culture as it has manifested itself in the twentieth-

century. Optimists such as John Dewey have looked upon cultural leveling with the belief that it holds tremendous potential to allow culture to flourish in democracy, yet this view has largely been that of a minority. More typical is the suggestion, stemming from both the political left and right, that cultural leveling would be a travesty in an age of mass culture. Conservatives such as Eliot, on the other hand, viewed mass culture as mechanical and shoddy, imitative and bureaucratic and thus more prone to totalitarian impulses than democratic ones. This point of view found its clearest expression in the work of the Spanish philosopher and politician José Ortega y Gasset. In his 1932 book *The Revolt of the Masses*, Gasset argued that culture cannot flourish on a mass basis. Brantlinger has aptly termed this book a "sort of *Communist Manifesto* in reverse" because of the way in which it viewed revolution as leading to tyranny rather than liberation as well as for the almost total absence of economic thinking throughout the text (1983:187). From Gasset's point of view, mass culture was the product of the mass man, which itself was the product of nineteenth-century society. He argued for the facticity of the ascension of the masses to "complete social power", a situation which had led to the "greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization" (Gasset 1932:11). Gasset's division of society into two camps — the specially qualified and the unqualified, those who makes demands on themselves and those who are "mere buoys that float on the waves" (1932:15) — would be repeated ad nauseam by an almost endless parade of commentators on mass culture who would follow him in the decades after the publication of his book. While Gasset may have provided the most forceful conservative and anti-democratic critique of cultural leveling it is necessary to keep in mind the degree to which his ideas about the nature of mass society can be found in the work of liberal and Marxist thinkers who followed him into the debate in the subsequent decades.

The Critique of Mass Culture in the Twentieth-Century

Herbert Gans has argued that in its trajectory from the eighteenth-century to the 1950s it is possible to see in the mass culture critique a rise and fall of the power of intellectuals (1974:7). If, as Gans maintained, the criticism of mass culture subsides in periods when intellectuals have social power, the ferocity of the critique in the 1950s would necessitate that one believe that the postwar period represented a low point in the history of influence for American intellectuals. Yet a number of recent scholars have argued against a simple reading of intellectual decline in favour of a view which sees the postwar era as one of transition for what Russell Jacoby has termed "public intellectuals" (1987:5) and Steven Biel has called "independent intellectuals" (1992:2). Each of these terms is roughly congruent with the other, and both point to a group of intellectuals who were, in the immediate postwar period, not affiliated with universities but who congregated around a small number of influential New York-based magazines and journals, including *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *The New Republic* and *Dissent*. These intellectuals, whose audience was generally presumed to be the educated but non-specialist public interested in culture and current affairs, were the stalwarts of the mass culture debate and largely shaped the direction which the discussion would take. Biel has argued that these intellectuals were defined both by their opposition to mass society and by their desire to lead it (1992:54). To this end they attempted to create alternative modes of influence in the belief that as critics they could influence the artists and cultural producers, who would in turn influence society. While this goal may never have been achieved to their collective satisfaction it is evident, nonetheless, that the public intellectuals of the postwar period exerted a degree of influence over the cultural debate which continues to this day. By the mid-1950s the era of the independent intellectual had been largely — though not entirely — concluded, as professional academics began to replace the former group and public intellectuals themselves moved into the universities. To come to terms with the significant role these thinkers had in shaping the public debate on mass culture it is necessary to examine not

only the specific contributions which they made to the ongoing discussion but to place them within a larger intellectual history which will provide a lens by which their contributions to shaping the development of mass communication studies can be properly assessed. In order to accomplish this it is necessary to outline the various approaches to — and theories of — mass culture as they existed in the first half of the twentieth-century.

The Tradition of Progressive Reformism

Among the important precursors of the public intellectuals of the 1940s and 1950s the progressive critics held an important if minor role insofar as they can demonstrate the degree to which traditional political divisions between left and right were complicated in the debates about mass culture. Gorman has pointed out the degree to which the criticisms of mass culture launched by progressives in the first decades of this century resembled those of the conservative or genteel critics (1996:37). While the progressives may have regarded the public with greater empathy and appreciation than did an Eliot or a Gasset they nonetheless shared with conservative critics a dismay about the effects of many of the developments of modernization and industrialization. Increasing attendance at dance halls, vaudeville houses and movie theatres were regarded by progressives as evidence of a potentially monumental social crisis which threatened the morality of entire populations. While this particular sense of the rapidly evolving social problem was shared with cultural conservatives the progressives made their departure from the conservatives in their estimation of who was to blame for the situation and what could be done to rectify it. Gorman has suggested that the progressive critics introduced three important ideas into the mass culture debate, ideas which differentiated them from the conservatives and which were variously adopted or rejected by subsequent commentators (1996:38-42). The first of these ideas was that the public was not to blame for the failures of mass entertainment. Unlike conservative critics who chastised audiences for mass culture as rogues and lowbrows, progressives more commonly cited the adverse impact of the environment as the

chief culprit in the taste for mass entertainments and discussed the ways in which "perfectly normal" people were being sucked into the degrading vortex of mass culture. The second notion which the progressives brought to the mass culture debate was the idea that the popularity of mass entertainment was related to the manipulations of commerce. Commerce, it was held, was responsible for pushing sex into the cinema or for the recruitment of young women to dance halls. Although they stopped short of proposing Marxist or socialist solutions to the mass culture problem it is clear nonetheless that the progressive critique was at least in part a critique of the role of capital in shaping the direction of culture. Finally, the progressives brought to the discussion a call to action founded on the belief that an essentially good public could be made to respond to good, reformed mass entertainment. This assumption rested on the understanding that the profit motive in entertainment could be controlled or eliminated through philanthropic organizations or regulation. Thus a number of key distinctions between the views of the conservatives and the progressives immediately suggest themselves. While the genteel critics strove to reform aesthetic tastes in support of an aristocratic view of culture the progressives sought to curtail the commercial element in mass entertainment. Furthermore, while the conservative tendency was to blame the individuals who comprised the mass audience for the inadequate state of American culture the progressives tended to emphasize the contribution of the environment in which individuals found themselves, thereby placing the problem at a level which would necessitate widespread social reform as well as governmental intervention into the cultural realm. These calls for reform, it goes almost without saying, clearly privileged the position of the progressives themselves and as such were a clear extension of paternalist reasoning. Because the progressive analysis of the mass culture problem stressed a victim ideology which conceived of the audiences for mass entertainments as wayward children who needed to be protected by the critics, reform philanthropy can be regarded, as Gorman has noted, as an extension of the social hierarchy into the cultural sphere (1996:50). Moreover, the paternalist approach to mass culture

promoted by progressive critics demonstrated the considerable overlap between conservative and reformist tendencies in the debate, as both sides of the discussion regarded mass entertainments and the audience for them as problems to be solved.

Aesthetic Radicals and Cultural Modernism

The possibility that mass culture could be regarded as anything other than a problem to be managed by elites can be found only sporadically in the American mass culture debate that characterized the first half of the twentieth-century. Perhaps the strongest possibility for the overthrow of this point of view came from the cultural radicals, whose embrace of aesthetic modernism was found in the so-called little magazines of the 1910s and 1920s where critics gathered to challenge the assumptions of the genteel critics. The tone for these commentators was set by the influential but short-lived journal *Seven Arts*. Published in 1916 and 1917 the magazine was edited by James Oppenheim and Waldo Frank and influenced by critics such as Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks. The *Seven Arts* writers can be generally regarded as having shared in a Whitmanesque desire to incorporate popular elements into the high arts, a desire which was rooted in a faith in democracy and democratic culture. In his 1915 book *America's Coming-of-Age*, Brooks rejected as mutually unproductive the principles which he labeled "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow", principles which he believed left no room for a genuine articulation of America's cultural life. While Brooks' conception of the divide between high and low cultures seemingly predetermined his outright dismissal of the latter, this was not entirely the case with other writers seeking to articulate what they viewed as a genuinely American or democratic cultural life. For example, Harold Stearns, the literary critic of *Seven Arts*, argued in favour of forgoing "snobbish" European standards for theater which were out of touch with American cultural life. In a similar vein Randolph Bourne argued strongly in favour of cultural pluralism and the fostering of variety which would find some place for heretofore neglected forms of cultural expression. Yet, as Gorman has pointed out, the embrace by

these critics of popular forms was necessarily limited (1996:62-63). Stearns, for example, championed popular drama "not because it satisfies the soul of man, but because it is ours" (1917:520) and Bourne ultimately championed a "third alternative" which would avoid both the genteel hierarchy as well as mass culture (Gorman 1996:63).

Perhaps the most influential of the American modernist journals of the 1920s was *The Dial*, which had shifted its emphasis from the genteel to the modern when it relocated from Chicago to New York in 1918. Rejecting the explicit nationalism of earlier journals like *Seven Arts*, *The Dial* also was both more aesthetically inclined and more favorably disposed towards some elements of popular culture. Significantly the magazine championed a number of popular entertainers such as Charlie Chaplin, Fannie Brice and W. C. Fields. The managing editor and theater critic of *The Dial* was Gilbert Seldes, one of the few champions of mass entertainment to have emerged from the mass culture debates in this period. Seldes' influential 1924 book *The Seven Lively Arts* sought to rescue the best elements of popular culture from the scorn of the genteel critics. Among the elements of popular culture which Seldes praised were the films of Charlie Chaplin and George Herriman's comic strip *Krazy Kat*. While Seldes' embrace of mass entertainments was limited to only those aspects which he considered to be exceptional his suggestion that an appreciation of the classics necessitated an appreciation of the new was a radical challenge to the critics which had preceded him. Gorman has argued that ultimately the contribution of Seldes and the other American modernists to the mass culture debate was inadvertent (1996:81). Because they could only validate popular culture in a very limited fashion by challenging the range but not the criteria of cultural critics the modernists could only praise mass culture in those instances where they perceived them to be the unique expressions of particular artists. Furthermore the cultural radicals of the American little magazines of the 1920s had little to say about the relationship between artists and audiences and, consequently, absented themselves from one of the central aspects of the debate as it was played out in subsequent decades. Nonetheless, the modernist writers associated with

magazines such as *Seven Arts* and *The Dial* pointed to the ways in which the debate about mass culture had increasingly been framed as a problem intrinsic to American rather than European culture and suggested the narrowness of the possibilities for the embrace of mass culture on any level by intellectuals.

Critical Theory and Social Science: The Frankfurt School

The argument made by James Gilbert about the European origins of Fredric Wertham's critique of the comic book industry is dependent upon Wertham's association with the German emigré critic Theodor Adorno (1984:112). Adorno and the other members of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research), commonly known as the Frankfurt School, occupy an important place in the American debate about mass culture despite the fact that their contribution to the debate itself was limited by linguistic and cultural barriers. As some of the most vocal Marxists active in the postwar debate about mass culture, the Frankfurt School scholars helped to illuminate a number of relations between various collections of reformers and occupied a mediating role between academic social scientists and non-academic public intellectuals who had largely turned their back on Marxism by the end of the Second World War. Brantlinger has argued that Marxism has — somewhat surprisingly — never developed a defense of mass culture. On the contrary many Marxists have regarded mass entertainments as foregrounding problems related to reification, negation and monopoly capitalism (Brantlinger 1983:223). The problem for the Frankfurt School scholars, for instance, was that the confluence of new media technologies and monopoly capitalism did not lead to revolution but to fascism and Nazism. Given the absence of revolutionary potential in mass culture the Frankfurt School scholars tended to conceive of mass culture as a form of regression which would take the United States down the road towards fascism. The Frankfurt School perspective, which foregrounded the need for freedom, reason and culture was, as Brantlinger pointed out, highly pessimistic in its combination of elements from Marx, Freud and Nietzche (1983:226). The remedy for the

problems diagnosed by the Frankfurt School could be found in their conception of "Critical Theory", which would restore a positive potential by bringing to consciousness the contrast between current human behaviour and its potentialities (Hughes 1975:142). Critical Theory was a term created by the Institute's director Max Horkheimer to signify a practice which was opposed to positivism, pragmatism and instrumental reason in philosophy, commercialization and mass entertainment in culture and domination in politics (Brantlinger 1983:228). In opposition to mass culture the Frankfurt School scholars generally embraced high culture or "genuine art", which could show how the world is by showing how it was not. While neither Critical Theory nor genuine art could by themselves lead to liberation they were, nonetheless, the cornerstones for the Frankfurt School's intervention into the mass culture debate.

The Frankfurt School position on mass culture can perhaps best be understood through a contrast between the divergent views of one of its members and one of its associates. Theodor Adorno had little faith in the working class as agents of revolutionary social change. Instead much of Adorno's thinking was dependent on the continued existence of high culture, because it was only in genuine art that the idea of utopia could be protected from false consciousness. According to Adorno, art is the last preserve of the "other" society which exists beyond the present one, a utopia which exists as an expression of humanity's legitimate interest in future happiness. Adorno's conception of "true" art necessitated a harmonious reconciliation of form and content which was not oriented towards the market (Jay 1973:182). Culture which was oriented towards the market was, Adorno argued, a form of non-communication, a regressive force which led to mass deception and false consciousness. Brantlinger argued that, based on these arguments, Adorno's work should be regarded as having stood Marx on his head in the suggestion that the dialectic of history is destructive and that progressive historical forces had cheated humanity of utopia (1983:237). In contrast, the work of Walter Benjamin, an associate of the Frankfurt School, was much more positive about the potential of the mass media.

Following the work of Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin held out hope for the progressive potential of politicized art. Benjamin's influential essay "The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) followed many of the arguments of the Frankfurt School closely, particularly as they relate to the loss of aura. Nonetheless, he also held that the loss of art's auratic nature held the potential for the emancipation of art from ritual and aristocratic monopoly. While Adorno had argued that art in the contemporary era mass culture served to reconcile the audience to the political status quo, Benjamin disagreed by arguing in favour of the potential of politicized and collectivized art. For Adorno and the Frankfurt School scholars, genuine art and mass culture were irreconcilable entities because art is always singular and unique while mass entertainments lack this auratic quality. Benjamin, in holding out some potential for politicized art while at the same time generally bemoaning the loss of aura, was one of the few Marxist thinkers of his period to have held out any potentially affirming value for mass culture.

While the Frankfurt School scholars exerted some influence over the mass culture debates during the 1950s, they did so only after modifying their work in a number of ways. In the 1940s the scholarly work of the Frankfurt School had taken a significant turn. Following their arrival in the United States, the Institute increasingly turned towards the study of American culture. At the same time the Frankfurt School scholars shifted their politics from the explicitly revolutionary towards the democratic in their increasingly empirical studies. The American Jewish Committee-funded study of anti-Semitism, for instance, stressed the role of education in fostering social change. Moreover, this study moved the Frankfurt School scholars closer to the mainstream of American sociology and highlighted the degree to which studies of manipulation characterized the Institute's postwar work on mass culture. Perhaps because it was least at odds with American research traditions *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) by Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford was the first work produced by the members of the Frankfurt School that caught the attention of American intellectuals in any

serious fashion. While several members of the Institute had work translated into English and had appeared in the Rosenberg and White's anthology *Mass Culture*, their influence was severely limited by the fact that important statements on mass culture, such as *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), remained untranslated until the 1970s. Nonetheless, to ignore the contribution of the Frankfurt School to the postwar debates would be to neglect an important aspect in the development of thinking about mass culture because the group functioned in an important mediating role between the two groups which would come to dominate postwar thinking on this topic: American researchers in the social sciences and public intellectuals and culture critics. In their shift from a Marxism rooted in the necessity of resistance to historical progress and a rejection of the alienating impact of mass culture, to an empirically grounded analysis of the manipulative and destructive quality of the mass media, the Frankfurt School ran the gamut of possibilities embodied by the two dominant groups of postwar voices on the mass culture question and helped to illuminate those tensions and continuities between the two camps that are the subject of this dissertation.

The Empirical Contribution of American Social Scientists

In his contribution to Rosenberg and White's anthology *Mass Culture*, the Frankfurt School's Leo Lowenthal sought to explicate some degree of the Institute's departure from more traditionally American conceptions of social science research. Lowenthal suggested that, unlike the politically engaged Critical Theorists, most social science researchers had abdicated political and ethical responsibility in their work:

> Empirical social science has become a kind of applied asceticism. It stands clear of any entanglements with foreign powers and thrives in an atmosphere of rigidly enforced neutrality. It refuses to enter the sphere of meaning. A study of television, for instance, will go to great heights in analyzing data on the influence of television on family life, but it will leave to poets and dreamers the question of the actual human values of this new institution. Social research takes the phenomena of modern life, including the mass media, at face value. It rejects the task of placing them in a historical and moral context. (1961:52)

Lowenthal's condemnation of the empirical school of research was not totalizing insofar as he was willing to make exceptions for scholars such as Robert Park and Louis B. Wright.

Nonetheless his general conclusion was that American social science suffered from an "antihistorical allergy" (1961:53) that tended to reinforce the equation of mass communication studies with market research. While a specific examination of Lowenthal's charges will be deferred until Chapter Five of this dissertation, it is necessary at this juncture to briefly insert the social sciences into the history of the postwar mass culture debates so that proper attention might be given to Lowenthal's "poets and dreamers", the public intellectuals. The point which needs to be made clear is the degree to which the mass culture debates were structured by a process of intellectual exchange. While the larger argument of this project that research into mass communication after the Second World War was largely dependent on a number of assumptions promulgated by mass culture critics, it would be erroneous to suggest that there was no form of reciprocal influence from the social scientists to the public intellectuals. The social sciences have evinced an interest in the study of mass culture for a considerable length of time and did not come to the topic after the critical paradigm had been erected. Rather ,they had a hand in establishing that point of view from the beginning. In the 1920s and 1930s social scientists influenced by progressive critiques of mass culture increasingly came to regard the issue of mass entertainments as an urgent question for sociology. The question to be addressed by sociology was whether mass culture was a cause or a product of modern social problems. Gorman has pointed out the degree to which progressive reformers and social scientists differed in their response to this question, with social scientists largely rejecting the progressive analysis which suggested that the public were victims of commerce and the urban environment. Many sociologists argued, to the contrary, a conservative position which suggested that the public was to blame for many of the problems associated with urbanization, and theories of modernization as loss influenced a number of studies launched at the beginning of the Depression era (Gorman 1996:87-90). Growing numbers of studies of American leisure pursuits, such as the Payne Fund Studies of the cinema (1929-1933), suggested the degree to which mass culture was increasingly being cast as a

social problem in the research. This perception became increasingly dominant in sociology and anthropology as the development of the ethnographic paradigm suggested that American culture had begun to lose values associated with non-industrial ways of life, such as a relationship to nature, communal lives and a spiritual vision. Ultimately social science researchers reformulated the progressive suggestion from the earlier half of the twentieth-century — to the effect that mass culture was something imposed on the public from outside — in order to suggest that that form of culture had become an expected feature of modern life in an industrialized society (Gorman 1996:96).

C. Wright Mills has argued that college-level textbooks represent the conceptual foundations or "professional ideology" of a discipline (Mills 1963:525). If this is true then it follows that the clearest statement of the ideology of the postwar mass culture critique can be found in Rosenberg and White's 1957 anthology *Mass Culture*, the first collection of scholarly works on the topic intended for use in college-level courses. Crucially, Rosenberg and White's volume brought together essays from American social scientists and placed them in dialogue with contributions from public intellectuals. The mutual influence of the social scientific and literary approaches to the study of mass culture was reflected in the fact that the editors dedicated the volume to two former professors: the social scientist and mass communication scholar Wilbur Schramm and Ernest Van Den Haag, who had taught the first American course on mass culture at the New School for Social Research in New York. Paul Lazarsfeld, writing four years after the publication of that volume, noted something of the tensions that existed between the two groups, when he suggested that artists and intellectuals unfamiliar with social science methodologies responded to empirical research in a way which resembled the responses of the general public to atonal music, that is, with contempt and scorn (Lazarsfeld 1961:xix). Nonetheless, it is clear that, despite this tension, the contribution of social scientists to the general debate on mass culture was significant. In the Rosenberg and White volume alone, for instance, there were a large number of empirically-grounded essays written by

anthropologists and sociologists. A number of these articles departed from the general tenor of anti-mass culture commentaries by problematizing the image of mass entertainments and their audiences. In an article on the book reading audience, for instance, Bernard Berelson simultaneously confirmed the suspicions of many intellectuals that most Americans were not readers of fiction while at the same time suggesting that in actuality the situation remained largely unchanged from any point in the country's literary history (1961: 119-122). A few of the social scientists represented in the volume sought to defer definitive conclusions until some point in the future, as when Rolf Meyersohn suggested that "it may some day be possible to design a study good enough to analyze and predict long-term consequences of television ... For the present it seems we must be satisfied with limited knowledge about limited areas" (1957:345). Other commentators, however, were more ready to stake out conclusive claims that suggested the degree to which social science research overlapped with the commentaries of public intellectuals in demonstrating a shared set of assumptions. Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton outlined a number of traits which they felt could be definitively attributed to the mass media, such as the enforcement of social norms and status conferral, and then proceeded to condemn the "appalling lack of esthetic judgment" of women who consumed soap operas, in a way which makes it difficult to distinguish their ostensibly scientific analysis from those of the non-academic public intellectuals (1957:466). Similarly, in an essay on Hollywood's film production techniques, the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker condemned the commercialization of the cinema when she suggested that "art and aesthetic goals have always been less important in society than either business or humanitarian ones" (1957:282) and then went on to suggest in the bluntest terms imaginable that "Hollywood represents totalitarianism" (1957:289). Comments such as those by Lazarsfeld and Merton and by Powdermaker emphasize the degree to which empirical social science research drew upon the mass culture critique which circulated throughout the twentieth-century, and point to the fact that the

division between social scientists and independent intellectuals on the question of mass culture was never as clear as Lazarsfeld suggested that it was.

The Critical Apotheosis: The New York Intellectuals

While his academic appointment at the New School for Social Research makes it difficult to classify him as a public intellectual, Ernest Van Den Haag nevertheless manages to raise many of the objections to and concerns about mass culture that characterized the New York intellectuals of the postwar period. His arguments harkened back to an earlier, conservative style of thinking about the relationship between cultures and audiences when he suggested that in the contemporary period it was the audience, not the art, that was mediocre (Van Den Haag 1961:54). Moreover, he specifically addressed himself to what many considered the most important questions of the age, namely, the problem of the marginal status of the intellectual within mass culture and the question of whether or not high culture could be extended to the masses without debasing it (Van Den Haag 1961: 55-57). For Van Den Haag the answer to the latter question was an emphatic no. He argued that the mass media fundamentally reshaped everything that they touched, and called for a strict division between high and low cultures as necessary for the preservation of genuine art (1961: 60). This argument was predicated on the assumption that, in the twentieth century, the cultural and economic elites which had once supported the creation of high culture had lost their power and that, as a consequence, mass culture was free to debase that superior culture (1957: 519-520). The crucial opposition, in Van Den Haag's eyes, was between an artistic practice which "transcends immediate reality to encompass wider views, penetrate into deeper experience and lead to fuller confrontation of man's predicament" and a popular culture which "distorts human experience" to draw "substitute gratifications" from it (1957: 532-533). These concerns and conclusions were typical of those of the group which came to be known collectively as the New York Intellectuals, and interpretations such as the one proposed by Van Den Haag emerged in the postwar period

as the dominant mode of understanding the relationship between high and mass culture in the United States.

Neil Jumonville has argued that questions about mass culture strike close to the heart of the identity of New York Intellectuals (1991:151). This group of thinkers occupied an unusual position in postwar American culture. For the most part they were unaffiliated with universities and colleges and sought to maintain an idealized intellectuality that would steer clear of all careers in order to privilege intellectual autonomy (Biel 1992:32-33). Ultimately, however, that position proved untenable and many of these public intellectuals occupied positions as journalists or editors for small political and cultural magazines. Additionally, with only a few exceptions these critics were gathered geographically around New York, and Greenwich Village specifically, a spatial location which had an important role in coordinating these intellectuals collectively as a group. The term "New York Intellectuals", therefore, can be understood to refer to a group of critics clustered around Greenwich Village through much of the first half of the twentieth-century who were affiliated with each other through their association with a small group of journals and magazines. Gorman has argued that the Depression era, with its growing appreciation of the common people and their tastes, might have ended the mass culture critique in the United States were it not for the emergence of the New York Intellectuals as an influential critical force (1996:137). These writers were the driving impetus behind what Randall Jarrell has termed "the age of criticism", and the journals in which they published largely originated in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1934, for instance, *Partisan Review*, one of the most influential journals associated with the New York Intellectuals, was formed as an organ of the Communist Party's John Reed Club in order to promote the proletarian culture movement. From its beginnings, however, *Partisan Review* challenged the party line on the relationship of politics and aesthetics, ultimately breaking with the party itself. The journal and its editors championed a cosmopolitan approach to European modernism that maintained a critical distance from the mainstream of American culture, and their aesthetic

point of view was undergirded on an intellectual ground by Marxism. Following the creation of the Popular Front in 1935 the Communist Party disbanded its John Reed clubs and *Partisan Review* was folded. This decision caused many of the New York Intellectuals to break with the party and resurrect the journal in 1937 as a forum for independent anti-Stalinist radicals who embraced Trotskyism as their model for "pure" Marxism (Gorman 1996:142-146). Despite their claims to a purer form of Marxism, the New York Intellectuals had a great deal in common with older conservative critics of the nineteenth-century, particularly in their tendency to suspect that the public was to blame for the poor state of American culture. As the most vocal critics of mass culture in the postwar period, therefore, the New York Intellectuals inflected American understandings of mass entertainments with a conservative bias that distanced them from the reformist traditions evident in much of the political landscape of the time.

The two most important mid-century statements on the relationship between high and mass culture originated with writers associated with *Partisan Review*. The first of these, Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", was published as a response to a series of articles by Dwight MacDonald on the declining state of Soviet cinema. MacDonald had argued that Soviet filmmaking had been ruined by political interference from the state which had led the Soviet people to prefer the paintings of Repin to Picasso. Greenberg's response argued, on the contrary, that the public preferred Repin, not because they had been conditioned by social realism, but because of human nature, which responded to the familiar and self-evident meanings that could be found in the paintings. The opposition between Repin and Picasso was regarded by Greenberg in Manichean terms as the destructive set against the redemptive. Greenberg posited the avant-garde artists as veritable saviors who could imitate God by creating something which was valid only on its own terms by deriving inspiration from the medium being worked in (1957:100-101). If the avant-garde died, he argued, then all of culture would die with it. At the same time, however, the avant-garde necessarily led to the development of a rear-guard.

This Greenberg termed "kitsch", and he defined kitsch as the product of the industrial revolution and universal literacy which had stripped status divisions from leisure pursuits. Greenberg suggested that because the masses had acquired the technical skill of literacy as well as leisure time they demanded new cultural forms to serve their needs. Kitsch served this purpose in creating a form of culture which was "pre-digested" and which evinced no discontinuity between art and life. Kitsch was seen as vampiric insofar as it drew on and diminished the traditions of high culture, and destructive because its high profits might lure legitimate cultural producers away from the avant-garde (1957:102). With this essay, therefore, Greenberg mapped out many of the assumptions about the destructive relationship between high and low culture which characterized the postwar era.

The second key article which helped to define the parameters of the debate for the New York Intellectuals was Dwight MacDonald's "A Theory of Popular Culture", published in 1944 in the introductory volume of his journal *Politics*, which he had founded upon leaving *Partisan Review*. In this article MacDonald argued a line similar to that of Greenberg when he suggested that mass culture was trying to kill high culture. At the same time, however, he departed from Greenberg's point of view insofar as he was able to cite elements of popular culture of which he approved, including the comic strips *Krazy Kat* and *Thimble Theater* (1944:20-23). Nine years later MacDonald republished a newer version of the article under the title "A Theory of Mass Culture". This version of the piece mentioned new forms of mass culture which had risen to prominence in the meantime, including comic books and television. Moreover, the article shifted the emphasis of the argument towards a concern with massification and modernization. MacDonald argued that mass culture was increasingly eroding the barriers of class, tradition and taste in order to create a new social order governed by the masses, a force he characterized as not entirely human. From MacDonald's point of view, where culture had once been clearly demarcated because of the existence of firm class distinctions, the boundary had, by the 1950s, become blurred and low culture was now threatening the high through sheer pervasiveness. To

prevent the destruction of high culture by the low MacDonald advocated a return to conservative values espoused by Eliot and Gasset. To this end MacDonald — who was heretofore aligned with American Marxism — sided with the most conservative of the prewar mass culture critics in calling for a return to cultural stratification which would privilege the cultural elite (MacDonald 1957: 70-73). By 1960, when MacDonald published a third version of this essay (entitled "Masscult and Midcult"), he had given up all hope for mass culture. In this version of the essay MacDonald focused on ways that high art might be defended from what he termed "midcult", or the phony and pretentious culture of the middlebrow that sought to water down high art. MacDonald's solutions to the problem which he outlined were, as Gorman noted, "deeply pessimistic" (1996:183) and required an embrace of the two cultures outlook originally advanced by conservative thinkers in the nineteenth-century. These articles by MacDonald and Greenberg, with their privileging of aesthetics as a priority above political improvement and progressive social change, indicated the degree to which the New York Intellectuals occupied a cultural position which was more conservative than radical and which harkened back to centuries old solutions for perceived postwar social problems. What is most striking, however, is the degree to which these views not only remained largely unchallenged by the New York Intellectuals but actually were able to set the agenda in the postwar debate about mass culture in the United States.

In his study of the New York Intellectuals, Jumonville suggested that only one central member of the group, Sidney Hook, and two affiliates, David Riesman and Edward Shils, challenged the dominant view of mass culture proposed by MacDonald and Greenberg (1991:151). The arguments of Riesman and Hook basically stated their opinion that mass culture, in fact, had a right to exist. Shils, on the other hand, went slightly farther when he indicated that much of the problem of mass culture was to be found in the prejudices of the intellectuals themselves. He further argued that mass culture critique was not sound because high culture had never been the culture of the majority of society and

therefore the consciousness of the decline was more a myth than a reality (1961:11-18). Shils' argument returned to the debate some sense of politics insofar as he stressed that the mass culture critique was founded on varying sets of cultural standards which placed the intellectuals at odds with the public at large. Jumonville has suggested that the New York Intellectuals found Greenberg's arguments in favour of the avant-garde and against kitsch compelling because they allowed the critics to maintain their social position. Because it was pre-digested, kitsch allowed no possible role for the critics, as mass culture was assumed to traffic in meanings that were self-evident even to the culturally illiterate. The more difficult avant-garde, on the other hand, was regarded as important because it necessitated the presence of a group of intellectuals to make it comprehensible (Jumonville 1991:182-184). Following this argument it is possible to suggest that while they espoused democratic and sometimes even Marxist values, the New York Intellectuals were most interested in an elitist and conservative position in the mass culture debate which was dependent on limited notions of democracy and a genuine disgust with and fear of the public which they termed the masses.

Fredric Wertham and the Public Intellectuals

Despite the fact that Fredric Wertham shared many concerns about American culture with the New York Intellectuals, and despite the fact that his 1954 book is often regarded as a key text in the history of the postwar mass culture critique which was dominated by that collection of writers (Gorman 1996:2), it is clear that he never belonged to that group. Although, between 1943 and 1948, he published a half dozen articles and book reviews in the important New York Intellectual journal *The New Republic* on the subject of psychoanalysis, Wertham was generally the subject of disapproval from the critics. Leslie Fiedler, for instance, wrote dismissively about Wertham in his essay "The Middle Against Both Ends", suggesting "that the undefined aggressiveness of disturbed children can be

given a shape by comic books, I do not doubt; and one could make a good case for the contention that such literature standardizes crime woefully or inhibits imagination in violence, but I find it hard to consider so obvious a symptom a prime cause of anything" (1957:537). This is, it hardly need be noted, something short of a full refutation of Wertham's argument, although it is also typical of the casual style of dismissal accorded Wertham by the New York Intellectuals. Robert Warshow was one of the few intellectuals to attempt to engage with Wertham's writings in *Seduction of the Innocent* in any systematic way and his commentaries demonstrate the limits of tolerance shown to the psychiatrist by his critics. Warshow's essay, "Paul, the Horror Comics and Dr. Wertham", was originally published in *Commentary* in 1954 and then reprinted in Rosenberg and White's volume in 1957. Warshow argued that his son Paul, a comic book fan, was not seriously affected by reading comic books, although Warshow as the boy's father would have preferred that he not read them anyway. Having established his limited opposition to the mass media Warshow proceeded to address a number of claims from Wertham's book, chastising Wertham for his "humourless dedication" to reformism, for his tendency to accept statements made by children in therapy sessions as valid and for his tendency to argue as if the comic book industry were monolithic. In the end Warshow rejected a caricature of Wertham's argument about causality but nonetheless advocated some degree of censorship for the "worst of the comic books" (1957:210) which were conceptualized in traditional high/low terms. Indeed, throughout the essay Warshow imposed a series of high and low distinctions on comic books in order to shift the terrain of Wertham's critique somewhat away from the question of psychological damage and towards aesthetic concerns. Warshow, for instance, argued that there existed a valid value distinction between comic books and canonical literature:

> It remains true that there is something questionable in the tendency of psychiatrists to place such stress on the supposed psychological needs of children as to encourage the spread of material which is at best subversive of the same children's literacy, sensitivity, and general cultivation. *Superman* and *The Three Musketeers* may serve the same psychological need, but it still matters whether a child reads one of the other. (1957:209)

Warshow's suggestion that "it still matters" can only be made sensible through the lens of the mass culture critique. In failing to take seriously Wertham's various claims about media effects the only possible line of dissent accorded a critic such as Warshow was a recourse to traditional Manichean conceptions of good and bad culture. While it is true that Wertham himself often relied on these same sorts of divisions in his writing, the fact remains that at the same time his work moved beyond that narrow conception of culture. It can be argued, therefore, that while Wertham's work clearly needs to be understood within the general context of American mass culture critiques common in the postwar period of the New York Intellectuals, it was by no means entirely contained by those understandings.

When considering the publishing career of Fredric Wertham it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that he led two very different lives as a writer. On the one hand he was a well-known author on psychoanalysis and psychiatry, the field in which he was professionally trained, and published several books and dozens of scholarly articles on subjects related to his professional expertise. These writings which were limited to the field in which he had been trained, and in which he worked professionally, were targeted primarily at his colleagues in the medical profession and constitute a collection of scholarly publications. On the other hand, however, Wertham was widely published in non-scholarly magazines and journals on a variety of topics in which he had no professional training. The audience for these works was the general public and Wertham's efforts in these arenas necessitate regarding him as a public intellectual on those occasions. In the majority of these cases Wertham utilized his professional credibility as a psychiatrist in order to exercise legitimacy in unrelated fields such as culture and politics, bringing him into discursive contact with other critics of mass culture and proponents of competing conceptions of media effects. The ways in which he sought to bring psychoanalysis to bear on artistic productions were suggestive of the nuances contained in his work and helped to lay a foundation for comparison with both his much better known criticisms of mass culture in the 1950s and 1960s and the commentaries of other postwar culture critics.

Wertham v. Freud: The Interpretation of *Hamlet*

Wertham's most noteworthy early intervention into the arena of literary interpretation occurred in 1941, the same year that he published the criminal case history *Dark Legend*. This is not surprising, given the fact that the clinical case study of Gino, the matricidal Italian-American youth in that study, informs Wertham's literary criticism: a psychoanalytic reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In *Dark Legend* Wertham wrote at great length of the matricidal tale of Orestes which marked, he argued, a shift from a matriarchal to a patriarchal code in Greek society. Wertham's evidence for this assumption was the fact that the trial of Orestes was not for murder, but for "un-Greek activity", a political rather than criminal question. The acquittal of Orestes in the story was the acknowledgment of a new legal code in Greece, a code which was explicitly sanctioned by Athena — the matriarchal goddess — herself. Wertham, of course, extended this analysis to explicate the actions of his patient, Gino. However, he also extended it to include a critique of Freud's interpretation of *Hamlet*, a critique which also casts doubt on the conception of the Oedipal Crisis as an important developmental moment in the lives of individuals. There is, it should be noted, more psychoanalytic work on *Hamlet* than on all of Shakespeare's other plays combined. All of that work centers around the question of why Hamlet hesitates to avenge his father. Freud's suggestion, published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1914), was that Hamlet is unable to act because his uncle has taken the action that Hamlet himself wishes that he had undertaken — he has killed Hamlet's father to become the lover of his mother — and Hamlet recognized his own Oedipal desire and, as a consequence, realized that he himself is no better than his uncle. Freud supported this suggestion by referring to Hamlet's distaste for his own sexuality — revealed in his conversation with Ophelia — and by reference to the actual life of Shakespeare, who was said to have written *Hamlet* shortly after the death of his own father

and who had a son of his own named Hamnet. Thus, Hamlet's hesitation is a recognition of his own, and by extension Shakespeare's own, Oedipal desires.

Wertham's dissension from Freud's argument (1941b) took the form of six key disagreements. In the first instance, Wertham argued that the ghost of Hamlet's father, in instructing Hamlet to seek vengeance, never explicitly instructs Hamlet to kill Claudius. More importantly, the ghost did instruct Hamlet not to harm his mother. Wertham wondered why the ghost would make such an instruction explicit unless he had some knowledge of Hamlet's desire to do just that. Similarly, later in the play the ghost warned Gertrude that Hamlet might attempt to harm her. Second, Wertham maintained that the ghost is not a repression — as Freud maintained — but a dream, and the self-expression of the patriarch. Third, Wertham suggested that there is no textual evidence that Hamlet hated his father. Hamlet actually proclaimed his love for his father in the play and Wertham concluded that at worst one could characterize the relationship between the two as ambivalent. Wertham's fourth contention was that Freud mistakenly assumed that the murder of Claudius was Hamlet's goal, an assumption which he insisted did not follow logically from the text. Wertham suggested that Hamlet blamed his mother for the death of his father and that his hatred of Claudius was subordinate to his hatred of his mother. Wertham pointed out that whenever Hamlet spoke of murder he did so by speaking of his mother's guilt, such as when he mentions the "soul of Nero", a classic symbol of matricidal fury. Furthermore, Wertham observed that Hamlet killed Claudius only after his mother was dead, and then only after Laertes pointed him out. Wertham's fifth disagreement with Freud stemmed from Freud's historical assertion that the play was written after the death of Shakespeare's father. Drawing on the historical work of George Brandes Wertham suggested that that was very unlikely, but that, even if it were the case, the text itself was not basis enough to draw conclusions about the way in which Shakespeare reacted to the death of his father. With this Wertham explicitly rejected the possibility that an artist or author can be analyzed through his work. Finally, and most

importantly, Wertham observed that Freud's contention that Hamlet was working through an Oedipal complex was not a conclusion but a starting point. Wertham went on to suggest that Freud's contention that the Oedipal complex is a "universal, biological, normal, unavoidable inheritance of the human race" was essentially incorrect (1941b:115). Wertham absolutely rejected this ahistorical and aclinical assertion by Freud and went on to suggest, by reference to the case of Gino, that a desire to kill one's mother seems to be every bit much a clinical reality as the desire to kill one's father. Wertham concluded, therefore, that Hamlet was more similar to Orestes than Oedipus, and further suggested that psychiatrists rethink their understanding of the role of the Oedipal complex in personality development.

The Author as Analysand: Richard Wright and *Native Son*

In his remarks on *Hamlet* Wertham explicitly rejected the psychoanalytic interpretation of an author by way of his work. Wertham reaffirmed this rejection three years later, when he published a study of Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* that was the result of a series of psychiatric sessions with the author. Wertham claimed that his article, "An Unconscious Determinant in Native Son" (1944), was the first published psychoanalytic interpretation done on a novel after therapy sessions with a living author, and consequently occupied an important position in the history of literary criticism. The argument in the article itself suggested that Wright had accounted for elements in his novel in rational, as opposed to emotional, terms. Wertham suggested that he had brought the affective basis of Wright's novel to the surface after conducting free association based on the symbols and motifs of the novel with the author. Wertham argued that the identification between Wright and the protagonist of the novel, Bigger Thomas, ran more deeply than Wright had implied in his autobiographical essay "How Bigger Was Born". At the root of the identification lay an unconscious memory which analysis had brought to the surface. As a young man Wright had been employed as a wood cutter for a white family and his chief

job was to tend the family's fireplace, a job that was obviously related to the furnace in the novel in which the body of Mary Dalton was burned. Wertham suggested that Mary's mother, the blind Mrs. Dalton who becomes aware that something extraordinary is occurring at the crucial moment of the narrative, corresponded to the matron of the white household for which Wright worked as a teenager. Moreover, Wright could not account for the reason he chose the name Dalton for the family in the novel. After analysis he was able to recall that when he had worked in a medical research institute he had learned that Daltonism was a form of blindness, and Wright concluded that he must have remembered that and associated it with Mrs. Dalton's affliction. Wertham pointed out, however, that what Wright had apparently forgotten is that Daltonism is actually a technical term for color-blindness, a particularly emotionally charged expression in a novel about American race relations. Wertham concluded that his study proved that the conscious autobiographical explanation of the novel's genesis in the essay "How Bigger was Born" was only a conscious rationalization of Wright's unconscious creative processes. Moreover, he stated that his work with Wright had succeeded in proving what had only been presumed: that the unconscious plays an important role in literary creation, and, further, that the unconscious factors can be recovered by analytic study.

Psychoanalyzing Modernism: *The World Within*, 1947

Despite his insistence that the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature necessitated the participation of the author in analytic session Wertham's most sustained efforts in literary analysis departed from that methodology. In 1947 Wertham provided a series of explanatory and interpretative analyses to a collection of short stories about various mental illnesses and conditions that was edited by Mary Louise Aswell, the literary editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. The resulting book, *The World Within*, was the main selection of the Book of the Month Club for January, 1948 and Wertham's introduction was reprinted in the *New Republic* (1947b). Aswell's justification for the book was the furtherance of

understanding of what she saw as the relationship between "madness and genius". To this end she sought to publish the best short fiction of 19th and 20th centuries related to psychiatric material. The book overlapped with the concerns of the New York Intellectuals insofar as it was a veritable who's who of modernism's literary leading lights, including Dostoevsky, Chekhov, James, Proust, Kafka and Faulkner alongside more contemporary writers such as Edita Morris, Truman Capote and Conrad Aiken. Each was represented by a single story, with a biographical portrait supplied by Aswell and post-script analysis provided by Wertham. Wertham's introduction to the book outlined the reasons for his involvement in such a project. Mentioning Freud's work on *Hamlet* he contended that psychology had always been influenced by literature and that the two work well together because each sought to relate the detail to the whole in an organic fashion. Moreover, Wertham held that the diffusion of psychoanalytic concepts through literature was a progressive act, but only insofar as that diffusion does not lead to a vulgarization of scientific inquiry and understanding. For Wertham, the key to good psychology was the two-fold recognition of conflict as something that is interior to the individual and the ability to recognize that interior conflicts are themselves a reflection of larger conflicts outside the individual. Literature, Wertham maintained, could help to aid in this recognition because of its function as a reflection of the real social life of particular historical moments.

Turning to the actual analyses provided by Wertham indicates his own predilections to a great degree. Wertham himself was fond of quoting various well-known literary figures in his writing, and many of his books contained a literary epigram for every chapter. Amongst Wertham's most commonly used sources are Dostoevsky and Goethe, with Shakespeare and the Greeks trailing only slightly behind. It is not surprising, therefore, that Wertham's commentaries on the 19th century material are both more fully formed and praise-filled than his analyses of the fiction more contemporaneous with his own writing. Writing of an excerpt from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, for instance, Wertham praised the author's "artistic daydreams" and "supreme skill" and cited

other critics who agreed with his assessment of Dostoevsky's genius (Aswell 1948:62). In contrast Wertham found almost nothing to say about Edita Morris' story "Caput Mortuum" other than the descriptive comment that it functioned as an "idyll of alcoholic domesticity" (Aswell 1948:321). This was made even more strange by the fact that alcoholism was regarded by Wertham as a major social problem and he addressed the topic at length on a number of other occasions. Nonetheless, Wertham's praise was directed primarily to the more classical writers who addressed psychological issues abstractly rather than the contemporaries who were more direct. Wertham, for instance, praised Henry James' "The Beast in the Jungle" as the best story ever written about neurosis and celebrated the fact that even the style is neurotic. Similarly he lauded Kafka's "Metamorphosis", suggesting that in the light of Nazi atrocities during the war it could be mistaken for reportage rather than allegory. With these comments and others included in the collection of stories Wertham's implicit distinction between art and mass culture was rendered clearly for the first time. Wertham praised the literature found in Aswell's collection for its ability to generate real insights into mental illness and their relations to society. At the same time, however, he suggested that "bad literature" on this topic, while entertaining, could not lead to the development of a mature personality and, consequently, was of no use to society as a whole. Wertham's dualistic division between good and bad literature in this instance was clearly reminiscent of common cultural judgments rendered by the New York Intellectuals at this period. This assumption about the negative impact of "bad literature" would be addressed most clearly in relation to Wertham's work on mass culture, which would follow closely on the heels of the publication of *The World Within*. Nonetheless, the basis of his condemnation of certain elements of mass culture was readily apparent in his writing even before he took it up as a serious issue in the 1950s.

Towards a Theory of Art and Violence

Wertham's 1966 book *A Sign for Cain* contained a chapter on the relationship between violence and art which should be seen as his most comprehensive statement on the topic. In that chapter Wertham addressed the ways in which he felt that violence had taken a hold on art, especially literature. At the same time Wertham expressed his belief that art served an important social and psychological role when it helped to make suffering comprehensible. To this end he suggested that there existed a need for art to harmonize its social and artistic functions. Although he argued that his point of view on this matter should not be read as regarding the role of art in an overly utilitarian fashion, he did go so far as to indicate his belief that the art for art's sake movements of contemporary modernism had gone too far and over-extended themselves to the point where modernism was no longer productive as a movement. Essentially, however, Wertham presented his conception of a binaristic division of art: that which was pro-violence and that which was anti-violence. For Wertham, obviously, good literature and art needed to contain no violence and when it did it should be circumspect. He held up the thirty-two Greek tragedies as positive uses of violence within literature when he pointed out that there is not a single killing which took place on-stage. Wertham's other anti-violence artists included painters who explicitly address violent themes in their work, such as Goya, Vermeer and Daumier, and also abstract painters whose work was well-ordered — such as El Lissitzky and Mondrian — because he felt that violence itself was a form of disorder. Among the writers praised for their contributions to exploring a fuller understanding of human violence were Richard Wright, Ernst Sommer and Alex Comfort. Franz Kafka was again praised as the classic writer of the 20th century and as an artist who most clearly signalled the oncoming culture of violence that Wertham believed dominated the second half of the 20th century. Finally, Wertham praised American folk art and suggested that its anti-violence qualities demonstrated the degree to which violence itself was not a natural component of the American people, an argument which had clear links to dominant tendencies in postwar

cultural commentaries which privileged folk arts as an alternative culture for the people which was distinct from mass culture (Greenberg 1957:102).

In the category of pro-violence art, the targets of Wertham's condemnations ranged from poets like Rilke who wrote lyrically about cruelty to philosophers such as Nietzsche who laid the groundwork upon which the rationalizations for brutality were based. Wertham contended that mass violence was aided by artists who increased the divisions between people or who trivialized war and suffering. In this category he placed films like *The Devils*, *The Collector* and *The Americanization of Emily*, as well as writers such as Norman Mailer and Colin Wilson. Wertham proceeded to criticize the works of writers he had previously praised, including Arthur Miller for his play *Incident at Vichy* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Of the latter he wrote that the book's positive reception demonstrated society's growing complacency about violence and that the measure of its success was the measure of society's failure. Ultimately, Wertham was content to cast his lot with Plato, Tolstoy and Engels, each of whom had argued convincingly that literature and art have an effect on the social world in which they are created. For Wertham all art had a social character and a social value, even if that art was introspective or subjective. This position was, as Martin Jay has argued, reminiscent of that of the Frankfurt School insofar as the privileging of social significance is the line of aesthetic Marxism which they supported in opposition to Lenin's conception of partisan literature and Stalinist socialist realism (Jay 1973:173). Wertham differed from the Frankfurt School, however, in his stronger emphasis on the role of the psychiatrist in relation to the field of artistic production. What Wertham accomplished in his writings on art and literature was the careful explication of the relationship between the social world and the individual — whether that individual be the author, character or reader. In this way Wertham's views on the arts were remarkably consistent with his general views on the duties and responsibilities of psychiatrists generally as both were to be concerned with providing the foundational basis upon which a progressively oriented reformulation of collective understandings of the

relationship between the individual and society could be articulated. At the same time, however, the degree to which Wertham was an exception from the dominant modes of thinking about the relationship between high and mass culture needs to be noted. Wertham's focus on the social condition of violence overrode a straightforward fixation on aesthetics and fears of cultural leveling. Thus, while echoes of the concerns of the New York Intellectuals and other mass culture critics can certainly be found in Wertham's writings on culture they exist only in the background behind his more prominent arguments about violence and psychiatric theory. If Wertham's arguments resembled those of any of the mass culture critics wholesale, then it would have to be those put forward by the progressives in the 1920s and 1930s. What will become increasingly evident in the more detailed discussion of Wertham's writings on comic books in Chapter Five is the degree to which his ideas more closely resemble the progressive condemnations of "commerce" and the belief in the reformability of mass culture than they do the retreating and elitist tendencies of the New York Intellectuals. Thus it seems reasonable to suggest the degree to which Wertham's arguments, while clearly influenced by the dominant conceptions of mass culture in the postwar period, were exceptions to the norms of the period. Wertham's easy dismissal by Fiedler, Warshow and other writers associated with the New York Intellectuals is more easily understood in this light.

Conclusion

In an essay published in *Dissent* in 1956, Henry Rabassiere suggested the degree to which the mass culture debate permeated all considerations of the arts, when he wrote that the intellectual's concern about mass entertainment had itself become the newest form of mass culture. Members of the political left and right, Rabassiere argued, competed to outdo each other in denouncing the tastes of the general public:

> Members of their bi-partisan club display in their home a copy of *Partisan Review* together with a painting conceived in an advanced style (as to records, progressives favor Bach while new-conservatives may boast a Shostakovitch concerto played by Oistrakh), and are conversant with words such as alienation, popular culture,

> pseudo-whatever-fashion-is, anxiety, crowd, absurd and a few others, judicious use of which will silence the un-initiated and bring recognition from those who belong; many will grant you such recognition to be recognized themselves. (1957:373)

Rabassiere's notion that the mass culture critique constituted little more than a game of culture for the educated elite highlighted the degree to which the debate itself was narrowly limited and open only to those deemed qualified by the intellectuals themselves. H. Stuart Hughes pointed out in 1961 that the idea of mass culture itself was dependent on cultural elitism because it was the cultural elites who first noticed — and made an issue of — mass culture in the first place (1961:142). Hughes' suggestion that mass culture did not corrupt the taste of mass audiences, but, rather, that intellectuals had consistently misread mass tastes and mistakenly condemned them as corrupt, echoes earlier suggestions by Gilbert Seldes that the popular arts have always worried cultural moralists and aesthetes who have regarded them as vulgar (1957:75). Seldes went on to suggest that most theories of mass culture should themselves be recognized as extensions of political arguments which have relevance not only in the cultural domain but for society as a whole (1957:79). While these political arguments can be easily characterized through shorthand — conservatives condemn the audience for mass culture because they fear the masses; progressives and Marxists condemn the marketplace for mass culture because they are disappointed with the masses — the fact that each critique shares in the myth of continuing cultural decline indicates the degree to which mass culture was held to pose a serious political problem in the postwar period. What is necessary, therefore, is an understanding of the ways in which the so-called mass society which characterized the United States following the end of the Second World War was construed as a problem for intellectuals during this period. More to the point, it is necessary to come to terms with how that conception of a shift in social organization influenced the development of the media effects paradigm by promoting the perceived crisis of individualism to center stage in the ongoing discussions about the nature of social life at the time that the media effects paradigm began to emerge in its fullest form.

Chapter Two:
American Concerns About a Mass Society

The increasingly important but constantly changing status of the American intellectual in the postwar period was highlighted by the cover of *Time*'s 11 June 1956 issue which carried a photo of Jacques Barzun under the caption: "America and the Intellectual: The Reconciliation". Inside, the article laid out the central question intellectuals had been asking as the 1950s advanced: "What does it mean to be an intellectual in the United States? Is he really in such an unhappy plight as he sometimes thinks — the ridiculed double-dome, the egghead, the wild-eyed absent-minded man who is made to feel an alien in his own country?" ("Parnassus" 1956:65). For the *Time* writer — following the lead of Barzun — the answer was quite simply that any problems hindering the intellectual were themselves the fault of the intellectual. For those who were willing to reconcile themselves to the new American Cold War consensus, however, the intellectual life was potentially quite rewarding. *Time*'s argument, in its simplest terms, was that the American "Man of Protest" who had come of age in the Depression of the 1930s had no role in the new reality. He was being replaced by the "Man of Affirmation", or the intellectual who — like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin in the eighteenth-century — wanted America to set a leadership example for the entire world (65). In support of this point of view *Time* quoted a number of the New York Intellectuals — among them Sidney Hook, Leslie Fiedler, Walter Lippmann and Daniel Boorstin — who had renounced pasts rooted in dissatisfaction and protest in order to support America's increasingly conservative Cold War orthodoxies in both domestic and foreign affairs. Perhaps the most straightforward example of the changing philosophy on the part of the New York Intellectuals came from Lionel Trilling when he pronounced the end of intellectual anti-Americanism: "An avowed aloofness from national feeling is no longer the first ceremonial step into a life of thought ... For the first time in the history of the modern American intellectual, America is not to be

conceived of as *a priori* the vulgarest and stupidest nation of the world" (67). Understanding the changing attitude which Trilling expressed and *Time* reported is crucial to coming to terms with the shifting status of intellectual labour in the postwar period. More importantly, an examination of this attitude plays a crucial role in illustrating the degree to which the progressive social thought of a critic such as Fredric Wertham fell completely beyond the narrow confines of the New York Intellectual circles.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the aesthetic concerns that led many American intellectuals to critique mass culture in the first half of the twentieth-century were tied to political theories which posited growing dangers for an America increasingly held to be a mass society. Of the four major themes of the mass culture critique outlined by Herbert Gans the one which has consistently been regarded with the greatest import is the belief that mass culture "lowers the taste level of society as a whole, thus impairing its quality as a civilization" (Gans 1974:43-44). This argument is predicated, as Gans observed, on the increasing centralization of society and the functional rationalization of both primary and secondary groups which mediate between the individual and the state. The theory holds that if a tyrant were to seize control of the media he would be able to persuade individuals to accept dictatorship, as many intellectuals held to be the case in the Soviet Union under Stalin and in Germany under Hitler (Gans 1974:46). The potential crisis, therefore, was not simply a problem of the mass media but of the media's relationship to increasingly massified forms of social organization which were thought to be increasingly global in the mid-century period.

Andrew Ross has pointed to the fact that in the America of the 1950s intellectuals increasingly championed a national culture which was defined against a series of foreign threats (Ross 1989:43). Chief amongst these was the possibility that an American mass society might be converted to fascism or totalitarianism. The Cold War assumption that totalitarianism could befall any industrialized nation — even America — dominated a good deal of the intellectual debate throughout the postwar period. The intellectuals' dismissal of

any form of social organization that might conceivably lead down the road to increased levels of social coordination at the macro-level obliged the critics to champion a series of positions which easily fit into the growing Cold War consensus. Among the positions being embraced were individualism, democracy and cultural pluralism. Thus, while the Greeks had long ago established the links between high culture and anti-democratic social institutions which would define the aristocratic approach to culture well into the beginning of the twentieth-century (Brantlinger 1983:60), the critics of the postwar era sought to reverse that particular association in order to make a claim to both democratic social organization and high art in the cultural realm.

This effort of the New York Intellectuals to define the twin bases of American virtue in democracy and high art can best be seen in the three part 1952 *Partisan Review* seminar entitled "Our Country and Our Culture" which placed a new emphasis on the United States as culturally homogeneous. The editorial statement that the collected respondents were asked to address stated, quite bluntly, that the relationship between America and its intellectuals had changed. Intellectuals, the editors argued, now felt closer to the nation than at any time in its history because, following the economic and cultural devastation wrought by the war, the United States had supplanted Europe as the guardian of Western civilization (*Partisan Review* 1952:282-284). This new closeness with the nation could be seen in the editors' uncomplicated and unwavering embrace of American democracy: "Politically, there is a recognition that the kind of democracy which exists in America has an intrinsic and positive value" (284), as well as in the explicitly stated rejection of the extreme aristocratic views previously pronounced by José Ortega y Gasset (285) — views which had been published by the journal itself. For the *Partisan Review* editors, the democratic values that America "either embodies or promises" were "necessary conditions for civilization and represent the only immediate alternative as long as Russian totalitarianism threatens world domination" (285). While a few of the invited commentators — such as Norman Mailer, C. Wright Mills and Irving Howe — rejected the editorial point

of view, the vast majority concurred with this new Cold War take on the relationship between culture and democracy. James Burnham, for instance, argued that the intellectual's new response to American society was justified both militarily and politically (Burnham 1952:290), while Philip Rahv suggested that the reconciliation of America and its intellectuals rested on the exposure of Soviet myths and the consequent realization that American democracy "looks like the real thing" (Rahv 1952:304). Sidney Hook stated that "the task of the intellectual is still to lead an intellectual life, to criticize what needs to be criticized in America, without forgetting for a moment the total threat which Communism poses to the life of the free mind" (Hook 1952:574). These responses, along with a number of similar sentiments expressed by other contributors to the seminar, demonstrate the degree to which the New York Intellectuals had, as C. Wright Mills commented at the time, adopted a "a shrinking deference to the status quo; often to a soft and anxious compliance, and always a synthetic, feeble search to justify this intellectual conduct, without searching for alternatives, and sometimes without even political good sense" (Mills 1952:446). The intellectual embrace of America and American democracy in the postwar period signalled a serious retreat from the critical perspectives which had characterized the intellectual activity of previous decades while, at the same time, it helped to close off avenues for domestic social reform by directing attention toward perceived or imagined foreign threats to the American way of life.

This chapter will examine the postwar conservative political consensus in order to contrast it with Wertham's conception of a socially engaged politics dedicated to progressive change. To this end Wertham's political positions on issues such as civil rights and anti-communism will be placed in dialogue with those of the New York Intellectuals in order to demonstrate the degree to which Wertham was at odds with those critics. Further, Wertham's specific political goals will be assessed in order to illustrate the foundational beliefs which structured his subsequent writings on psychiatry, mass culture and media effects. I will argue that, in order to understand the specific differences which existed

between Wertham and scholars of mass communication as it emerged as a discipline following the end of the Second World War, it is necessary to acknowledge the degree to which their approaches to mass culture were rooted in conceptions of social relations which were diametrically opposed one to the other. Finally, this chapter will suggest that the primary distinction between Wertham and postwar mass communication researchers was a political one, particularly insofar as political questions structured Wertham's particularistic approach to the study of mass culture through psychiatry and informed his rejection of empiricist methodologies which would ultimately come to dominate the study of media effects.

Theories of Mass Society and Totalitarianism

Warren Sussman has argued that the problem at the heart of postwar American anxieties was the fact that the country had become, by the end of the Second World War, a "success" (Sussman 1989:19). The suggestion was that the ideal nation which intellectuals had championed in the first half of the twentieth-century — a democratic and inclusionary state which guarded the general welfare of the populace through a managed economy — had come to pass during the Truman administration of the late-1940s. Yet ironically, just as Truman made the dreams of the intellectuals into a reality through the affirmation of Keynesian economic theories in the 1946 Full Employment Act, and the development of new agencies such as the CIA to monitor foreign threats to the nation, an "age of anxiety" began to arise (20-21). The source of this anxiety resided in the newly sensed possibility that the large governments which had once seemed desirable were now seen as potentially totalitarian and that the mass involvement in the political process which had been a goal of early progressives was now a problem. Insofar as old ideals had manifest themselves as new threats the American dream had not worked as the intellectuals had predicted. The shifting political interests of the New York Intellectuals can be seen in their decisions

surrounding the first major election following the end of the war. As Richard Pells has pointed out, American power grew quickly in the postwar period because America as a nation had escaped the destruction of the war and was consequently able to march toward the suburbs, while Europe was concerned with rebuilding its cities (1985:5-7). If the fact that America was relatively untouched by the war led many to perceive it as the "ultimate country" (Pells 1985:30) it also made for great difficulties in organizing for broad social change at the domestic level. This difficulty can be seen, for example, in the failure of Henry Walllace's 1948 bid for the presidency and the subsequent consolidation of the postwar Cold War antagonism to the Soviet Union and communism generally.

According to Pells, in the 1920s and 1930s the majority of American intellectuals had embraced — to some degree or another — communism and the Soviet Union as a cure for the Depression which had wracked the country (1985:30). This American goodwill was dealt a serious setback in the late 1930s as Stalinist repression deflated the Soviet mystique in the United States. By the time of the Nazi/Soviet pact of 1939, there existed little tolerance for communists in American intellectual circles. During the war, however, a common opposition to Hitler helped to shore up the image of Soviet Union in the United States so that even the conservative magazine *Life* could run articles in praise of the Russian people and Stalin. Nonetheless, by the Yalta summit enthusiasm in the United States for a "Big Three" set of global powers had all but disappeared, as had the possibility of domestic communism. At the same time, however, bumbling on domestic issues had harmed Truman's credibility in the eyes of many intellectuals. When the Republicans gained control of the House and Senate for the first time since 1930 in the 1946 mid-term elections, many intellectuals began to look for another leader to back.

The leading candidate to displace Truman was Henry Wallace, a former vice-president under Roosevelt and the Secretary of Commerce who Truman had dismissed for a 1946 speech advocating a less confrontational approach in foreign affairs. Wallace's desire to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union built upon the wartime alliance

made him a viable alternative to Cold War thinking. To this end Wallace proposed a program which would extend economic aid to the Soviet Union and begin a period of détente rooted in international cooperation. In 1947 Wallace formed the Progressive Citizens of America, a collection of "dissident liberals, trade unionists, veteran Communists, and Hollywood artists" pledged to an "impeccably reformist agenda" (Pells 1985:69) which included an end to racial segregation and the red scare, as well as greater economic planning and labour rights. Wallace's 1948 campaign for the presidency, however, was to be undone by events in Europe. In March of that year, the Soviets overthrew the government of Czechoslovakia and in the summer blockaded Berlin, circumstances which caused most liberals to abandon their faith in coexistence. The New York Intellectuals, who had welcomed Wallace as the editor of the *New Republic* the previous year, turned on the PCA. James Burnham opined that "a vote for Wallace is a vote for Stalin" (in Pells 1985:116) and the intellectuals began their embrace of Cold War thinking. By 1949 the Soviets had developed the bomb and 1950's Korean War cemented anti-Soviet feelings within New York's intellectual circles. This changing relationship to American foreign policy formed the backdrop against which intellectuals would outline their equation of mass culture and totalitarianism — an equation which would help to define critical thinking in the postwar period.

William Kornhauser and *The Politics of Mass Society*

Among the key texts which sought to explicate the new consensus politics of the postwar era was William Kornhauser's 1959 volume *The Politics of Mass Society*. This book provided a framework through which the perceived relationship between mass society and totalitarianism could be revealed. Kornhauser was one of many postwar writers who argued in support of American conceptions of democracy by equating fascism and communism under the common rubric of totalitarianism, which was held to be the natural enemy of democracy. He outlined two theories of mass society and sought to bridge the

two into a unified theory of mass society. The first was the aristocratic theory of the nineteenth-century, characterized by writers such as Jakob Burckhardt and Gustave LeBon who were reacting to fears stemming from revolutions. The second was the democratic theory elaborated in the twentieth-century by Emil Lederer and Hannah Arendt who were concerned with the consequences of totalitarianism (Kornhauser 1959:21-26). Essentially, according to Kornhauser, the aristocratic critics of mass society characterized that form of social organization as a loss of traditional authority and a quest for popular authority and rule by the masses which was the opposite of aristocracy's exclusiveness of elites. Democratic critics, on the other hand, sought to shield the masses from the type of elite domination which had previously characterized aristocracies. They held that such domination could re-emerge as a result of the manipulation of the group in an atomized society, particularly through the mass media. For democratic critics, therefore, mass society was characterized by growing domination, a quest for community and the rise of the pseudo-community, namely totalitarianism (27-35).

Kornhauser himself sought to use parts of each explanation in his own theory of mass society by suggesting that both arguments were correct up to a point. He argued that mass society was a non-aristocratic system in which elites were not isolated and were consequently prone to influence from the masses, and in which the masses were available for mobilization by the social elites into pseudo-communities (39-73). Moreover, he suggested that all societies contained three levels of social relations: the personal, the community and the state. According to Kornhauser — as well as other critics at the time — relations at the community level mediated the relationship between the individual and the state, but in a mass society that community relationship was absent, leaving the mass and the elite exposed to each other directly. In pluralist societies with strong community-based relationships the possibility of creeping totalitarianism was greatly reduced. The pluralist framework which privileged community-based social relationships, therefore, was the ideal which America needed to embrace (74).

This mass society thesis had a direct relationship to culture, according to Kornhauser, insofar as he argued that mass culture negatively impacted upon local cultures and decreased the availability of local affinities while increasing direct access of the cultural elite to the mass audience (102-103). Mass culture, he argued, helped to foster a society in which atomized individuals would develop uniform tastes which would ultimately separate them from their true selves. This type of alienation would lead to what Kornhauser termed "totalitarian man", or the individual that was both self-alienated and group-centred (111). To this end, then, mass culture could be seen to be the thin edge of the wedge that would lead to a mass society and even totalitarianism. For this reason intellectuals of the postwar period placed such tremendous importance on cultural questions. If mass culture could break down traditional community affiliations and lead to the development of a more atomized and alienated population, then it would open the door to a form of mass society which was vulnerable to totalitarianism, a topic more concretely examined by postwar critics such as Hannah Arendt.

Hannah Arendt and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

The Cold War equation of nazism and communism through the use of the term totalitarianism to represent both, an equation which can be seen in Kornhauser's work, owed a great deal to the writing of Hannah Arendt. Arendt's 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* — which Pells has termed the "political masterpiece of the postwar era" (84) — appeared at the height of the Cold War while the Korean War was still being waged. It helped to define the New York Intellectuals' concern with the problems of mass society. Arendt argued that three movements in the nineteenth-century had converged to construct the totalitarian mind and that each of these developments was indicative of the collapse of the European class structure and nation state. The three developments which Arendt singled out were the rise of anti-Semitism, overseas imperialism and tribal nationalism. For Arendt the primary concern with mass societies was the fact that the

masses were comprised of superfluous men who sought to combine with a force greater than themselves in order to make sense of their lives. She thus argued that totalitarianism has always been preceded by mass movements and required mass support in order to be fully realized as a social force (Arendt 1951:301). Unlike the aristocratic critics of the nineteenth-century, Arendt did not believe that the masses were the result of the spread of democracy, education and lowered cultural standards but rather saw the rise of the mass as a result of social atomization that found its origins in the end of the clearly defined class structure and the rise of the cult of the individual and individualist philosophies (310). Thus Arendt defined totalitarian movements as "mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member" (316). If totalitarianism was made possible by the mobilization of the atomized individual, therefore, any threat to the realization of the individual as a force integrated into a democratic and pluralist society was potentially totalitarian.

Pells has suggested that Arendt was welcomed among the New York Intellectuals upon her arrival in 1941 because her intellectual pre-occupations were the same as those of her new colleagues generally, and she confirmed the worst suspicions about fascism that were already held by the group (84, 90). Arendt's contribution to the postwar discussions of mass society and totalitarianism, therefore, had the effect of convincing American intellectuals that there was merit in returning to the conservative values of the nineteenth-century in order to repair the decomposition of society. Moreover, with fascism defeated during the war, intellectuals considered the primary totalitarian threat to American democracy in the 1950s to be the Soviet Union. To counter this threat *Partisan Review*, *Commentary* and other journals of the New York Intellectuals aligned themselves with American foreign policy and the theory of containment proposed by George Kennan, which provided the theoretical basis for the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and the

NATO Alliance (Pells 1985:101). On questions of foreign policy, therefore, it was the choice of a preponderance of intellectuals in the postwar period to join with the new American consensus, which sought to oppose the spread of communism abroad and curtail it at home, by challenging the components of the mass society. Crucial to that challenge would be a new conception of the American individual and a re-thinking of the individual's role in the social structure. This postwar re-examination of the social character of the average American was led by critics such as David Riesman, William Whyte and C. Wright Mills, who together provided a foundational critique of postwar American social character.

The Crisis of the Individual

As American intellectuals fell into line with new orthodoxies relating to matters of foreign policy, more than ever intellectual debates shifted to questions about domestic policy and the nature of the American character. Following the revival of the production economy of the 1940s, the postwar period became increasingly marked by cycles of consumption as the new markers of social distinction. At the same time, the end of the war helped to de-emphasize the need for communities to pull together and placed a new premium on individualism as a virtue. William Graebner summarized the way that the intellectual position had shifted over time:

> Many intellectuals, disturbed by the growth of bureaucracy, by cultural homogenization, and by the dangers they perceived in a burgeoning mass culture, were much more interested in challenges to individual autonomy than in making critiques, as they had in the 1930s, of the unequal distribution of wealth and the condition of the working class under capitalism. (Graebner 1991:9)

At the same time postwar centralization accelerated the decline of regional and folk cultures and helped to augment an affirmation of the culture of the whole, or a focus on America as a nation generally rather than as specific aggregates of populations and cultures (Graebner 1991:76). As prosperity increased, the middle-class population segment was increasingly regarded by critics as a stand-in for the entire nation, or at least the most significant part of

it. Not surprisingly, therefore, the 1950s saw the publication of a vast quantity of books addressing the status of the middle-class in America and their perceived problems. These books assumed, as Pells has observed, that the institutional processes of capital accumulation and modernization had been completed, and consequently addressed themselves to questions which lacked the type of institutional solution which had been the subject of debate in the 1930s. Instead intellectuals opted to criticize the social order in the United States, not because it was oppressive but because it was deemed impersonal and bureaucratic (Pells 1985:186). As intellectuals turned their attention in the postwar period to a survey of the "plight of the privileged" (Pells 1985:186), they emphasized a new search for the American identity which would resist conformity. As the suburban housing boom exploded, intellectuals called on the middle-class to be subversive on questions of culture while retaining the new status quo in questions of politics.

The New Men: David Riesman and William Whyte

Two books stirred considerable soul-searching in the postwar period with their suggestion that mass society was in the process of creating new forms of identity in the United States. David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* both investigated the issue of personal freedom within what was seen as an increasingly restrictive and coercive social order. In *The Lonely Crowd*, for example, Riesman argued that "man is made by his society" and that there was an explicit and definable relationship between a society and the types of character which that society produces (1950:4-6). Riesman's definition of the three types of society producing three types of character — which he termed tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-directed — subtly condemned postwar America for its growing reliance on other-directed individuals. For the other-directed type, as Riesman defined him, relations with the world were mediated by mass communications, while contemporaries and colleagues became the source of social orientations and direction in personal behaviour (1950:21-5). The change

from the self-orienting inner-direction to the group-orienting other-directed personality type was, Riesman suggested, due in part to the fact that postwar America was increasingly consumption oriented. With additional leisure time and disposable income Americans had witnessed the quickening rise of mass culture entertainments to fill that time and conspicuous consumption had been socialized (Riesman 1954:228). Despite the fact that he did not fully share many of his fellow intellectuals' fears about mass entertainments Riesman's suggestion that modern popular culture taught the value of group-mindedness and trained audiences in consumer orientation and group adjustment (1950:169) was remarkably consistent with the collective intellectual belief that the greatest domestic threat facing Americans following the war were other Americans.

William Whyte similarly sounded the alarm about the potentially negative impact of the group on the individual in his 1956 book *The Organization Man.* In that volume Whyte argued that the collectivization of the corporation had led to the development of a new form of organizational life which conflicted with the American heritage rooted in the Protestant Ethic. Whyte termed this new form of organization the Social Ethic and identified its major tenets as belief in the group as the source of creativity, belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual and belief that science has the tools to achieve belongingness (7). In tracing the history of the rise and fall of the Protestant Ethic in America, Whyte suggested that it had been indispensable for the rise of capitalism but had been slowly whittled away by intellectuals writing at the end of the nineteenth-century and then undermined by the rise of Freudianism and pragmatism which had contributed to the dream of a perfectible society (20-22). The Social Ethic which was the new orthodoxy of the American corporation stressed togetherness and group work at the expense of the individual and suggested that a harmonious atmosphere might be created by the elimination of individualism altogether. Whyte suggested that the apotheosis of this type of false collectivization could be found in the new living arrangements in the suburbs. As a new social institution the suburbs were the culmination of the Social Ethic in which adaptation to

the group became the only normative value and a generation of businessmen was converted into a generation of technicians (392-394). For Whyte all of these changes were toward the negative. Like so many intellectuals in the postwar period he stressed the importance of personal liberty in opposition to the group. Similarly, for Riesman, the optimal position was with the autonomous man who manifested the ability to choose. Both of these texts argued in favour of a reform of individual patterns of behaviour rather than for broad-based social change at the institutional or social level. Pells has argued that the suggestion that there was no need in the postwar period to alter the political or economic system — despite the continuing existence of gross inequality in the United States — helped intellectuals to obscure the relationship between social structure and personal discontent (Pells 1985:248). It is crucial to note the degree to which the New York Intellectuals and other postwar commentators had abandoned the possibility that large scale reform to America's social institutions remained necessary following the end of the war and the emergence of a consumption economy.

C. Wright Mills and the Problems of the Middle-Class

One of the strongest indictments of postwar America was published in 1951 by the sociologist C. Wright Mills. *White Collar* depicted the American middle-class — a group to which 80% of Americans believed they belonged in 1948 (Graebner 1991:96) — as increasingly alienated at work and at play. Arguing that the class structure of the entire nation had changed and was on the brink of disappearing entirely Mills suggested that the white collar worker, who was somebody's man but not his own, was on his way to becoming the typically American individual (Mills 1951:xii-xv). Moreover, Mills suggested that it was the mass society decried by so many of the postwar intellectuals that was shaping the white collar worker to its "alien ends" (xvi). For Mills the historical position of the American middle-class resided in its status as the ballast which held the economy in a more or less stable position. Prior to the twentieth-century the majority of Americans —

particularly farmers — owned the land upon which they worked and the small entrepreneurial world was essentially self-balancing and required no central authority in order to function effectively (9). In the twentieth-century, however, the American farmer had become the victim of the rise of American capitalism, as changes to structures of farm ownership and leaps in efficiency in the 1920s and 1930s led to an ongoing decline of farmers who owned their own farms. This signalled the end of the era of dominance by the small entrepreneur in the American economy as the business world became increasingly polarized into a division of large industrial concerns and small retail firms (15-24). Thus, over the space of a single century, Mills argued, the basis for the American economy had been radically transformed and Americans had moved from being small capitalists to employees of much larger industrial firms (34). The new economic organization in which more and more Americans found themselves occupying waged labour positions in large corporate concerns led, Mills suggested, to the development of a new social hierarchy. The new middle-class was comprised of the perhaps 80% of the working population who worked for the wealthiest two or three per cent of the population. This new salaried class was not primarily linked to production but to distribution in the increasingly bureaucratized system of economic management (63-68).

The primary impact of this new form of economic organization on life in the United States was to change the political relations in the country and enable the emergence of a mass society which posed political dangers. Liberalism, Mills argued, sought to enlarge political rights and the ability of individuals to act politically (324). Yet in a postwar era of increasing affluence more and more people were becoming politically alienated. Mills suggested that one of the reasons for this development was the arrival of the mass media which interceded between consciousness and existence (333). If mass communication influenced the consciousness of existence by expropriating the vision of the individual, Mills argued, it did so in such a way as to trivialize serious political issues in its efforts to personalize and accentuate mythologies of individual success (335-336). While Mills

suggested that the mass media interfered with the development of liberal political relations, the deeper cause of political alienation resided in the centralization of political power in the United States over time. He suggested that because the United States had survived the war relatively unscathed and then entered into a period of economic growth, the country lacked the type of economic resentments which in other nations had blossomed into ideological conflicts and aided in the development of political movements. Lacking homogeneity and specifically unified class interests, therefore, the new American middle-class of the postwar period had not developed into a basis for real political strength that could demand broad social reforms (340-351). Ultimately Mills' argument, like those of Riesman and Whyte, was suggestive of the degree to which postwar intellectuals conceptualized the primary domestic problem of the era as bureaucratization, centralization and the determination of individuals to surrender at least part of their identities to newly emergent groups and social organizations. That this critique of group organization on the domestic front coincided easily with a suspicion of the collectivized Soviet Union goes almost without saying. It seemed that on every front the postwar reality called for a rejection of collective organization and social change and a championing of the lone individual standing firm against the perils presented by the mass media, mass movement and mass man. When combined with an acceptance of American foreign policies as they related to the Cold War, these elements would come to define the so-called new consensus in the postwar period.

The New Consensus

The combination of Cold War anti-communism on matters relating to foreign affairs and domestic anxiety over the effects of group-mindedness, bureaucracy and mass culture on the domestic front ultimately came to be referred to as the "consensus perspective" in postwar American thought. Notably, it was the consensus intellectuals who were profiled by *Time* in its 1956 cover story, and it was this group which dominated intellectual

discussions through the 1950s as both the media effects paradigm and the study of communications were beginning to gain momentum. What Graebner has identified as the postwar intellectual's loss of faith in history and abandonment of the progress model of human development (Graebner 1991:48) formed the backdrop for Fredric Wertham's discussion of comic books, the mass media and the nature of human violence, despite the fact that on most serious questions Wertham departed from the new consensus orthodoxies of the period. The new consensus notion that America's lasting heritage was one of pragmatism and unfettered economic growth was foregrounded by writers such as Daniel Bell who suggested that the combination of social science and modern technology would allow the United States to realize a frontier of abundance and end competition over scarce resources. Bell's major statement on the new consensus, 1960's *The End of Ideology*, summarized many of the most common points of agreement between intellectuals in this period but also tried to move beyond many of the arguments made earlier in the decade. Bell argued, for instance, that the theory of the mass society had become the most influential theory in the Western world but that it had led to a great deal of unnecessary moralizing (Bell 1960:21-30). Bell suggested that there was no real threat of domestic totalitarianism in the United States because the nation's long history of volunteerism and service organizations mediated between the individual and the state (31). Moreover, he suggested in distinction to other intellectuals of the period, that the level of conformity was less than it had been in the past, not greater (35). Bell's celebration of American pluralism — coupled with his belief that the Soviet Union was the greatest threat to freedom in the postwar period (297) — allowed him to conclude, as his title suggested, that ideology had arrived at a dead end and that the process of putting ideas into action had been displaced by the coming of a "consensus on political issues" (373).

The consensus which Bell described and saw himself as a part of has been subsequently condemned by historians of the period. Pells, for instance, sees in the history of radical intellectuals from the 1920s and 1930s reconciliation with American foreign

policy following the war and the development of a unified domestic policy in the 1950s, a narrative which depicts a loss of faith or capitulation to the powers that be (Pells 1985:116-117). By the 1950s, Pells suggested, the dominant intellectuals no longer saw themselves as critics but rather adopted the role of explicators, justifying society rather than challenging it. The increasingly conservative tone of postwar intellectualism can be seen in the new journals and organizations which had their start in the 1950s, such as the Committee for Cultural Freedom and its journal, *Encounter*. Subsequently revealed to have been funded by the CIA the CCF formed a nucleus of anti-communist intellectuals in the 1950s that included David Riesman, Daniel Bell, Sidney Hook and other prominent New York Intellectuals (Pells 1985:130). As these writers increasingly turned away from economic explanations for problems in American life in the postwar period they increasingly took up discussions which were rooted in politics, psychology and morality. The critique of mass culture which reached a fevered pitch during this era — and which found its fullest expression in the writings of many of the consensus intellectuals — can be seen in this light as a strategy to continue a facade of critique while at the same time arguing in favour of the pluralistic status quo. Significantly both Bell and Irving Howe argued that the critique of the mass media stood in for a critique of the American way of life which did not require a challenge to the country's political or economic institutions (Pells 1985:218).

If this is true then it demonstrates the great difference between the New York Intellectuals and Fredric Wertham. It may be, as I argued in the first chapter, that Wertham's critique of mass culture on aesthetic grounds was broadly influenced by the ongoing critique of mass culture that dominated American cultural thought in the twentieth-century and which found its apotheosis in the writings of the New York Intellectuals. However, it nonetheless remains to be noted the degree to which his conclusions on questions of politics and the prospects for wide scale social change were at odds with the new consensus in the 1950s. Wertham's writings in this period, including his condemnations of mass culture, did not seek to foster a new individualism but argued for a

greater connection between the individual and society. Wertham's conception of a social psychiatry which would examine the individual as a member of various forms of social organization, from the family through to the community, is suggestive of the degree to which he cannot be easily placed within a discursive framework dominated by intellectuals whose primary concern was a fear of institutional bureaucracies. While the dominant intellectuals of the period attempted, as Pells noted, to obscure the relationship between the social structure and personal problems (Pells 1985:248) Wertham made a point of constantly stressing that connection.

To demonstrate the degree to which Wertham was not simply a failed New York Intellectual, but actually adopted a critique of mass culture that should be regarded as existing in opposition to prevailing orthodoxies, it is necessary to pay attention to the ways in which he similarly departed from the postwar consensus on the major political issues of the day. To this end, therefore, Wertham's contributions to the significant postwar debates on two notable foreign and domestic policy issues of the early-1950s will be contrasted with the positions of the postwar intellectuals: the Rosenberg executions of 1953 as a foreign policy issue and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954 as a domestic policy concern. These two issues point to the degree to which Wertham was at odds with the dominant orthodoxies of the time and help to lay the groundwork for his critique of mass culture, which was rooted in a progressive liberalism as it was on the wane following the end of the Second World War. Similarly, Wertham's major statement on the nature of human violence and the prospects for widespread social reform, *A Sign for Cain*, will be taken into consideration in order to stress the degree to which his theory differed from the postwar consensus.

The Case of Ethel Rosenberg

Certainly one of the most important touchstones of the postwar debates about American domestic and foreign policy was the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, sentenced to death for espionage in 1951 and executed on 19 June 1953. Throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s the Truman administrations had made the persecution of communists and suspected-communists a hallmark of its foreign policy. In March 1947, for instance, Truman had authorized the FBI to check the loyalty of all federal employees, a move which was endorsed by a number of prominent intellectuals including Bell, Hook and Leslie Fiedler (Pells 1985:269). In July 1948 twelve leaders of the Communist Party were tried under the Smith Act of 1940 — which made it a crime to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States government — and ultimately convicted. The convictions were upheld by the Supreme Court in 1951, thus rendering the Communist Party impossible to join because the Court had essentially ruled that the Party was a conspiracy. In 1948 Alger Hiss was tried for treason and, after a mistrial, ultimately convicted at a second trial in 1950. By 1949 twenty-two states required loyalty oaths for teachers. It was within this climate of persecution and hysteria, therefore, that the Rosenbergs would be judged: first by a jury and secondly by the intellectuals who had made anti-communism the driving force of American thought in the 1950s.

The Rosenbergs were arrested in 1950 on information provided to the government by David Greenglass, a co-conspirator and Ethel Rosenberg's brother. The couple was convicted in 1951 at the height of the Korean War and the apex of Cold War hysteria. At the sentencing the presiding judge in the case argued that by providing the Soviet Union with the secrets to the atom bomb the Rosenbergs should be held personally responsible for the 50,000 American casualties in the Korean conflict. The pair were separated and sentenced to death, able to see each other only when meeting with their lawyers. In the years between their conviction and execution the couple corresponded by letter and a highly edited selection of 187 of these letters were published in June 1953 — the month of the execution — as *The Death House Letters*. It was this volume of letters which attracted

critical commentary from Leslie Fiedler and Robert Warshow, spotlighting the position of the New York Intellectuals with regard to the Rosenbergs. Fiedler's essay, originally published in the first issue of the Committee for Cultural Freedom's journal *Encounter*, argued that there were two Rosenberg cases: the legal trial of March 1951 and the symbolic trial which had begun subsequent to the conviction. Fiedler suggested that while the Rosenberg's legal guilt had been established in the court of law, the Rosenbergs had won the symbolic case because many liberals and fellow-travelers had been swayed by the humane plea on their behalf (Fiedler 1952:27-33). Fiedler, however, was not swayed. Reading their letters he condemned the couple for their tendency to see themselves as clichés, suggesting that the letters were "too absurd to be tragic" (38). For Fiedler the Rosenbergs' biggest crime was the fact that even after the conviction they did not confess, even to each other. Thus he condemned them for the fact that "they failed in the end to become martyrs or heroes, or even men" (45). If Fiedler stripped the couple even of their humanity, Warshow felt that they deserved no better. Warshow condemned the Rosenbergs for the fact that they had no internal sense of their own being. This was evidenced, he argued, by their false and awkward relationship to culture which marked them as inextricably middlebrow and insincere (Warshow 1962:37-40). The Rosenberg's inauthenticity stemmed, Warshow argued, from the fact that the couple believed whatever their politics required them to think. In this sense the Rosenbergs were indicative of the new personality types found in a mass society, "people of no eloquence and little imagination" (43). For the New York Intellectuals, therefore, the Rosenbergs were conveniently dismissed through an appeal to existing ways of conceptualizing American society and its culture. Their letters written while imprisoned bore all the marks of the middlebrow, and their very middle-ness was cast as their ultimate crime against the Cold War consensus.

In an essay on the relationship between the Rosenbergs and the New York Intellectuals, David Suchoff has justified Hannah Arendt's silence on the Rosenberg

question despite her condemnations of the growing anti-communist hysteria of the period by suggesting that she "would indeed have been courageous to support them publicly" (Suchoff 1995:160). It can be said, then, that Fredric Wertham was courageous not only to support the couple publicly but to actively work on their behalf and on behalf of their two young sons. In 1951 Wertham was asked to examine the imprisoned Ethel Rosenberg because it was feared that her solitary confinement as the sole female death row inmate in Sing Sing might contribute to a nervous breakdown. Wertham met with Rosenberg and evaluated her case:

> There was no doubt that she was in a bad way. She was evidently a courageous woman, but the strain of being isolated in the Death House was becoming too much for her. Except for a guard she was kept all alone in an entire building and could not see or speak to any other person from morning to night. ... Aggravating her emotional state was the mental torture she was exposed to. The electric chair was used as psychological pressure: it was a matter of talk or die; if you'd only "name names" their lives could be spared and she could save her husband's life. ... In my testimony ... I stated that if the absolute separation of husband and wife were to continue so that Mrs. Rosenberg could not confer with her husband there was a definite and strong probability that she would break down and develop a prison psychosis. ... within a few days after my testimony Washington reversed itself. Mr. Rosenberg was transferred ... to the Death House in Sing Sing. After visiting with her husband, Mrs. Rosenberg's depression lifted and her spirits revived. (in Meeropol 1975:59)

Wertham's conception of Ethel Rosenberg as a "courageous woman" tortured by the state could not be further removed from the condemnations of her as the quintessentially inauthentic middlebrow voiced by Warshow and Fiedler. That Wertham placed his career in the public health sector in jeopardy through his willingness to work with Ethel Rosenberg is evidenced not only by the scandal-mongering press that swirled around the case — "Denies Favoring Soviet" was the headline reporting Wertham's testimony in the staid *New York Times* — but also by his recollections later in life.

He wrote, "Never in my life have I been blamed so much for anything I did as I have been for testifying for Mrs. Rosenberg. This happened not only with uneducated people but also with those who think of themselves as informed and liberal-minded. Some people even stopped talking to me!" (in Reibman 1990:16-17). Wertham's support for the Rosenberg's went beyond simply evaluating Ethel in Sing Sing and testifying on her

behalf, however. Wertham also examined the Rosenberg's children — then aged three and ten — at the Lafargue Clinic. There Wertham concluded that both Michael and Robert Rosenberg had been "severely traumatized" but that both had "positive emotional resources which warranted a good long-range prognosis" (Meeropol 1975:253). The Rosenberg's sons continued to see Wertham on a weekly basis for a "couple of years" and his recommendation was ultimately to have the boys adopted, change their names and place them in private schools in order to give them the best chance for normal lives (Meeropol 1975:254). These suggestions, like Wertham's recommendation regarding Rosenberg's treatment, were fully adopted by the boys' guardians.

While Wertham did not publish any articles specifically on his work with Ethel Rosenberg and her sons he nonetheless did not shy away from publicly discussing his participation in the cases altogether. In *A Sign for Cain*, for instance, Wertham's discussion of the ethics and morality of the death penalty touched on his involvement with the case. While arguing that the death penalty must be abolished because it was inhumane and immoral Wertham noted that "Capital punishment is particularly cruel when the law plays with the life of a prisoner, much like a cat playing with a mouse" (Wertham 1966:304). Wertham suggested that this form of game-playing came about when federal officials told Rosenberg that her life and that of their husband would be spared if she were to cooperate with the government. For Wertham this offer was indicative of the sorry state of American culture: "That two otherwise respected federal government officials should lend themselves to a you-talk-or-we-will-kill-you maneuver is understandable only if we realize how deeply violence as a method is entrenched in our society" (304). Similarly, the cruelty of the American legal system was put on display by the state's decision to execute the mother of two young boys: "We have closed-season hunting laws for animals while they bring up their young. This principle should be extended to humans" (304). This conclusion is, needless to say, totally at odds with the casual indifference to the executions found in the cold-hearted and condemning literary analyses provided by Fiedler and

Warshow. It should be recalled as well that as was pointed out in Chapter One both Fiedler and Warshow explicitly rejected Wertham's work on comic books in the harshest possible terms. Thus it would appear that there was a clear link between the strident and unfeeling anti-communism of the New York Intellectuals and their particular condemnations of the middlebrow mass culture and the more humanitarian sentiments of Wertham and his more idiosyncratic take on the problems presented by mass culture. This sort of opposition would reappear two years later in the differing responses of the New York Intellectuals and Wertham to the question of civil rights.

Brown v. Board of Education: Race in the Postwar Era

In *Partisan Review*'s 1952 "Our Country and Our Culture" seminar Max Lerner argued against pronouncements by the New York Intellectuals that America was moving toward becoming an increasingly classless society. He wrote:

> The image of an American "classless society" which crops up in the more lyric business pronouncements such as William H. Whyte, Jr. has so delightfully gathered, is largely NAM ammunition. What we have roughly is an open-class system, with a high degree of mobility still left in it despite its recent rigidities on top and bottom, and (as Riesman documents in *Faces in the Crowd*) with vast stores of new experience opened for all classes, especially the middle. We have a "democratic class struggle" still operative, in which the working class and its allies use every economic and political means to better their own position and the nation's welfare. Finally — and worst of all — how about our Negro population, whose treatment is the ugliest scar we bear? (Lerner 1952:583)

That Lerner brings "our Negro population" into the question at all was remarkable, for he was the only writer included in the seminar to acknowledge the possibility that the new classless American society and the new consensus might be in any way racially-based. While Lerner had faith that American democracy would be able to overcome the country's racial divisions, his surety was not universally held. Pells has suggested that after 1955 the American Cold War consensus began a long process of unraveling, and that one of the keys to the dissolution of the consensus lay with the fight for civil rights in the South. By 1955, for instance, the Montgomery bus boycott had called into question the idea that

American blacks in the South participated as equals in American democracy (Pells 1985:346). However, as the absence of discussion about race from the "Our Country and Our Culture" seminar demonstrated, few of the New York Intellectuals seemed to address questions pertaining to race or acknowledge the fact that the new "white collar" collectivity which was seen to dominate the 1950s was a form of social organization that was entirely white. Writing on Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* Andrew Hoberek has suggested that the author was in essential agreement with Whyte, Riesman, Mills and other postwar intellectuals who regarded the de-individualizing power of the organization with suspicion (Hoberek 1998:106). Hoberek went on to point out, however, that by 1961 a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics survey noted that "nonwhite workers" made up a scant 3.7 percent of the white collar work force, concluding that "white-collar culture did not simply reflect but helped generate the white-black racial schism in postwar United States" (107-108). The role of the intellectuals in perpetuating a social crisis in the United States which denied black Americans their fundamental civil rights can be brought to light by examining the social position occupied by black Americans outside of the postwar consensus.

The Colour of the Cold War

Manning Marable has suggested that there were two periods of reconstruction in the United States in which powerful visions of democracy and equality surfaced. The first followed the end of the Civil War when changes were made to America's social institutions, blacks were elected for the first time to both the House of Representatives and the Senate and changes were made to segregation laws in the North. This reconstruction came to an end in 1896 with the ratification of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision by the United States Supreme Court which ordained the "separate but equal" legal principle (Marable 1991:3-9). The second reconstruction, Marable argued, occurred with the changes that followed the Supreme Court's unanimous dismissal of the basis for the *Plessy* decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 17 May 1954, which helped to

usher in a new era of civil rights legislation. Still, despite that victory in the courts, change came slowly in the postwar period as many whites sought to avert the type of swift alteration to the social fabric which had accompanied the first era of reconstruction just as blacks pushed for long-delayed reforms to American social institutions (Marable 1991:11).

While Roosevelt's New Deal policies had provided opportunities for black advancement in the United States it was the Second World War which played a dominant role in demonstrating to blacks the urgency of attaining the freedoms for which they had so recently fought. Not only were returning black soldiers anxious to attain new freedoms but during the War the black population of the North had doubled as workers migrated from the South to fill jobs in wartime production. This shifting population density provided economic and political opportunities for black Americans which were translated into expectations for the future. Following the war new civil rights goals were set which included an end to job discrimination, the prosecution of lynchers, an abolition of the poll tax and an end to the separate but equal doctrine in the military, education and public housing (Lawson 1991:4). Groups dedicated to achieving these ends saw their numbers multiply. The NAACP, for instance, grew from 50,000 members in 1940 to 450,000 just six years later (Lawson 1991:9).

As blacks became an increasingly important political force in the North their votes were courted by the two major political parties. On racial issues Truman had been a compromise candidate in the 1944 election, but his privileging of Southern support in Congress for Cold War foreign policies over domestic civil rights led many blacks to move back to the Republicans — the party of Lincoln, and historically the party which blacks had supported — in the 1946 mid-term elections. At the same time polls indicated that Henry Wallace's support among the black population ran as high as 91 percent in 1946, a vote total which would have made his third party a major political force in the 1948 elections. Truman, who had refused to desegregate the military by decree and who had not endorsed the civil rights plank in the Democratic Party's 1948 election platform, took note of this

threat and, following the 1948 Democratic Convention ordered two civil rights acts. The first established a nondiscriminatory fair employment policy for the federal government and the other created a committee to promote equal opportunity in the armed forces with the ultimate goal of integration (Lawson 1991:32-36). As a result many Southern Democrats split from the party and supported Strom Thurmond's run for the presidency on the States' Rights ticket while Truman himself campaigned in Harlem and criticized Wallace's campaign for its "communist infiltration". In the end Truman secured 69 percent of the black vote in the 1948 election and helped secure black loyalty to the Democratic Party for years to come (Lawson 1991:38).

Despite the fact that black Americans overwhelmingly endorsed the Truman government in the 1948 election it is not clear that they benefited from the policies of the government, particularly as those policies related to the Cold War. Marable has suggested that "the impact of the Cold War, the anti-communist purges and near-totalitarian social environment, had a devastating effect upon the cause of blacks' civil rights and civil liberties" (18). As American business interests attempted to bolster their incomes by expanding global markets and curtailing labor costs at home they discovered that the Red Scare accomplished both. In 1947 the Truman administration spent $400 million to halt the spread of the political left in Turkey and Greece, while at the same time it began to investigate the federal bureaucracy for suspected communists. As individual states began to outlaw the existence of the Communist Party one effect was to ouster individuals who had been the most dedicated proponents of civil rights and desegregation (Marable 1991:18-20). As anti-racist unions were charged with being communist-infiltrated the CIO expelled more than one million members, thereby weakening both the drive for civil rights and the potential of American labor power (Plummer 1996:193). At the same time the Cold War enabled proponents of the status quo to argue that the possibility of rapid change posed a danger to the American way of life in light of the ongoing foreign policy interests in the promotion of the American way of life abroad. The foreign policy dictates of the Cold War

which were so aggressively endorsed by the New York Intellectuals , therefore, were instrumental in stalling the passage of meaningful civil rights legislation for more than a decade until the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Thus it is obvious that, by embracing the Cold War status quo on the foreign and domestic front and espousing the virtues of American pluralism as a curative for every institutional social problem in the United States, the leading postwar intellectuals turned a blind eye to the specific problems facing America's black population who remained outside of the promises of American democracy.

Wertham on Race

In Wertham's writings questions about race are inextricably linked to questions of violence, the overwhelming concern that runs through all of his life's work. Wertham's concern with the question of human violence formed the backbone of both his political and social thinking as well as his critique of mass culture, and he dedicated much of his working life as a psychiatrist to the elimination of violence from human relations. To address the practical question of violence in the community Wertham founded the Lafargue Clinic in Harlem in 1946 and the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center in New York in 1947, a pioneering clinic for the treatment of sex offenders. Each of these clinics was symptomatic of Wertham's desire to bring psychiatry into the community to counter-act the threat of violence and served as examples of Wertham's involvement with grass-roots organizations. Wertham had tried to generate funding for a clinic which could meet the psychiatric needs of the New York black community — who were often denied access to treatment in hospitals — since the mid-1930s, without success. In 1946, with the encouragement and advice of Earl Brown, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, he opened his clinic without governmental or philanthropic support in the basement of Harlem's St. Philips Episcopal Church. There a multi-racial volunteer staff of fourteen psychiatrists and twelve social workers sought to alleviate hostility in the community and better understand the reality of black life in urban America. Named after Dr. Paul Lafargue,

the Cuban-born black French physician who married Karl Marx' daughter, the Lafargue Clinic became a leading center in the promotion of civil rights in New York.

The Lafargue Clinic was widely celebrated and praised in the New York and national press of the late-1940s for its contribution to the amelioration of society. Ralph Ellison called the clinic one of Harlem's most important institutions and "an underground extension of democracy" (Ellison 1953:295). He stressed the degree to which the Lafargue Clinic's approach to psychiatry was at odds with dominant intellectual conceptions of the postwar American when he suggested that:

> the Lafargue Clinic rejects all stereotypes, and may be said to concern itself with any possible variations between the three basic social factors shaping an American Negro's personality: he is viewed as a member of a racial and cultural minority; as an American citizen caught in certain political and economic relationships; and as a modern man living in a revolutionary world. Accordingly, each patient, whether white or black, is approached dynamically as a being possessing a cultural and biological past who seeks to make his way toward the future in a world wherein each discovery about himself must be made in the here and now at the expense of hope, pain and fear — a being who in responding to the complex forces of America has become confused. (Ellison 1953:295).

This approach to the psychiatry which placed equal emphasis on the individual and the social world in which the individual lived was far removed from the mainstream of both psychiatric and general intellectual thought in the postwar period. The *New Republic* observed that Wertham and his associates at the clinic termed their approach "social psychiatry" to denote a form of psychiatry which understood the need to come to terms with a patient's economic and community life as well as the interior or psychological life (Martin 1946:798). At the same time the magazine stressed the uniqueness of not only the approach but even the desire to treat black patients in the United States at that time. In 1946 there were only eight black psychiatrists in the United States (Martin 1946: 798) and, according to *Time*, Harlem accounted for more than half of the juvenile delinquency cases in New York ("Psychiatry in Harlem" 1947:50) which made the decision to move to the area with the greatest need seem both logical and necessary. As a centre at which blacks could receive psychiatric counseling without an appointment — and for only a quarter, or

fifty cents if a psychiatrist was required to testify in court — the Lafargue Clinic clearly sought to spark genuine social change.

Ralph Ellison termed Wertham's clinic both a science laboratory and "an expression of forthright democratic action" (301). This coupling of progressive politics and science was a hallmark of Wertham's writings generally but never moreso than when he concerned himself with the status of blacks in postwar America. Wertham's name appeared frequently in the New York press as he chastised complacency on civil rights in New York throughout the 1950s. In 1951, for instance, Wertham testified that "segregation by custom" — or segregation brought about by administrative decisions fixing school boundaries — was as significant a problem in New York as was legally mandated school segregation in the South (Dale 1951:23) and he repeated the charges at the end of the decade when he accused the city of promoting segregated classrooms in its integrated schools (Kihss 1958:12). Similarly, Wertham regularly derided the hypocrisy and posturing which many intellectuals and critics substituted for concrete action on social change. A 1949 *Saturday Review of Literature* portrait of Wertham rendered the connection between race, democracy, intellectual posturing, anti-communism and the question of human violence explicit:

> At the recent Middlebury, Vt., conference to consider "a positive program for a democratic society" among many splendid observations "a spiritual ground swell" was noted. Typically, Dr. Fredric Wertham took out a box of brass tacks when his turn came to speak. What, he demanded, about the six innocent Negroes sentenced to death in Trenton? "If I were to go to them and say, 'There is a spiritual ground swell around you,' it wouldn't do much good. It's a problem of democracy to solve that! It isn't possible to discuss any program of democracy or peace on earth without discussion of violence. At present there is a condemnation of people who advocate the overthrow of the Government by violence. What the powers that be are really worried about are the people who advocate the overthrow of violence by government." (R.G. 1949:10)

Wertham's connection in this instance of racism and the legal system would find a fuller expression in his 1956 book, *The Circle of Guilt.*

Circle of Guilt closely resembled Wertham's previous criminal case histories — *Dark Legend* (1941) and *The Show of Violence* (1949) — insofar as it was a case study of a murder wherein he was the psychiatrist for the accused. It differed from its predecessors,

however, in the way in which it treated the crime not so much from a psychiatric perspective as a social perspective. The case under review in *The Circle of Guilt* was that of Frank Santana, a young Puerto Rican boy living in New York who was accused of killing a white boy named William Blankenship. The case was notorious in New York for its "senseless" nature and, as Wertham noted, the press coverage leading up to the trial drew out a number of racist preconceptions from the New York press. It was in *The Circle of Guilt* that Wertham first mentioned his structuring belief that violence and communication are the opposite of one another, and he did so by noting that Santana was "not accustomed to communicating" and that this had led him into involvement with a local Puerto Rican gang, The Navahos. According to Wertham, Santana's lack of communicative skills was a result of his shyness and his inward emotional life. Denied opportunities at school because of institutional racism Santana had largely stopped attending, choosing instead to go to the movies all day, every day. These movies, Wertham suggested, were used by Santana to fill the gaps in his emotional life and make up for his feelings of inferiority, feelings which Wertham suggested should have been addressed professionally early in his life. The lack of attention paid to Santana was indicative of a larger ethical problem in American society. Wertham contended that it was those individuals who had the least support from family, social networks and authorities that were most prone to juvenile delinquency. By abandoning Santana the schools and other social institutions had violated Santana's basic human rights to education, health and protection from harm, all things which Wertham held as the most fundamental rights of every child.

Published only two years after *Seduction of the Innocent*, his most sustained critique of mass culture, it is perhaps little surprise that Wertham dedicated an entire chapter of *The Circle of Guilt* to Frank Santana's relationship with comic books. Yet comic books were only one of the extrinsic factors addressed by Wertham in this book and, judged by the page count, the least important. Whereas typically the New York Intellectuals and other critics of mass culture in the new consensus would assign moral responsibility for

criminality to mass culture Wertham stressed a series of social factors which he found to be more pressing. Significantly Wertham dedicated a much larger chapter of the book to the history of Puerto Rico and its not-quite-colonial relationship to the United States in the 20th-century. Beginning with Columbus' discovery of the island in 1493 Wertham traced the history of the island through to its annexation during the Spanish/American war and its ongoing economic enslavement by the United States. Wertham noted, for instance, that half of Puerto Rico was unemployed or under-employed and that this had led to serious social ills. Puerto Ricans in the continental United States, Wertham continued, were not the cause of ethnic conflict but rather were the victims of it. Furthermore, he suggested that they did not cause social ills — like slums — but merely highlighted them. Ultimately Wertham concluded that Puerto Ricans in the United States had been ignored and disdained by social service agencies, abused by the courts and wrongly diagnosed by psychiatrists unable to see beyond their own prejudices. Wertham further suggested that such blatant anti-Puerto Rican racism lay at the root of gang activities. In this particular case he was sure of that fact. Moreover, he reported that the murder victim Blankenship, widely portrayed in the media of the day as an angelic boy minding his own business who had been murdered for no reason while on his way to the movies, was actually a member of the Red Wings, an anti-Puerto Rican gang. Santana, Wertham argued, had been defending himself from a tormentor when his gun went off, killing Blankenship, an action that the psychiatrist diagnosed as a "short-circuit reaction" rooted in his double-orientation in both violence and the fear of violence (183-185). Wertham concluded that Santana was not legally insane but, nonetheless, had a mentally disturbed sense of right and wrong which should supply background for clemency in his sentencing. Before the trial, however, Santana pled guilty to second degree murder and received a sentence of 25 years to life rather than face the potential death penalty for a conviction on a first degree charge. After the trial the District Attorney attempted to clarify the facts about the victim's status in a gang, a move which Wertham criticized as the heaping of abuse upon the victim after the drive to execute

Santana had failed. Blankenship, Wertham argued, was no more at fault than was Santana. The driving force behind the entire incident had been anti-Puerto Rican racism, something that neither of the boys had originated but which was the result of the culture of an adult society which should truly be indicted. Ultimately Wertham wrote his book on the case because he was unable to testify on Santana's behalf and therefore was unable to attempt to resolve the causes of this violence in the legal realm. He had taken the story to the public realm in the hope that the underlying basis for this tragedy could be addressed in that arena. Wertham's tendency to intrude into the space between the legal realm and public consciousness in this and other cases can be better seen in his intervention into the pressing question of school segregation and his important role in the fight to end that practice.

Wertham and *Brown v. Board of Education*

Certainly Wertham's single most important contribution to the lives of American blacks in the postwar era was his participation in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education.* As early as 1948 Wertham had decried the lack of substantive psychiatric work being done on the question of racism (Wertham 1948:497). In Wertham's estimation racism was at least as important as sex in the development of the personality, but while sex had been aggressively theorized by developmental psychologists racism was a virtually untouched subject. Wertham's interest in the topic can only have been further underscored by his acknowledgment that racism itself was motivated by social and economic factors that can only be understood historically. Consequently the study of racism provided an exceptional opportunity to promote the type of social psychiatry he had long advocated. In 1951 Wertham was contacted by the Delaware chapter of NAACP and asked if he would undertake a psychological study of the effects of school segregation on children. Wertham agreed and thirteen Delaware school-children were brought five times to the Lafargue Clinic from four locations in the state. There the psychiatrists and social workers took individual clinical case histories, conducted interviews and administered

standardized tests. The results of the findings by the Lafargue Clinic were presented by Wertham in October 1951 at the desegregation trial in Delaware. Delaware, as a North/South state whose schools were entirely segregated, was considered a key state by the NAACP in their battle against segregation. More importantly, the basis for the legal argument in the Delaware case differed from the arguments in the four other cases being heard simultaneously in various other states. In the other cases the plaintiffs alleged that the *Plessy*-derived policy of separate but equal was not itself a form of equality and was unconscionable. The Delaware case argued that segregation was not only unconscionable but injurious and that it constituted a public health problem.

Wertham's participation in the Delaware case came about because his work at the Lafargue Clinic made him extremely qualified to speak to the question of segregation as a public health crisis. Jack Greenberg, the lead lawyer for the Delaware case, later described Wertham as a "famous psychiatrist" who "cared deeply about discrimination" (Greenberg 1994:136). Wertham was one of several social scientists who agreed to testify on behalf of the plaintiffs in the case. Greenberg described the testimony of Otto Klineburg, Jerome Bruner and Kenneth Clark as having been reasonably routine and then continued by noting that "only Wertham's testimony was different than expected — he captivated the courtroom. The Viennese accent helped, but the impact came from what he had to say" (137). What Wertham had to say about the psychological effects of school segregation in his testimony was later published as an article in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* in 1952. In that article Wertham asserted that there were three distinct factors that could injure a child's life: personal factors, such as the family; infra-personal factors, those related to the physical constitution such as epilepsy; and supra-personal or social factors, of which racism was a particularly striking example. In the example of racism Wertham argued, based on his specific observations of the children from Delaware, that a neurosis was developed in children who attended segregated schools because they were unable to rationalize the fact of segregation. This inability stemmed from the fact that the adults

around them were unable to provide a sensible justification for the ongoing disparity of treatment under the law. Therefore the physical aspects of the school — that is, the lack of funds accorded to schools for blacks — were not the causative factor, but the very fact of segregation itself caused emotional harm. Moreover, because segregation was governmental policy children experienced it as a moral practice and were therefore unable to resist through appeal to the sense that someone bad was perpetrating a wrong because they had been led to understand that the government could not act immorally. Children therefore interpreted segregation as punishment by the government. When they realized that they themselves had done nothing wrong to deserve this punishment they rationalized that the fault must lie with the adults, their parents. This led to the development of chronic self-esteem problems within the community, particularly insofar as the problem of segregation itself was not episodic but was continuous and of long duration (Wertham 1952). Wertham's argument was supported, he argued a year later in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* (Wertham 1953), by the study of the children from the newly de-segregated Delaware schools. In the second study twenty-two children, including ten from the original study, were examined and it was concluded that not only did the children perform better at school but that the essential psychological conflict from which they suffered had been removed. This, Wertham concluded in *The Nation*, proved that it was possible to "single out one force from a complex structure of a child's emotional health" (Wertham 1954b:97). At the trial Wertham concluded with that very argument:

> Segregation in schools legally decreed by statute, as in the State of Delaware, interferes with the healthy development of children. It doesn't necessarily cause an emotional disorder in every child. I compare that with the disease of tuberculosis. In New York thousands of people have tubercle bacilli in their lungs — hundreds of thousands — and they don't get tuberculosis. But they do have the germ of illness in them at one time or another, and the fact that hundreds of them don't develop tuberculosis doesn't make me say, "never mind the tubercle bacillus; it doesn't harm people, so let it go" (in Greenberg 1994:139)

The decision handed down in the Delaware case on 1 April 1952 cited Wertham for its justification in favour of desegregating the state's schools when it accepted and repeated his testimony to the effect that "State enforced segregation is important, because it is 'clear

cut' and gives legal sanction to the differences, and is of continuous duration" (in Greenberg 1994:150). Greenberg recounted that Thurgood Marshall had termed Delaware "our best case" and suggested that its importance lay in the fact that because it was a victory at the state level it allowed a wedge to be driven into the solid foundation of segregation that might persuade the Supreme Court to follow the lead of the state court toward desegregation (151). When it was ultimately combined with similar — though lost — cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, DC in 1953 for final hearings before the United States Supreme Court the Delaware decision became the template upon which the American school segregation, and by extension the legal basis for the *Plessy v. Ferguson* separate but equal doctrine in all matters of public life in America, were thrown out. Despite the fact that the Court's ruling that schools should be desegregated "with all deliberate speed" allowed for a great deal of stalling at the state level — in 1956-57 more than 3,000 school districts were still segregated (Marable 1991:41) — the fact remains that the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was one of the most important moments in the postwar drive toward civil rights. Years later Wertham would recall his participation in the de-segregation efforts and praise the Supreme Court decision of 1954 as "one of the most momentous decisions of the high court in this century" (Wertham 1976:508) while decrying the fact that so many liberals of the day had refused to get involved and had refused to testify that school segregation was harmful for children. It is around this case, therefore, that the distinction between Wertham and other intellectuals of the postwar period can be clearly drawn. The degree to which Wertham's position on desegregation was not simply an aberrational difference between himself and the New York Intellectuals but was symptomatic of a much wider divide can be seen by turning to the fullest statement of Wertham's social philosophy, his 1966 book *A Sign for Cain*.

A Sign for Cain: Wertham's Vision of Social Change

On social and political issues the clearest demarcation between Wertham and the intellectuals who dominated the postwar period can be found in a comparison of his 1966 book *A Sign for Cain* with the best known work of the period. In many ways *A Sign for Cain* was the culmination of Wertham's thinking. Whereas his earlier books dealt with either psychiatry and the legal system or the relationship between mass culture and juvenile delinquency this particular volume incorporated all of his previous work and then expanded upon it in order to present a unified thesis on the nature of human violence and the potential for its eradication through social psychiatry. The book itself was widely reviewed in the fall of 1966, and the reviews fell into two categories: the extremely positive and the extremely negative. Among the positive reviews were short reviews from *The Christian Century* which called it "disturbing" and "well-documented" ("This Week" 1966:1116), *Publisher's Weekly* who suggested that it would be of wide interest to community leaders ("October 26" 1966:87-88) and *The Library Journal* which suggested that "it should be recommended to every person who can read" (De Rosis 1966:4678). The *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, on whose editorial board Wertham served at the time, predicted that the book would become "a classic in this field" (Meerloo 1968:116) and compared it to Lorenz' *On Aggression* for its timely comments on violence. The comparison to Lorenz' work was reiterated by a number of other reviewers and critics, though far less favorably. *The New York Times*, for instance, reviewed the book alongside Robert Ardrey's *The Territorial Imperative*, a book which drew on Lorenz' research in order to suggest that aggression was an innate factor in biology. The paper suggested that, in light of the newer arguments from Lorenz and Ardrey, Wertham's contributions to the field seemed "hopelessly dated" (Fremont-Smith 1966:41). Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* compared *A Sign for Cain* to Ardrey's book and flatly rejected Wertham's thesis, pessimistically remarking "We believe the seed of violence to be ineradicable from man's nature, and therefore its flow to be

ineradicable from society" (Fuller 1966:18). In a lengthy review *The Saturday Review of Literature* adopted the same line when it suggested that Wertham overstated the cultural factors involved in human violence when he rejected the thesis that aggression was innate (Fox 1966:40). *America* chastised Wertham for his failure to promote the Cold War agenda by criticizing the Soviet Union and China, ultimately concluding that his book displayed the "slapdash staccato of a hysterical Sunday supplement crusade" (Muhlen 1966:353). The polarized reactions to Wertham's book were atypical given the fact that each of his previous efforts had been enthusiastically received by the critics. Thus they point to the fact that his views were, as the *New Statesman* pointed out, "unfashionable" in the postwar period and at odds with the dominant thinking about the possibilities of widespread social reform (Lethbridge 1967:688).

A Sign for Cain was essentially a sociological history of violence in Western culture, and as such it focused on the effect of political tyrannies on the shaping of human relations, the medical and legal legitimization of violence and its acceptance as a human value. Wertham opened the book by suggesting that postwar America had become an age of violence and that America lived in a violence economy in which the philosophy of success at any price had taken hold and culminated in a complete disrespect for human life. Throughout the volume the constant background was Wertham's double thesis: that there was more violence in the postwar era than at any time in human history; and that that violence could be ended (13). Wertham's fundamental belief in the educatability of humanity structured this twin argument and formed the basis for his rejection of the argument, proposed by Lorenz and others, that human violence was innate or natural (17). Wertham rejected arguments made by theorists rooted in neuropathology which suggested, following evidence from animal psychology, that the natural mental state for humanity was aggression. Similarly, Wertham rejected the anthropological notion that there was once a golden age of non-violence in human pre-history. Wertham refused to romanticize a mythological past, instead choosing to draw the reader's attention to a history of mutilation,

torture, infanticide, slavery and human sacrifice, all of which grew out of the social conditions and institutions of the past. For Wertham there was never a romantic past to be held up as utopian and from which humanity could be seen to have fallen from grace. Rather, the era of non-violence was always located in a scientifically produceable future (26).

It is in *A Sign for Cain* that Wertham spent the greatest amount of time dealing directly with what he considered to be the social causes of violence. Amongst these were the political climates of fascism and colonialism, each of which were, in his estimation, political systems utterly dependent on violence and the threat of violence. He argued that each found its basis not in the psychology of individual leaders — a common assertion that Wertham found absurd — but in the logic of capitalism. He therefore made great efforts to enumerate, for instance, the economic underpinnings of Nazism. Racism was described by Wertham as a form of potential violence closely akin to colonialism. Furthermore, he suggested that racism was generally utilized as the rationalization in the psychological preparation for administrative mass killings such as in the Holocaust. Complacence about racism, Wertham suggested, was fundamentally a complacence about violence. The concept of the administrative mass murder drove the logic of a great deal of Wertham's theory. He suggested, for instance, that the euthanasia project undertaken during the Second World War by German psychiatrists, in which as many as 275, 000 patients were put to death, constituted a new and completely unforeseen era of human cruelty and disregard for human life. Wertham found at the ideological base of this type of atrocity a belief in Malthusianism, a nineteenth-century philosophy of eugenics and population control which Wertham regarded as tremendously dangerous because of its casual disregard for the sanctity of life and the ease with which it could be tied into racist and genocidal thinking.

In the end Wertham turned towards a discussion of what could be done to end the culture of violence and it was at this point that his particular politics were brought into

sharpest relief. Discussing the idea of capital punishment Wertham traced the history of the death penalty back to its origins as a form of exorcism or purification through to what he held to be its contemporary function as a weapon held in reserve for opponents of the contemporary political or economic organization of society. Wertham suggested that the act of political murder and the use of capital punishment were only narrowly divided and he suggested that it was incumbent on society to abolish the death penalty because it was inhumane and immoral. At the same time he acknowledged that the death penalty did indeed function as a deterrent as its proponents claim, but saw this deterrent as a mode of institutionalized terrorism. On the question of non-violent resistance Wertham's liberalism was at odds with many of the orthodoxies of the 1960s. In tracing the history of non-violence, from Etienne de la Boétie through to Gandhi, Wertham departed from popularly held philosophies of non-violence, particularly those of Gandhi, Tolstoy and Lao Tse which were located in a disdain for technology and science. Instead Wertham suggested that the role of non-violence was limited and historically determined, and that it could never function as a panacea, and that the elevation of non-violence to an absolute moral position only served the interests of oppression. To this end Wertham suggested, for instance, that the Spanish Civil War was a legitimate response to Spanish fascism. Wertham's conditional endorsement of non-violence was rooted in his belief that a link between violence and the social and institutional life of a society was required for the causes of violence to be eliminated. The elimination of violence was a goal which Wertham held to be reachable in the long-run because he fundamentally ascribed to a belief in the power of human progress. To accomplish this, however, it was incumbent on society to look at the general influences and specific agencies of violence in detail. Wertham concluded *A Sign for Cain* by suggesting that there were two paths toward the cessation of violence. The peace movement sought to stop wars at all cost while the social justice movement sought to alter social and economic conditions on a global scale. Wertham suggested that the end of wars should be the result rather than the aim of progressive activists and that the two paths

must somehow meet. Importantly Wertham insisted that there was no panacea or master plan, such as Marxism, which would insure the triumph of a non-violent world. What was required, he insisted, was a scientific disinterestedness to resist both the hyperindividualization which has undermined social institutions, including psychiatry, and the hypernationalism which had erected artificial barriers between people. Thus Wertham's politics could best be seen to exist as a near total rejection of the thinking of the New York Intellectuals at the point where questions of politics and social change entered into the picture.

Conclusion

Wertham's disdain for individualistic conceptions of human interaction and his call for a more thorough-going understanding of the interaction between individuals and the social structure were not simply out of fashion with the New York Intellectuals in the postwar period but were actually in opposition to their way of conceptualizing postwar American society and the individual's place within it. Crucially in *A Sign for Cain* Wertham condemned the culture of "getting ahead" individualism and the acquisitive society that was fetishized by postwar intellectuals as the key to all of America's social problems. Because he never wrote on the subject it is impossible to suggest with any certainty that Wertham was a supporter of Henry Wallace's brand of liberalism, nonetheless it is possible to note the many areas of overlap between Wertham and the progressive liberalism represented by Wallace and undercut by American intellectuals as they embraced the Cold War consensus. In the first instance many of Wertham's associates — such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Paul Robeson — were supporters of Wallace, and Wertham shared with these men a concern that civil rights had been shunted aside by the Cold War. Similarly, Wertham's work with Ethel Rosenberg demonstrated that he was not afraid to take principled decisions in the face of red-baiting. Indeed, Wertham himself refused to indulge in Cold War condemnations of countries perceived to be America's enemies but, like

Wallace, actually criticized the failure of the United States to communicate with those nations. In *A Sign for Cain*, for instance, Wertham suggested that when the Soviet Union sent the first woman into space the United States unnecessarily derided an accomplishment that should have been seen as an emancipatory moment for all women (Wertham 1966:53). Wertham's refusal to condemn the Soviets — a tendency for which he was criticized — is indicative of the degree to which his politics were at odds with the norms of his day.

Furthermore, those political differences are suggestive of the reasons why the New York Intellectuals were so quick to dismiss his work on mass culture to which — on the surface at least — they might otherwise have been sympathetic. Despite the fact that Wertham and the postwar critics shared a disdain for mass culture they could find no point of agreement on the larger question of why mass culture was a particular danger. For the New York Intellectuals the problem was that mass culture could lead the United States toward totalitarianism. For Wertham the problem had much more to do with the psychological inter-relationship between the individual and society, a relationship which can best be understood by examining his idiosyncratic definition of "social psychiatry".

Chapter Three:
The Development of American Psychiatry

Fredric Wertham opened a January 1953 article in the *Saturday Review* with this observation: "At present this nation has more psychoanalysts — and incidentally more murders and more comic books — than any other two or three nations combined" (Wertham 1953c:16). More succinctly than any other single sentence this statement summarized Wertham's preoccupations in the postwar period. The conjunction of psychoanalysis, human violence and mass culture lay at the heart of his thinking at this point in history. Moreover, it was virtually impossible for him to separate these interests one from the other. To come to terms with Wertham's thinking on the effects of mass culture as they related to human violence it is necessary to first come to terms with the particular ways in which his approach to the study of the mass media was informed by his career as a psychiatrist. In *White Collar* C. Wright Mills argued that the postwar psychoanalytic literature promising peace of inner mind fit the "alienating process that has shifted from a focus on production to consumption" (Mills 1951:283). This was a concern which Wertham shared. He rejected those aspects of Freudianism which drew heavily on conservative or aristocratic critics of the mass such as Gabriel Tarde and Gustave LeBon and advanced in their stead a conception of "social psychiatry" which placed equal emphasis on the biological, familial and societal influences on mental illness (Wertham 1963b:410). Indeed, it is impossible to come to terms with *Seduction of the Innocent*'s clinically-based intervention into the media effects debates without acknowledging Wertham's unorthodox position in postwar psychiatry. To achieve that understanding, this chapter will examine the history of psychoanalysis and psychiatry in the United States during the first half of the twentieth-century in order to suggest the ways in which psychoanalytic thought both reinforced and undercut the mass society thesis and the critique of mass culture. At stake, then, is the need to position the psychoanalytic and

psychiatric writings of Fredric Wertham within the history of American psychiatry. I suggest that the ways in which Wertham negotiated the intellectual and professional paradigms of psychiatry are suggestive of the ways in which he similarly negotiated those of media effects and the critique of mass culture. By examining Wertham's relationship to pre- and postwar psychoanalysis and psychiatry a foundation will be laid for understanding his specific divergences from the dominant media effects paradigm as it emerged in the field of communication studies.

Freud and the Origins of Psychoanalysis

The history of psychoanalysis is intricately and inextricably linked to the biography of a single man, Sigmund Freud. Trained as a medical doctor who specialized in neurology Freud was unable to find a job at a university because he was Jewish. Forced to find work elsewhere he began to see neurotic patients and to search for ways to cure them. Psychoanalysis, a term which Freud coined in 1896, is largely a result of these efforts. Psychoanalysis itself is an attempt to explain human behaviour by examining the individual generally and the unconscious mind specifically. Psychoanalytic theory is based primarily on a small number of detailed case studies assembled by Freud. Because he rejected diagnostic tests and opted only to utilize a patient's conscious statements in analysis, Freud's methods failed to live up to scientific standards for testing validity. Instead, Freud relied on a "talking cure" methodology developed by his colleague Joseph Breuer, which stressed the purging of emotions through catharsis. Together Breuer and Freud penned *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), which was the first book on psychoanalysis. Perhaps the single most important text for the development of psychoanalytic thought, however, was Freud's 1899 volume *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which suggested that dreams were a window onto the unconscious mind. Following this volume Freud made a number of crucial contributions to the development of psychoanalysis in the next decade. These included the

identification of the conflicting pleasure and reality principles, the enunciation of the theory of the three stages of childhood development and the Oedipus complex and the idea that the human personality is derived from the interaction of three systems: the id, the ego and the superego. As Freud continued to work and attract followers and adherents psychoanalysis began its rise in Europe, originating in Vienna before extending to Germany and Switzerland. By 1910 and the Second International Psychoanalytic Congress, the informal movement had become increasingly bureaucratized. Training centers had begun to emerge in Berlin and Vienna which would instruct aspiring psychoanalysts on techniques for interviewing patients and free association. These techniques were seen as essential elements of psychoanalytic practice insofar as it was held that the solutions to neuroses lay with an inward looking and individualistic explanation of behaviour which rejected social causation. Orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, therefore, did not seek to change society as Wertham would seek to do with his work at the Lafargue Clinic and in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, but sought to help the neurotic individual understand the cause of their dysfunction and get on with their lives. In this regard, therefore, it can be suggested that Freudian psychoanalysis sought to help spread rather than combat the rise of conformism in the twentieth-century.

H. Stuart Hughes has suggested that Freud demonstrated an "Olympian detachment" from politics (1975:189). Certainly it is clear that most commentators on Freud's notion of the interaction between social and internal psychic forces agree that while he paid lip service to the idea that social factors played an important role in shaping the individual personality, it is clear that he never developed these ideas in his own writings. Arthur Berliner has argued, for instance, that Freud seemingly ignored the writings of Marx throughout his career and that while both of these men sought liberation Freudian liberation concentrated exclusively on the individual (1983:165). Freud's extreme individualism can be seen insofar as he argued that social life was detrimental to the individual because it necessitated the subordination of individual pleasure seeking and

exacted a heavy toll through conformity. To this end, therefore, Freud saw all social structures as essentially coercive and he suggested in *Civilization and its Disontents* that civilization could go too far and become repressive. Brantlinger argued that Freud's social and political assertions were grounded on two dichotomies: the division of people into leaders and the led; and the division of people into rational minorities and irrational majorities (1983:158). To develop these ideas Freud drew heavily on the crowd psychology of LeBon and Tarde, with a particular emphasis on LeBon's 1895 book *The Crowd.* LeBon, who had a considerable influence on the thinking of José Ortega y Gasset, and thus influenced the development of the aristocratic critique of mass culture, suggested that the crowd was the opposite of culture. LeBon's notion of the group as a primal horde was developed by Freud in his 1921 book *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in which he argued that the mob is highly sensitive to suggestions from a leader. To this end Freud suggested that in a crowd the individual superego is abandoned as the group acts as a form of contagion and becomes the authority to whom submission is owed (Berliner 1983:111). To counteract these irrational group tendencies societies required, according to Freud, an elite which would take control of the mass in order to ensure the continued survival of the social order:

> It is just as impossible to do without control of the mass by a majority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilization. For masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciation. ... It is only through the influence of individuals who can set an example and whom masses recognize as their leaders that they can be induced to perform the work and undergo the renunciations on which the existence of civilization depends. (Freud 1927:7)

To the degree to which his social thought was dependent on a clear demarcation between an elect and a mob Freud contributed to the development of a conservative, aristocratic understanding of social relations which had obvious similarities in the American scene to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and other critics of democratizing tendencies. Subsequent efforts by writers such as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno to link Freudian psychoanalysis with Marxism, therefore, constituted a truly radical effort to reinterpret the basis of Freudian thought for a new era. To this end, however, the

Marxist Freudians were only one group of many struggling to define psychoanalysis in the United States in the first half of the twentieth-century.

Psychoanalysis in the United States

If psychoanalysis was born in Vienna in the 1890s it is nonetheless clear that it grew strongest in the United States of the twentieth-century. Laura Fermi has identified psychoanalysis as, alongside atomic science, one of the two most significant forces to have been brought to America from Europe by the rise of Hitler and the Second World War (1971:141). It is unquestionable that the rise of Nazism in Germany forever changed the direction of psychoanalysis. In October 1933 psychoanalysis was banned from the Congress of Psychology at Leipzig because it was deemed a "Jewish science" and Freud's writings and other psychoanalytic literature were burned in Berlin (Jahoda 1969:420). Following the *Anschluss* of 11 March 1938, Freud and many of his followers who had remained in Vienna emigrated to England, and when Freud died the next year a number of the remaining analysts moved on to the United States. It has been estimated that two thirds of all European psychoanalysts emigrated to the United States during the 1930s, thereby ending the continental stranglehold on psychoanalysis and shifting the base of power to America (Fermi 1971:142). Of course European expatriates did not arrive in a nation utterly devoid of a psychoanalytic history. By the 1930s psychiatry was flourishing in the United States and psychoanalysis had already made serious inroads into the public consciousness. Early psychiatric practitioners had been split over the reception of Freud and Freudian thought. While the behaviorist J. B. Watson issued a manifesto for scientific psychology which would exclude psychoanalysis, Heinz Hartmann argued in favour of combining Freudian thought with more scientific psychological undertakings (Fermi 1969:431). Ultimately, however, psychoanalysis would be successful in the United States largely because it coincided with particular needs of the public at that time. Freud's argument for

progressive sexual reform, for instance, found a receptive audience in a nation emerging from its puritanical roots. At the same time America's decentralized medical establishment and progressivist traditions would lend psychoanalysis an air of legitimacy that it might have otherwise lacked. In short, the United States and psychoanalysis were able to provide each other with the tools necessary to develop in new directions.

Although the first reference to psychoanalysis in an American magazine can be found in the mid-1890s the history of psychoanalysis in United States really began in 1909 with the arrival of Freud and Carl Jung in Worcester, Massachusetts. Freud had come to America to deliver a series of five lectures which helped to draw attention to the nascent psychoanalytic movement in the country. Two years after his visit the American Psychiatric Association was founded and the following decade saw a number of Americans traveling to Europe to undergo training in psychoanalysis as well as the arrival of European analysts in New York at the New School for Social Research (Fermi 1971:143). World War I confirmed the importance of psychoanalysis in the United States insofar as it seemed to confirm a number of Freudian hypotheses relating to the nature of conflict, catharsis and instinctual drives. Following the war the role of psychoanalysis was rapidly advanced in the United States as treatments were sought for shell shock and other postwar trauma syndromes. The 1920s witnessed the development of professional psychoanalytic training in the United States with the Berlin Centre as a model. The growing interest in psychoanalysis led to a division between lay and medical practitioners which would ultimately be resolved in favour of the medical establishment as the new training institutes necessitated a medical background and enforced Freudian orthodoxy by stressing tradition. As psychoanalytic institutes spread from New York to Boston and Chicago characterology became an increasing concern and for the first time psychoanalysts turned to the study of delinquency and criminality as part of a progressivist social agenda for psychoanalysis (Hale 1995:43). The development of the mental hygiene movement at this time combined behaviorism and psychoanalysis in an attempt to stem mental illness and delinquency,

which was increasingly regarded as a medical problem. By the end of the 1930s the centre of psychoanalysis had clearly shifted to the United States. However the Depression, coupled with the rapid influx of new analysts, had made it difficult for many to earn a living through psychoanalysis and had exacerbated a number of tensions between analysts divided along the lines of age, training, national origin and psychoanalytic outlook. One of the results of these debates in the 1930s, Hale has argued, was a diminishment of non-orthodox and politically inflected analysis and a much stronger association between psychoanalysis and the medical establishment (Hale 1995:119). The rapid rise of psychoanalysis in the United States, therefore, was dependent on its association with medicine and its reliance on Freudian traditions to unite the movement even in the face of numerous splinter movements and divergences from orthodoxy.

While psychoanalysis was ascendant in America in the first decades of the twentieth-century it was the Second World War that truly conferred legitimacy on the movement. Psychiatrists were drafted into service in an effort to weed the psychologically unfit from the armed forces and also to treat returning veterans suffering from war neuroses. Following the successes of psychiatry during the war the National Institute of Mental Health was formed in 1946. Increasingly psychotherapy was becoming the treatment of choice for dealing with mental illness and psychoanalysis was becoming the model of psychotherapy. At the same time psychiatric practice was undergoing a serious shift away from the mental hospital and toward private practice. In 1947 half of all American psychiatrists were affiliated with a hospital, but a decade later that number had dropped to sixteen per cent (Hale 1995:246). At the same time psychoanalysis was undergoing tremendous popularization in the postwar period with hundreds of books and articles being published each year. Interest in psychoanalysis peaked in 1956 with the celebration of Freud's one hundredth birthday. The new popularizers were generally uncritical of Freudian thought and, as a consequence, Hale has argued that the United States had become more conservative, orthodox and Freudian than even Freud ever was.

As Freud increasingly replaced Marx as the intellectual forefather of choice among American intellectuals a number of psychoanalysts voiced criticisms of the conservative tenor of psychoanalysis in the United States, among them Erich Fromm and Fredric Wertham. Ultimately these voices would be drowned out by the forces of orthodoxy, but a more serious challenge to Freudian psychoanalysis would stem from academic psychology which questioned the claims that psychoanalysis represented a form of scientific or medical knowledge.

Psychoanalysis versus Psychology

As a discipline psychology itself had once faced questions over its status as a branch of science. At the turn of the century those seeking to differentiate psychology from biology and philosophy as a separate branch of knowledge also had to prove the value of psychology beyond commonsensical explanations of human behaviour. Experimental psychology had emerged as a distinct activity roughly contemporaneously with psychoanalysis in the 1890s. At the same time, however, a number of crucial distinctions existed which divided the two approaches to the study of the mind. Everett Rogers has enumerated four major differences between American psychology and psychoanalysis: first, psychology was method centred and involved laboratory experimentation while psychoanalysis was problem centred around neuroses and did not fit into scientific experimental methodologies. Second, psychology was a quantitative method while psychoanalysis was qualitative and in-depth. Third, psychology focused on the here and now of the experiment while psychoanalysis was addressed to the past of the analysand, particularly to childhood. Finally, psychology was primarily interested in the study of the normal while psychoanalysis was interested in the study of the abnormal (Rogers 1994:85-86). At the same time, however, it needs to be noted that psychology and psychoanalysis did not always regard themselves as participants in competing camps and there existed a significant degree of interchange between the two approaches. Morawski and Hornstein

have suggested that there were three distinct eras of reaction by psychologists to psychoanalysis: In the first of these eras, before 1920, the tendency was for psychologists to criticize psychoanalysis from the outside as unsound and unscientific. In the 1920s many psychologists attempted to criticize the movement from within as they underwent analysis themselves. By the 1930s psychologists had decided to co-opt many of the most interesting proposals of psychoanalysis for scientific and experimental research while ignoring Freudian methodologies (Morawski and Hornstein 1991:112-114). The reconciliation offered by this third tendency sought to stress the degree to which psychoanalysis and academic psychology shared a common intellectual ancestry that originated with physiology and the writings of Charles Darwin. Further, it was assumed by psychologists that psychoanalysis was a system which they could test through experimentation and then confirm or reject. At the same time American psychoanalysts, backed by the medical training which they were obliged to undergo, sought to provide a more scientific basis for psychoanalysis through the use of projective tests such as the Rohrshach Test. In this way it was hoped that the problem of a lack of scientific forms of measurement in psychoanalysis could be obviated (Jahoda 1969:440). Ultimately, however, the important break between the two approaches would stem from the ways in which each was used. While psychoanalysis continued to be an approach which was driven by medical and mental problems, psychology would become increasingly method-centred. J. B. Watson, for instance, saw the goal of psychology as nothing less than "a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of *behavior*" (in Cushman 1995:154). This emphasis on behaviour led psychology away from the more humanitarian concerns of a discipline such as psychoanalysis and towards applied methods which would ultimately come of age in advertising and in media effects research. Nonetheless, the interaction of psychology would be one of two important influences on psychoanalysis in the United States, particularly insofar as its relationship to claims of scientificity were at stake. The other significant development would be the emergence of the

mental hygiene movement in the first decade of this century as a means by which psychoanalysis would be directed toward broad-based social reform and humanitarian efforts.

The Mental Hygiene Movement

The controversy over lay analysis in the United States was ultimately settled in favour of the medical establishment with the decision that individuals lacking medical training would be excluded from the practice of psychoanalysis. This decision flew in the face of Freud's predilections, as he had always favored non-medical or lay analysis, but psychoanalysis in the United States stressed treatment of patients rather than knowledge for its own sake and medicine eventually won the battle. The victory of medicine in shaping the direction of American psychoanalysis can similarly be seen in the importance of the mental hygiene movement in structuring the development of the practice. The mental hygiene movement in the United States can be dated from the founding of the first national committee in 1909, the same year in which Freud spoke in Massachusetts. The movement was an extension of existing public health movements in the field of psychiatry and symbolized the application of scientific knowledge to the nation's social life in much the same way that the media effects paradigm would later in the century. The American mental hygiene movement was started by a former asylum inmate named Clifford W. Beers who sought to change psychiatric practice through institutional reform. To accomplish this goal he solicited the aid of a number of prominent psychiatrists including Adolf Meyer and Thomas Salmon. It was Meyer who coined the term "mental hygiene" and he suggested the movement concentrate more on preventative psychiatry than institutional intervention (Richardson 1989:49). As the national committee gained federal funding it became an influential force for a clinical and individualistic form of psychiatric problem-solving. The movement adopted a medical model inspired by the success of nineteenth-century vaccines in the prevention of disease spread and rooted in the progressivist tradition of aid to

children. Essentially what the mental hygiene movement suggested was that if psychoanalysis was correct in assuming that familial relationships could make a person neurotic then mental problems could be prevented by the presence of fundamentally sound personal interactions (Cushman 1995:152). This scientific attitude toward deviance would ultimately displace religious and moral attitudes by the mid-century period as the study of juvenile delinquency and the notion of mental hygiene became inextricably linked.

The intersection of scientific knowledge and psychoanalysis that mental hygiene cemented was largely influenced by a number of doctors at Johns Hopkins University, at whose Phipps Clinic Fredric Wertham would be invited to teach in 1922. The man who extended that invitation, the Swiss-trained neuropathologist director of the Phipps Clinic Adolf Meyer, was central to the process. Meyer had long urged psychology to move away from its roots in philosophy and toward clinical research which would help to legitimate its scientific orientation. Specifically, Meyer advocated a holistic approach to mental illness which was based on an understanding of the dynamic interplay between a patient's mental and physical faculties. Meyer termed this approach psychobiology and he helped make it the central premise of the American mental hygiene movement (Richardson 1989:23). The linking of human biology and psychiatry allowed Meyer and his followers to approach the patient as an integrated whole. As with psychoanalysis Meyer stressed the importance of childhood on mental development, but he went beyond Freud when he insisted on the equal importance of the home, the school and the community in shaping the development of young minds. Meyer insisted on the need to study all features of a patient's life in order to arrive at a proper diagnosis and plan of treatment. To this end Meyer was appreciative of Freud for the way in which he had helped to broaden and humanize psychiatry but at the same time he criticized him for failing to take account of the "social formulation" of mental processes (Dreyer 1972:109). Hale has suggested that Meyer played a crucial role in shaping the reception of psychoanalysis in the United States insofar as he adopted Freudian thought into his own system of psychobiology as a replacement for the hereditary somatic

system. Further he introduced key psychiatrists to Freudian thought (Hale 1995:168). At the same time, however, Meyer's system was at odds with orthodox Freudianism on many important issues which would divide psychiatrists invested in the mental hygiene paradigm from more orthodox Freudians as the century progressed.

One of the most important developments of the mental hygiene movement was the creation of new ways of conceptualizing juvenile delinquency in the twentieth-century. Crucial to the shifting attitude about juvenile criminality was the adoption of the *parens patriae* principle at the end of the nineteenth-century as an expression of the common good. This principle redefined the child not as a criminal offender but as a juvenile delinquent and thereby granted the child the protection of the court. Under this new understanding the prevention of juvenile delinquency — rather than the punishment of same — became the paramount concern. In the first decades of this century this idea spread from the courts to schools and the family in the form of the child guidance movement. The idea of child guidance sought to apply psychiatry to the identification of abnormal emotional development at a young age so that potential deviants might be corrected or redirected. By 1930 there were more than 500 permanent child guidance clinics in the United States, greatly contributing to the medicalization of childhood (Richardson 1989:107). The mental hygiene movement which had initially been interested in juvenile delinquency had turned its attention fully toward pre-delinquent behaviour and the prevention of delinquency as psychiatrists increasingly began to occupy the role of the expert on questions of criminality and other aspects of human behaviour.

By the postwar period the psychiatry and the mental hygiene movement had become essential parts of both the nation's medical establishment and the welfare state. The National Mental Health Act was passed in 1946 and the National Institute for Mental Health was founded in 1949. These developments greatly spurred the growth of the psychiatric field. In 1944 there were just over 3,000 psychiatrists in the United States. By 1964 that number had grown to more than 17,000 (Richardson 1989:156). With this phenomenal

growth came an increasing acceptance of psychiatrists as experts in a vast number of areas of human behaviour, including but by no means limited to criminality. The vast changes to psychoanalysis over the course of this century are difficult to encapsulate in such a short space. From its origins as a European-based investigation into neuroses through its increasing scientization in the United States and expansion into areas of the law, education and child-rearing psychoanalysis has proven adaptive and highly mutable. The degree to which psychoanalysis in the United States has mutated in a short period of time can be witnessed simply by examining the career of someone like Fredric Wertham who began his career writing medical and anatomical textbooks on brain function, later became an expert in the field of criminal forensic psychiatry and wound up thoroughly enmeshed in the reformist politics of the mental hygiene movement and child guidance. That his career does not come across as a series of departures from his own past work, but can be seen as a fluid development through various stages of the history of psychoanalysis in the United States, is indicative of the degree to which American psychiatry has been marked by gradual shifts in emphasis rather than radical shifts in direction.

Wertham's Writings on Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry

In 1925 Wertham co-published (with R. S. Lyman) his first medical/scientific article, "Clinical Demonstrations of Mental Disorders from the Point of View of Psychopathology and Internal Medicine" (Wertham 1925). This article argued for a greater inter-dependence between physicians and psychiatrists in the treatment of patients, a theme which would become common to Wertham's subsequent medical work. In the following years Wertham published extensively on medical and scientific topics in several journals including *Annales Medico-Psychologiques*, *Mental Hygiene*, *The American Journal of Psychiatry* and *State Hospital Quarterly*. The journal to which Wertham contributed the majority of his early writing was *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, on whose

editorial board Adolf Meyer served. Wertham's publications in the *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* formed the basis for his first important monograph: *The Significance of the Physical Constitution in Mental Disease* (Wertham 1926). This booklet outlined the fundamental assumptions of Wertham's early research as a psychiatrist and expounded many of the formal beliefs upon which his subsequent work in cultural psychiatry rested. Briefly, *The Significance of the Physical Constitution in Mental Disease* suggested, following the work of Meyer and Emile Kraepelin, that while individual persons are unique, people themselves are classifiable with regard to habitus (body form), inner organs and psychobiology. Wertham argued that anthropometric studies had been a hallmark of scientific psychiatry since the time of Esquirol, and that while they had been repressed for some time they had witnessed a resurgence of interest with the development of endocrinology as a field of study at the end of the 19th century. In his study of sixty-five randomly chosen men from the Phipps Clinic Wertham, following Kretschmer's typologies, identified four morphological body types. Moreover, Wertham proposed that while there existed a correlation between morphological constitution, mental disease and personality (65) a fundamental connection suggesting biological determinacy was inconceivable unless one were to ultimately believe in the power of fate over science. In this way Wertham stressed the biological factor of mental disease without adopting an absolute or eugenical position which would minimize the importance of the interpersonal or social elements of psychiatry. The majority of Wertham's publications in the years immediately following the publication of *The Significance of the Physical Constitution in Mental Disease*, consisted of case studies which sought to augment the findings reported in the monograph.[1]

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[1] See "Les rapports de la morphologie humaine avec les types psychopathiques", *Annales Medico-Psychologiques*, 161-168, 1926; "A Minimum Scheme for the Study of the Morphologic Constitution in Psychiatry: With Remarks on Anthropometric Technique", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1927, 93-98; "Observations and Remarks on the Physical Constitution of Female Psychiatric Patients", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1927, 499-506.; "A Group of Benign Chronic Psychoses: Prolonged Manic Excitements. With A Statistical Study of Age, Duration and Frequency in 2000 Manic Attacks", *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1929, 9, 17-78; "Habitus Lipodystrophicus with Affective Psychosis (Hypomanic

Wertham's career path took a major turn in the beginning of the 1930s when he became the first psychiatrist in the United States to be awarded the prestigious National Research Council Fellowship. Wertham used these funds to undertake the research which would go into the writing of his 1934 book *The Brain as an Organ* (Wertham 1934), which contained an introduction by his American mentor, Adolf Meyer. Wertham's research at this time was almost exclusively forensic and scientific. In his 1931 article "The Cerebral Lesions in Purulent Meningitis", for instance, Wertham studied the parenchymal lesions associated with purulent meningitis and deduced that it was chiefly the cortex that was affected. Other research on brain lesions — particularly as they related to dementia paralytica — followed in the subsequent years.[2] The publication of the medical textbook *The Brain as an Organ* was the culmination of Wertham's research into the anatomy of the brain, an area in which he had developed an interest as early as 1925 while in London. Wertham's textbook opened by suggesting that the histopathology of the brain was at an impasse and that a simpler conception of the brain was necessary for progress to made. Fundamental to Wertham's argument was the then radical suggestion that the brain was an organ of the body similar to other organs and not, as had previously been assumed, something unique unto itself in anatomical terms. Wertham suggested that the field of neuropathology should become more closely linked to the field of general pathology. To do this the brain had to be studied as an organ and the whole central nervous system had to be studied in conjunction with it whenever possible. Among the chapters of the book were detailed analyses of various methods of brain dissection, methods for preparing and

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Excitement)", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1929, 22, 714-718; "The Relativity of Psychogenic and of Constitutional Factors", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1929, 22, 1201-1206; "The Incidence of Growth Disorders in Nine Hundred and Twenty-Three Cases of Mental Disease", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1929, 21, 1128-114.

[2] See "Central Nervous System in Acute Phosphorous Poisoning", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1932, 28, 320-330; "The Nonspecificity of Histological Lesions of Dementia Paralytica", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1932, 28, 1117-38; "Small Foci of Demyelinization in the Cortex and Spinal Cord in Diffuse Sclerosis: Their Similarity to Those of Disseminated Sclerosis and Dementia Paralytica", *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1932 1380-1401; "Are the Histological Lesions of Dementia Paralytica Specific?", *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1933, 12, 811-821.

analyzing lesion samples and a study of the question of whether or not schizophrenia had an underlying biological basis. *The Brain as an Organ*, like the vast majority of Wertham's earliest publications, is best seen as the writing of a physician and scientist concerned with questions that are primarily medical rather than social, and although these works provided a background for his subsequent critical work, they do not themselves directly address questions of significance for the study of communications. It is in his later works that Wertham forged an alliance between medical research, psychoanalytic therapy and social theory which would lead to his interest in mass culture.

Wertham's Contributions to Science, 1937 - 1944

While he was writing *The Brain as an Organ*, Wertham relocated from Baltimore to New York, where he was named the senior psychiatrist at Bellevue by the New York Department of Hospitals. He also organized and directed the Court of General Sessions, a clinic responsible for screening every convicted felon in the state. In 1936 he became director of Bellevue's Mental Hygiene Clinic and four years later he moved to the Queens Hospital Center where he became director of psychiatric services. These career changes would help to orient Wertham's attention away from strictly medical questions and towards the work for which he would become best known. This is evidenced by Wertham's diminishing medical output over the course of the next decade.[3] Nonetheless, Wertham did make a number of minor interventions into the psychiatric study of human behaviour which should be mentioned here.

The first of these interventions would be the development of the Mosaic Test, a projective test intended as an aid in psychiatric diagnosis. Wertham first described this test

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[3] Wertham's post-*Brain as an Organ* medical writing was limited to only a few articles. See for example: "The Brain in Sickle Cell Anemia", (with Nathan Mitchell and Alfred Angrist), *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 47, 752-767; "A New Sign of Organic Brain Disease", *Transactions of the American Neurological Association*, 65th Annual Meeting, 1939; "Discussion: Psychosomatic Problems in Opthalmology", *Journal of Clinical Psychopathology*, 6, 477-478, 1945; and "Psychotherapy in Disorders of the Gastrointestinal Tract", *Review of Gastroenterology*, August 1953, 573-578.

in a 1941 article published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (co-authored by Lili Golden) (Wertham 1941c). This test utilized a series of multi-coloured geometric pieces with which patients were asked to design an image that would be analyzed by the psychiatrist, often in conjunction with the analysis of a patient's other art works, as was the case when Wertham treated Zelda Fitzgerald. The Mosaic Test was described by Wertham as superior to the Rohrshach Test because it allowed a wider diagnostic range, greater objectivity, simplicity and speed, and the results could be recorded exactly for future analysis or reference. Despite the advantages that Wertham claimed for the test, it was never widely adopted by the psychiatric community. Although Wertham wrote a chapter on the administration and interpretation of the test in Abt and Bellak's 1950 book *Projective Psychology* (Wertham 1950) few references to the test seem to exist in the writings of psychiatrists beyond Wertham's circle of colleagues. Wertham himself continued to utilize the test and made reference to it in his subsequent writings, particularly in his criminal case studies. Furthermore, in book reviews Wertham would often chastise authors for their failure to mention the Mosaic Test when dealing with the diagnostic tools of psychiatry.[4]

In addition to this diagnostic test Wertham also diagnosed a psychiatric syndrome which he suggested went a considerable way to fostering an understanding of the way in which fantasies of violence are transmuted into acts of violence. Wertham's studies in what he ultimately termed the Catathymic Crisis (from the Greek *kata* meaning "according to" and *thymos* meaning "wish") found their origins in his belief that social psychiatry needed to bring psychopathology to bear on the criminal mind (Wertham 1937). In doing this the psychiatrist would undertake two main tasks: a determination of diagnosis irrespective of the criminal act and a furtherance of the search for motives in criminality. Catathymic behaviour as a category was introduced in 1912 by Maier to describe a reaction that serves

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[4] See, for example, reviews of Luise J. Zucker, *Ego Structure in Paranoid Schizophrenia* [1958], *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 858-860; Hans Walder, *Drive Structure and Criminality* [1959], *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 611-613; Harold A. Liebenson and Joseph M. Wepman, *The Psychologist as a Witness*, (1964), *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, (3) 687.

as a transformation of a stream of thought as the result of certain complexes of ideas charged with strong affect — a wish or a fear. In Wertham's conception the Catathymic Crisis was seen as a specific manifestation of catathymic behaviour in which the patient acquired the idea the he must carry out a violent act against himself or another person. This was described by Wertham not as obsessional, but as a specific urge that met a resistance in the conscious mind that caused a delay. As evidence for the syndrome, Wertham offered the examples of patients who feel better after failed suicide attempts. The Catathymic Crisis was not limited to suicide but could encompass a variety of effects including self-castration, arson and even murder. According to Wertham the concept of the Catathymic Crisis was indispensable for understanding certain forms of violent crime and suicide. While Wertham would develop his initial thoughts on this subject in his subsequent criminal case studies the idea itself, like the Mosaic Test, was not widely adopted by psychiatrists. Nonetheless, the biologic and intra-psychic basis of the Catathymic Crisis stands as an important juncture between Wertham's strictly medical writings and his later socially-oriented work on the nature and character of human violence, which would lead to his critiques of mass cultural forms like comic books and television.

A third notable intervention into the study of human behaviour stemmed from Wertham's writings on pain and its relationship to patient care. In 1944 he developed thrombophlebitis in his right leg that was nearly fatal and which required an emergency operation. The specifics of the case were such that Wertham was unable to receive anesthetic and was awake for the entire procedure, as well as for a second operation on his left leg conducted shortly thereafter. During these operations Wertham had his spoken utterances recorded by a stenographer for later analysis. Wertham's study of the pain he underwent was one of the first to record such a psychologically abnormal experience from the inside point-of-view of the patient. In two 1945 articles (Wertham 1945a, Wertham 1945b) Wertham argued that Freud's contention that a "sick man withdraws his libido" was over-simplified and that the dissociation between mood and behaviour can be complex to a

degree that was not demonstrated by the available literature. Wertham wrote that during the operation he laughed with the surgeons and made puns ("Don't get demoralized; get demerol-ized" (1945a:171)). Wertham's observations on his own mental state were well-received and subsequently reprinted, and his experience was written up by *Time* in their medical section ("Speaking" 1945). Wertham's self-study was related to the Mosaic Test and the Catathymic Crisis insofar as it demonstrated the degree to which he sought to unite intra-psychic complexes to inter-personal relations in the furtherance of a scientific psychiatry. It was from that basis in scientific psychiatry that Wertham would seek to make real interventions into his social and cultural environment, and scientific thinking remained a constant background for the developments of his later career even as he moved away from strictly medical and scientific writings.

Wertham's Relationship to Psychiatry

Wertham wrote on a number of occasions that his desire to pursue psychiatry as a profession was profoundly influenced by his correspondence with Freud during his college years. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that so little of Wertham's earliest writings touch on Freud's work in any serious fashion. It was not until 1949 that Wertham published what should be regarded as his definitive article on Freudian analysis. "Freud Now" was published in, of all places, *Scientific American* and was presented as the views of a "noted psychoanalyst" on the "present condition of Freud's legacy" (Wertham 1949c). According to Wertham, Freud's significant accomplishments in psychoanalysis included the development of the appreciation of the role of sexuality in personality development, the development of the distinction between the unconscious, preconscious and conscious mind, and the development of ideas including repression, condensation, displacement and sublimation. Moreover, Freud effected a massive change simply by speaking of psychological processes at all. That he did so with a logic of science evidenced by the idea of the unconscious and a practical method of investigation helped to advance the

understanding of the mind by bringing humanity to science — an attitude previously expressed by Meyer. Yet in Wertham's eyes Freud — and, more importantly, Freudianism — was hardly beyond reproach. Wertham suggested that Freud's thinking moved from a materialist basis rooted in the natural sciences towards a mechanistic idealism that paved the way for reactionary mysticism of Carl Jung. In Freudian thought Wertham alleged that the notion of the death instinct was "off the deep end", arguing that in that instance Freud strayed close to the thought of Heidegger, who Wertham termed "the most influential Nazi philosopher" (53). In contemporary usage Wertham suggested that the conservative tendencies of late Freudian thought had been emphasized by psychiatrists who were politically conservative so that Freudianism was no longer a help to anyone. Wertham suggested that the breakthroughs of Freud were being undermined by orthodox Freudians: "The great discovery of psychoanalysis was the discovery of the individual. The great error of late orthodox psychoanalysis is to see the problems, the processes and the solutions only within the individual" (54). He argued that one way of reversing this trend was through an expansion of Freudian logic. While Freud correctly keyed in on the formative power of the family, Wertham would have psychiatrists expand the social circle to encompass the personality shaping influence of society as a whole. This new conception of personality development, he suggested, necessitated regarding Freudian thought as historically situated and open to dialogical development:

> We psychoanalysts who wish to guard the true heritage of Freud and develop in a truly progressive manner do not visualize the future scientific development of psychoanalysis in terms of a formalistic allegiance to dogmatic doctrine as it stands. One must reconstruct Freud's work on the basis of a realistic philosophy, of newer and broader clinical observations, and on the full utilization of the experiences of mankind during the last two decades. Neglect of the social element in psychoanalysis is based largely on the too-mechanical separation of biological and social. Such a psychological phenomenon as the Oedipus complex gains its real force from the very fact that it indicates both the social and biological points of greatest tension. (54)

Of note in this instance are not only Wertham's use of the term "we" to describe the "true heritage" of Freud, but more importantly the emphasis on the inter-relationship of biology and society that marked the intersection of his medical training and writing with the liberal

politics and social conscience that structured the majority of his best known scholarship. That type of scholarship would come to the fore as he increasingly turned his attention away from purely theoretical debates with the orthodox Freudians and toward the application of psychoanalysis in forensic psychiatry.

Wertham on Criminality

In a 1963 book Thomas Szasz argued that it was a traditional function of psychiatry to participate in criminal law (Szasz 1963:91). He further argued that psychiatrists could be divided into two categories: those like Franz Alexander and Hugo Staub, Gregory Zilboorg and Winfred Overholser who believed that criminals were ill and required psychiatric help rather than prison, and those like himself and Fredric Wertham who warned about the dangers of an over-dependence on psychiatric expertise in the criminal process. Essentially this debate was structured around the question of the responsibility of the psychiatrist in the criminal proceeding. If, following Staub and Alexander's lead, criminal offenders would receive psychiatric treatment rather than penal rehabilitation Szasz suggested that individual rights and the protection of the individual would be ignored in favour of a form of psychiatric authoritarianism (94). What he advocated, on the other hand, was that psychiatry should play a significant yet subordinate position in the administration of criminal justice. Szasz suggested that the outlook of Wertham was exemplary in this regard. Before returning to the specifics of the debate between advocates of a psychiatrically dominated justice system and proponents of psychiatry as an assistant to legal justice it is necessary to outline Wertham's significant body of writing on actual criminal cases in which he was a participant.

Wertham's arrival in New York from Baltimore in 1932 marked a significant shift in his writings as he became less concerned with medical subjects and increasingly cognizant of the important role society played in the structuring of individual personalities.

Wertham's work with the Court of General Sessions helped to spark his interest in the ways in which psychiatry could be a potential benefit to the courts, and by 1934 Wertham was a well-known forensic psychiatrist who had testified in a number of notorious New York murder trials and emerged as a leading critic of the poor administrative relationship between the courts and medical experts.[5] Wertham's experiences as an expert witness in various murder trials were the subject of two books published during the 1940s: *Dark Legend* (Wertham 1941a) and *The Show of Violence* (Wertham 1949a). In each of these books Wertham argued that the role of the psychiatrist in the court of law was to bring out the psychiatric background of murder in relationship to the law and society it represented. The relationship of murder, law and society particularly fascinated Wertham and was itself the subject of much of his writing. His interest in murder as a social phenomenon was articulated concisely in a 1949 essay entitled "It's Murder" which was published in *The Saturday Review* as a preview of *The Show of Violence* (Wertham 1949d). In this essay Wertham suggested that America as a nation was fascinated with murder and murderers and that fascination had led to a view that crime was an exceptional circumstance divorced from social origins and unique unto itself. Wertham saw it as his task to remind the reader that, divorced from its mythologies, murder was not exceptional but commonplace. He argued that the idea that murderers were hounded by guilt was seriously held only by "romantic poets and conservative psychoanalysts" (8), suggesting instead that every murderer had a justification for his acts that took the form of a rationalization. Wertham further argued that rationalizations for murder were not themselves merely the fictions of individuals but rather symbolized "the ideology of a previous stage of society" (8). The relationship of murder to the social background was similarly foregrounded by the status of murder as an act in the context in history. Wertham suggested that the story of historical eras could be written in terms of the ways with which murders and murderers were dealt. Following this logic

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[5] See, for example, "Alienists' Testimony is Usually 'Bunk', Psychiatrist Swears at Murder Trial", *New York Times*, 21 Mar. 1934, 30.; "Fish Now Insane, Expert Testifies", *New York Times*, 20 Mar. 1935, 44.; "Courts Criticized on Mental Cases", *New York Times*, 9 Oct. 1937, 9.

Wertham condemned the American postwar period as an era in which murder was not taken seriously as a crime — evidenced by unsolved cases relating to racially motivated killings, particularly in the South — and in which there existed a general devaluation of human life that prevented the possibility of changing society in any significantly progressive fashion. Wertham's thoughts on the relationship between the act of murder and the social context from which it emerged was one of the central concerns of his first books written for non-specialist audiences, *Dark Legend* and *The Show of Violence*.

A Case Study of Murder: *Dark Legend*, 1941

Written for the lay reader, *Dark Legend* was a case history of a matricide. Gino, a young Italian immigrant living with his family in New York, surrendered for arrest after stabbing his mother thirty-two times with a bread knife. Wertham testified regarding the question of Gino's competence to stand trial, arguing that Gino did not know the difference between right and wrong and therefore was legally insane. Gino was ultimately committed to a hospital for psychiatric observation, with Wertham becoming his psychiatrist and setting about attempting to come to terms with the question of why the young man had murdered his mother. Wertham's conclusions depended on an interpretation of the crime which placed equal emphasis on Gino's life history and his social status as an impoverished Italian immigrant living in New York. Although he considered the possibility of a biological basis for Gino's mental disorder, Wertham ultimately placed little stock in the possibility, arguing that the disorder was psychological rather than physical (127-129). The psychological drives which factored into the murder in this instance were largely the result of Gino's life history, which Wertham recorded in the first person testimony of the killer for more than sixty pages in this two hundred and thirty-three page book. Gino was the oldest of three children of a New York man who died when he was only six years old. At that time his mother relocated the family to Borda, Italy where she began to neglect the children while spending her time with the father's married brother, Aiello. This neglect

enraged Gino, who prayed to his father for the strength to avenge his family name by killing his uncle, an act which he was never able to carry out. At the age of thirteen Gino and his family returned to New York, where his mother began a series of relationships with different men, all of whom Gino despised and feared. At the same time he became the sole financial supporter of his family. Although he felt that he was unable to disobey his mother by leaving the family or quitting his job, Gino also felt an overwhelming urge to restore his family honor. Ultimately Gino murdered his mother as she slept, an act for which he told Wertham he had no remorse:

> I never slept so well like I slept now. I was glad I did it. I did what I thought was right. I will never be sorry. Nothing bothers me now. I am sorry I didn't do it a long time ago. I don't believe in forgiving. When I am good to somebody I am really good. I can forgive anybody who would give me a slap, but not one who dishonors my family. I can't take it. About my honor I don't forgive. (120-121)

Wertham interpreted Gino's prayers to his father for strength and his fixation on the question of family honor as a fantasy identification with his father. He further suggested that the image of the father — of the adult — had been interrupted by the father's untimely death. The question of family honor, following this line of reasoning, was simply a rationalization rooted in the ideology of a previous historical era (153).

According to Wertham the rationalization of family honor was likely instilled in Gino during his time in Borda, a period in which his sense of family became badly confused and deeply associated with violence. From this point of view the social world was implicated in the causes of the murder, but did not itself take on a proximate role. The impulse that actually led to the murder, Wertham argued, stemmed from Gino's inability to successfully negotiate the sense of degradation he felt by the usurpation of his father's role by his uncle. In this way Gino's story was remarkably similar to the stories of Hamlet and Orestes, the two most famous matricides in fiction. To support this connection Wertham placed significance on a number of facts related to the actual murder as well as to Gino's life history. In the first instance Gino killed his mother while she slept, an act which Wertham interpreted as the slaying of the mother image rather than of the mother. This was

related to a general misogyny present in Gino rooted, in his deep-seated hatred of his own sexuality which manifested as a connection between sex and death. The threads which bound Gino's fantasies of sex and revenge were incest and the dread of incest. Wertham suggested that the development of incest taboos was historically situated late in the development of civilization and was bound to the right to own women under patriarchy. Gino's jealousy of his mother's lovers, therefore, took the form of a subconscious awareness that he was losing the ownership of his mother that was his due under patriarchal authority as he entered adulthood. This led to destructive fantasies against her which were aggravated by the impoverished living conditions the family found itself in. Unable to negotiate the entry into adulthood because of the traumatic impact of the behaviour of his mother, his emotional conflict necessitated some resolution. Wertham suggested that he found an "illusory path" related to vindicating the family honor by clearing his father's name (189). Thus killing his mother became for Gino an act symbolic of adulthood which was rooted in the deeply held love/hate relationship that he attempted to have as both son and symbolic patriarch. Wertham's conclusions based on this interpretation were two-fold: first, Gino was the victim of a Catathymic Crisis in which an act of violence against his mother was the only way he could relieve his profound unconscious emotional conflict; and second, that Gino's actions were related to the historical ritual injuries inflicted upon tribal mothers under patriarchy. Wertham termed this hostility to mothers based on excessive attachment and patriarchal feelings the Orestes Complex and suggested that it be seriously considered by psychoanalysts in addition to the Oedipal Complex described by Freud.

Understanding Murder: *The Show of Violence*, 1949

Wertham's second book on the subject of murder was different from the first insofar as it gave the case histories of six different murder cases or trials, alongside opening and closing chapters that discussed the question of murder generally and the role

of the psychiatrist in the murder trial specifically. Briefly, Wertham argued that psychiatrists had a central role to play in murder trials because murder was a crime which grew from negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger and frustration and psychiatry. As the science best equipped to deal with emotions, psychiatry could provide tremendous fact-finding insight. The murder cases detailed in *The Show of Violence* were varied, but each contained a touch of the lurid or the sensational. The first was the case of a woman who Wertham diagnosed as having had a Catathymic Crisis after she murdered her two children and attempted to end her own life. The case of Martin Lavin was quite different. Charged with the murder of a man during a bar hold-up Wertham contended that Lavin was not insane in any way and that he was faking his symptoms. This case brought Wertham a degree of fame in New York at the time when he staked his professional reputation — under oath at the trial — on his absolute belief that Lavin would kill again if he were released into society. Three months later Lavin killed a police officer and Wertham was praised in the press as the one man who had actually understood the real problem but to whom no one had listened. Another case of bureaucratic incompetence related by Wertham was the case of a man named Forlino who had murdered his nephew but who received inadequate treatment from the authorities.

Two other cases were more notorious. The first was the Albert Fish case. In 1935 Fish was one of the most notorious serial killers in the United States, a sexual predator who cannibalized his victims. Wertham testified at Fish's trial that he suffered from paranoid psychosis but ultimately the jury ruled that Fish was sane and sentenced him to death. Wertham cited the case as an example of exceptional mishandling from the perspective of jurisprudence and crime prevention because Fish had been institutionalized at least eight times for minor offenses and was never properly diagnosed, each time being released to resume his murders. The Robert Irwin case was, according to Wertham, similarly mis-handled by authorities. Irwin, dubbed "the Mad Sculptor" by the press, had been in and out of mental institutions for a decade before he murdered three people in a

New York boarding house. Irwin was a self-castrator who Wertham diagnosed as suffering from Catathymic Crisis, while other psychiatrists had diagnosed schizophrenia. His case became widely known after he sold his confession in Chicago to the Hearst newspaper chain, who ran it over several days before turning Irwin over to the authorities in New York.

Perhaps the most instructive of the cases in *The Show of Violence* from the point of view of illuminating Wertham's general arguments about the relationship of the individual and society in murder cases was the story of a woman who attacked her two children, killing one of them. Wertham wrote that the case reminded him of the tragedy of Medea, the legendary wife of Jason who killed her children rather than face exile. Wertham suggested that the various myths of Medea should be understood as a parable in which a woman asserts her womanhood in a hostile world but who nonetheless loses that womanhood by her very assertion. In the case with which Wertham was involved he saw much the same pattern. The accused was an impoverished woman with two children whom she had not wanted in the first place. She was unable to care for them but was denied adequate social assistance and discouraged by social workers from giving the children up for adoption. Wertham argued that the community which denied this woman assistance in caring for her children was culpable in their deaths because they neglected to act on any of the myriad ways in which they could have come to the assistance of the children and the mother before she took such extreme actions. By denying this woman her dignity as an individual — just as Jason had denied the dignity of Medea by sentencing her to exile — the community had precipitated the murder of those children. The difference between Medea and this woman, Wertham argued, was that "the ancient temples are in ruins, and times and human nature have changed. There was nothing heroic about her — not even anything tragic. The tragedy lies elsewhere, in the contrast between our civilized morality and our uncivilized social responsibility" (235). Wertham concluded by stating that the maternal instinct did not operate in a social vacuum and announced that he would testify on

the woman's behalf to the effect that the crime could have been prevented with the aid of the community. This case led Wertham into his conclusion that most psychiatrists undervalued the degree to which inner conflicts in individuals were linked to social conflicts, and that individual and social factors in psychology were not opposing forces but were bound together. In support of this observation he suggested that historically the problem of infanticide had been a problem relating to men and their relationship to existing social conditions. In the contemporary situation Wertham extended that argument in order to suggest that the higher rate of infant mortality among blacks in the United States testified to the degree to which America as a nation devalues certain lives and facilitated an ongoing climate of murder and violence.

Psychiatry, The Law and The Prevention of Violence

Wertham's condemnation of a generalized devaluation of human life led to a series of prescriptive measures intended to curtail violence in the United States. In the area of sex crimes, for example, Wertham wrote a number of articles suggesting ways in which they might be curtailed. A 1938 article entitled "Psychiatry and Prevention of Sex Crimes" suggested that the neither of the two existing orthodoxies relating to prevention had merit (Wertham 1938). The legal perspective which suggested that prevention stemmed from greater degrees of punishment failed to safeguard the community because sex crimes could not be deterred through the law alone. The psychological perspective which suggested that sex crimes stemmed from personality quirks in individual perpetrators similarly failed because it did not address the role of society in the development of social ills. Wertham contended that in fact most sex criminals were caught between "crime and disease" (849) and that, psychiatrically speaking, there was no such thing as an individual alone but only an individual in relation to society. The key to prevention, therefore, was co-operation between psychiatric and legal agencies directed at the understanding and correction of the social circumstances in which individuals found themselves. Twenty-three years later in

1961 Wertham's position had evolved in the details yet the underlying assumptions remained the same. In an article for the *Ladies' Home Journal* entitled "Sex Crimes Can Be Prevented" (Wertham 1961) he outlined five "practical measures" that could be taken by parents, the media and public authorities to safeguard children from sexual predators. Wertham's recommendations were the forewarning of children by parents, the reduction of mass media sadism, adequate psychiatric treatment for all persons convicted of both major and minor sexually related offenses, more community based psychiatric clinics and a greater exchange between experts in all fields of violence prevention.

Throughout his writing on violent crimes generally and murder specifically Wertham was careful to remind his readers that violence was a social condition. One example which he provided on a number of occasions was the fact that anthropologists have pointed out that in some societies it was not a crime to kill a stranger to the tribe, while in others accidental killings were subject to the identical treatment of deliberate homicides. In a 1954 article in the *New York Times Magazine* (Wertham 1954c) Wertham sought to address the question of the motives for violent crime by addressing the question of how death wishes were translated into action. He argued that a catalyst was required to transform thought into act but, more importantly, what was also required was the whole life experience and personality of a killer. Wertham suggested that the difference between a thought and an action was never as simple as a single impulse because murder required an impulse strong enough to allow it to overcome social and moral inhibitions. More to the point, however, Wertham maintained that while the question of why men kill may remain an eternal one it was certain that society already knew enough about the answer to further the prevention of murder. In a well-ordered society insane murderers and sex murderers would present the smallest problem because "most of these people come to the attention of the authorities long before they murder. Instead of quibbling about legal insanity after the event, we should provide treatment or guidance before it" (50). Moreover, Wertham announced his belief that the end of murder as a social phenomenon was foreseeable. He

suggested that historically the incidence of incest had been reduced by society's adoption of it as a major taboo and that murder could similarly be minimized. Wertham's response to the question of why men kill was tied to his reformist belief that killing itself could be stopped:

> Buried in the works of Freud is this sentence: "Conflicts of interests among human beings are principally decided by the application of violence." Undoubtedly that was true. But I don't believe it always will be. Even though we live in a violent period, I am certain that the ways of violence will eventually be replaced by reason. (50)

Clearly, Wertham's liberal faith in the possibility for far-reaching social reform consisted of a near-Utopian view of the potentialities of humanity to effect the broadest conceivable social changes. If the scientific study of emotions and human relations were to be tied to specific interventions into the social realm, Wertham suggested, it would necessitate a view of psychiatry which was at odds with America's dominant individualist paradigm of the time. That paradigm was supported by orthodox Freudians, and Wertham would spend considerable energy engaged in an effort to redirect American psychoanalysis after Freud.

Wertham and the Freudians

The question of whether or not psychiatry and psychoanalysis were to make specific interventions into the social realm or were to be limited to the treatment of individual patients was the subject of much of Wertham's writing. Specifically the question was the source of an ongoing disagreement that Wertham had with the psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg, an orthodox Freudian who was chairman of the influential New York Psychoanalytic Society. The disagreement between these two over the years ranged across a number of topics in many venues. Certainly the most public encounter occurred in the pages of *The Nation* in 1950, when both men responded to an article written by a woman who argued in a previous issue that psychoanalysis had destroyed her marriage, a debate that was reported by *Time* ("Couch Cult" 1950). Dorothy Ferman's essay had argued that

her marriage had ended on the recommendation of her husband's analyst, who she blamed for needlessly rehashing grievances and life-experiences from her husband's childhood when he should have been attempting to cure him. Ferman argued that psychoanalysis had become caught up in its own "hoopla" and that while it might be helpful to some individuals it needed to be acknowledged that it could also be destructive to others (Ferman 1950:185). The following week saw responses from Wertham and Zilboorg. Wertham contended that what Ferman wrote rang true, suggesting that "ordinary problems" of the type that Ferman described her husband as having suffered did not require orthodox analysis. He also suggested that not only were psychiatrists the only doctors who blamed the patient or his family when they were unable to cure the patient, but that eight out of ten orthodox analyses were entirely unwarranted. He argued further that it seemed to be the goal of psychiatrists to adjust people to the modern age of mass society (Wertham 1950b:205-207). Zilboorg, responding to both articles, took an entirely different position. Deeming Ferman an "unfortunate, unhappy, bitter person" and Wertham an "excellent clinician" who nonetheless suffered from an anti-psychoanalytic bias, Zilboorg argued that there was little to be achieved by attacking psychoanalysis in the pages of a national magazine (Zilboorg 1950:207-208). He concluded that true psychoanalysis was orthodox psychoanalysis and that the problems of the type outlined by Ferman could be corrected by the establishment of a national board for psychotherapists which would enforce orthodox training.

While this dispute between two psychiatrists of differing methodological outlooks might appear to be minor on the surface it was in fact suggestive of a far deeper dispute between Wertham's conception of a social psychiatry and orthodox Freudianism. This dispute played out around the criminal questions identified by Szasz generally, and specifically around the utility of the McNaughton Rule which governed determinations of legal insanity in the United States at that time. The McNaughton Rule had its origins in English law. In 1843 a man named M'Naghten had shot and killed a man named

Drummond, who was the private secretary of Sir Robert Peel, the actual intended victim. The defense at the trial was insanity and it was established by the court that the purpose of criminal law was to punish willfully committed wrongdoing. As a result McNaughton was committed to an asylum until his death, but was acquitted of the charge. By the mid-century period in the United States, however, this basis for legal insanity was increasingly under siege by psychiatrists who proposed new understandings which would give psychiatric testimony and expertise greater weight in the courtroom. Among the dissenters was Zilboorg who, in a 1951 book on Sigmund Freud, argued that criminology was now thoroughly under the psychoanalytic influence and the McNaughton Rule was being undermined by more recent, Freudian understandings of mental processes (Zilboorg 1951:8). In his 1955 book entitled *The Psychology of the Criminal Act and Punishment* which was dedicated entirely to the relationship of psychoanalysis and criminality Zilboorg contended that "the future historian will some day assess the true harm which the McNaughton rule has done to justice as well as to scientific criminology and forensic psychiatry" (Zilboorg 1955:8-9). Zilboorg argued that a more modern approach to forensic psychiatry would necessarily come to terms not only with criminal deeds but also with perpetrators who acted out of an innate aggressive desire to do injury. His recommendation was for the establishment of a board of unbiased expert witnesses who would diagnose all accused criminals and testify at all trials. This board would be run by the American Psychiatric Association and would be charged with classifying criminals based on the danger which it was held that they posed to society. Some criminals would ultimately be condemned to life in an asylum even if only charged with minor offenses, others would be cured and released (Zilboorg 1955:130-137). Regardless, it is clear that the proposals outlined by Zilboorg would have placed tremendous authority over life and death matters in the hands of a small group of psychiatric experts.

Wertham was similarly interested in the legal definition of insanity, although he did not advocate the overthrow of the McNaughton Rule but did want some changes to its

interpretation. Wertham's position was most clearly enunciated in the first chapter of *The Show of Violence*. There he traced the history of the insanity defense in criminal cases, settling on four key eras: the scholastic/theological view of right and wrong that dominated the middle ages and was ended by Erskine; the metaphysical view of right and wrong that was ended by McNaughton in 1843; the psychological perspective of Freudian theories that violence was an irresistible impulse; and the scientific social view which he argued was defined by Judge Cardozo in his challenge to the McNaughton ruling. Cardozo's challenge to the McNaughton rule was to place the question of responsibility in a secondary position. Instead Cardozo suggested that the law test the "true capacity" of the individual. In such a circumstance the proof of mental disorder — regardless of degree — would increasingly supplement and replace the test of personal responsibility. In championing Cardozo's legal interpretation of insanity Wertham suggested that the McNaughton rule still maintained a degree of medieval retribution about it and refused to draw the type of clear distinctions between the ill and the well that would be necessary in a humane and just society. Wertham argued that society's response to the sick man must differ from its response to the well man insofar as it must ensure that the individual with morbid impulses was protected from himself and society protected from him. To do this the psychiatrist would necessarily need to develop a social orientation corresponding to the growing awareness of social responsibility in a changing world. He could no longer shirk his duty to determine "where individual guilt resolves itself into social responsibility" (Wertham 1949a:18). In this way psychiatrists would make themselves truly useful to the courts in the capacity as fact-finders rather than advocates, and would help to end the "cancer of present-day hyper-individualistic psychiatry" (Wertham 1953b:51) which in his opinion had done nothing to solve the problem of violence.

Wertham's embrace of Cardozo's interpretation of the McNaughton rule did not extend to the elimination of the rule itself. In actuality Wertham, while admitting various faults with the rule, was opposed to efforts to repeal it altogether and replace it with the

Durham rule of 1954 or the American Law Institute ruling of 1962, both of which were adopted by many individual states. In Wertham's eyes the McNaughton rule was a highly elastic safeguard against abuse that would be curtailed by newer rulings. While Wertham admitted that many judges had interpreted the McNaughton rule too narrowly he continued to suggest that the problem lay not with the rule itself, but with its interpretation by the courts and the inability of psychiatrists and the legal system to reconcile their differing needs and assumptions. Ultimately, Wertham's critique of the relationship of psychiatry and the law pointed to three deficiencies which he perceived as paramount; first, the area of procedures which were too often left unclear or contradictory and which allowed potentially violent offenders to be ignored by the system; second, the area of jurisprudence where legal cases were handled administratively rather than scientifically; and finally, in the area of psychiatry which had failed the courts by not undertaking adequate follow-up studies and consequently put too much emphasis on projective tests and imprecise terminologies — such as "antisocial" — in the place of the significant clinical studies which Wertham argued should be the mainstay of psychiatric research.

Wertham's tempered embrace of the McNaughton rule went hand in hand with his absolute refusal of the proposals put forward by Zilboorg. His disdain for Zilboorg was evidenced in the fact that he frequently dropped negative references to the psychiatrist into his articles and book reviews even when discussing entirely different subjects. On one occasion he accused him of misleading the public (Wertham 1963:514). Another time he chastised him for his prewar Freudian assertion that the Nazis simply needed to release their aggressive tendencies (Wertham 1965:837). More substantial treatments of Zilboorg's thought can be found in book reviews written by Wertham. In a 1943 *New Republic* review of Zilboorg's *Mind, Medicine and Man*, for example, Wertham argued that the book was the culmination of a modern trend in orthodox Freudian circles which denied that social forces exerted influence on the psychological make-up of individuals (Wertham 1943). In the review Wertham contrasted his own politics — "I must confess, not without

shame, that I still am an unregenerate 'idealist' and 'would-be reformer'" (707) — with those of Zilboorg, who he suggested "adds fuel to the subtlest kind of political and economic reaction" (708). Wertham's alignment of orthodox Freudianism with political conservatism would be crucial to defining his own social psychiatry as a divergent form of Freudian-derived psychiatry. Yet more than simple conservative tendencies in orthodox Freudianism troubled Wertham. In an extremely lengthy review of *The Psychology of the Criminal Act and Punishment* he argued that Zilboorg's work was more romantic than scientific and that he had confused social problems for emotional problems (Wertham 1955a:569). Specifically rebutting Zilboorg's arguments for changes to the McNaughton Rule Wertham termed the Freudian approach to criminality "psycho-authoritarianism" and raised a number of objections. In the first instance he pointed out that the idea of unbiased psychiatric experts was ludicrous given the number of psychiatrists who would not treat black patients (570). He also disagreed with Zilboorg's assumption that an individual's life was the history of struggle with the aggressive instinct, suggesting that Zilboorg failed to consider the effect of economic and social deprivations on criminality. Wertham dismissed Zilboorg's arguments as speculative, noting that the psychiatrist himself had never worked on criminal wards — as Wertham had. He also condemned him for misrepresenting the facts of the Albert Fish case, one of Wertham's own cases discussed in *The Show of Violence* and a patient with whom Zilboorg had never even met (573). Ultimately Wertham drew the distinction between himself and Zilboorg's theoretically unbiased Freudian expertise by asking:

> If I am asked to determine whether a patient is sick, and I find that he is sick, why shouldn't I be on the side of the patient? If a patient suffers from a genuine illness, I fight for him. If he is ill, I say so. The difficulties of the situation lie elsewhere. They are obscured by such statements as "[p]sychiatry is predestined to reject ... legal tests" or "psychiatry cannot really take sides" (579)

Taking sides, whether in murder trials or civil rights hearings, was the essence of Wertham's conception of a social psychiatry and it formed the crucial distinction between his philosophy and that of the more orthodox Freudians who sought to intervene in the

criminal process in a more neutral fashion. Indeed, Wertham would famously intercede in the very public debate about the psychiatric ruling that Ezra Pound was mentally unfit to stand trial for treason. This case would combine Wertham's progressive politics and his views on psychiatry in a very public fashion.

The Case of Ezra Pound

Wertham's tendency to take sides on the major issues relating to the intersection of psychiatry and the law of his day was never more in evidence than when he condemned the judgment that the poet Ezra Pound was unfit to stand trial for treason. Pound was arraigned for treason in November 1945 as a result of a series of broadcasts he had made on Italian radio during the Second World War which were aimed at American servicemen in Europe. He was ordered for psychiatric observation at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. where he was diagnosed by four psychiatrists, three working for the federal government and one hired by the defense. The lead government psychiatrist on the case was Winfred Overholser, who had been approached previously by defense counsel to testify on Pound's behalf, but had convinced the others that it would be advantageous if they submitted a single unified report. Over the objections of the staff of St. Elizabeth's, their report stated that Pound was unfit to stand trial. As a result he was committed to the hospital for treatment and was eventually released in 1958 without ever having come to trial for treason. Significantly, Overholser was one of the psychiatrists whom Szasz identified along with Zilboorg as having an attitude towards psychiatry and the legal system which was at odds with Wertham's position (Szasz 1963:91).

Wertham's critique of the report authored by Overholser did not rest entirely on the idea that the case had been erroneously decided, although that certainly accounted for a great number of his substantial objections. Wertham also discussed the controversies which had erupted around Pound following his commitment to the hospital. The first of these began in March 1946 when Pound's work was omitted from the Modern Library edition of

Conrad Aiken's influential anthology of modern poetry despite the fact that an earlier edition had included twelve of Pound's poems (Cornell 1966:112). A larger scandal supplanted that one in 1949, however, when Pound was awarded the Bollingen Foundation Prize for poetry by the Library of Congress for *The Pisan Cantos*. This action meant that one branch of the United States government had awarded a prize to a man who still faced charges of wartime treason from another branch of government. The scandal was broadened when it was learned that the name Bollingen referred to the vacation home of Carl Jung, who was himself accused of collaboration with the Nazis. In two articles (Wertham 1949e, Wertham 1949f) Wertham argued that the Pound case was a warning signal that wartime violence was being brushed under the carpet. He said sarcastically that Pound actually deserved the prize because he had so clearly earned it. By that he meant that the prize was named for a home owned by a fascist and that it was given to a fascist author for a fascist book (Wertham 1949f:589). He went on to suggest that the Pound case raised the most vital problems of the epoch:

> ... the security of people; the prevention of mass hatred and mass violence; the social responsibility of the writer and the artist; the relationship of a poet to his poem; the life of an artist in relation to the work of art; the administration of justice to satisfy the sense of justice of the people; the safeguards of democracy; the unsolved question of why so many intellectuals in different countries — writers, musicians, painters, psychiatrists — have succumbed to the blandishments of Fascism, from Knut Hamsun and Paul Morand to Dr. Alexis Carrel and Carl G. Jung. Rational scrutiny of all these questions was cut off with one work: INSANITY. *Psychiatria locuta, causa finita.* Psychiatry has spoken, the case is closed. (593)

Wertham contended that in order for violence — especially violence on a grand scale — to be reconciled it needed to be judged and condemned. That had not occurred in this instance because the psychiatrists had found Pound unfit to stand trial, despite the fact that they offered no supporting evidence for that view. Wertham's condemnation of the forces at work in the Pound controversy — anti-social and individualistic psychiatry, a minimization of fascist tendencies and a point-of-view from the Bollingen jurors drawn from the Fellows of American Letters which utterly divorced aesthetic concerns from political realities — was indicative of his primary complaints about the work of others in this period. What remained

to be seen was the type of positive contribution Wertham would strive to make with his personal conception of a social psychiatry.

Towards a Social Psychiatry

In a series of articles written for *The New Republic* in 1945, Wertham began to lay a foundation for much of his later writing which would take issue with post-war tendencies in psychiatry and psychoanalysis (Wertham 1949c, Wertham 1949d). Here Wertham wondered whether or not psychoanalysis was becoming an opiate, and drew particular attention to psychiatrists who seemed content to label entire societies as "anal" or "oral", a position that Wertham called "absurd" (1949c:540). Wertham's critique of psychoanalysis, while specific to the more conservative tendencies, often seemed to blend into a general dismissal of popularization. In a 1948 review for the *New York Times Book Review*, Wertham asked what was to be gained from the popularization of psychiatry. His answer was an image of man, specifically of "homos psychanalyticus", the man without a social world and the man with orifices in the place of flesh and blood (Wertham 1948b). Similarly, writing in *The New Republic* a few months later Wertham derided psychoanalysis' new status as "cocktail chatter" and attacked both the prominent anti-Freudian psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan for his "platitudes and pseudo-erudite announcements" and Sullivan's publisher for the "unparalleled lack of criticism and responsibility" that would allow a book like *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* to be published at all (Wertham 1948c:29). Ultimately, Wertham was opposed to what he saw as a conservative tendency among popularized psychoanalytic works to sell what he termed "peace of mind literature" (Wertham 1949g:6). He recognized that the vogue for these books indicated the presence of a large number of significantly unhappy people who were being denied proper psychiatric attention because of the high cost of analysis. This is not, however, to suggest that Wertham was opposed to popularization of psychiatric thought *in*

toto. Indeed, he himself engaged in just such activities when he wrote articles such as "10 Ways a Child May Tell You He is Headed for a Troubled Teen Age" in *Ladies Home Journal* (Wertham 1959). Rather Wertham reserved his criticism of psychiatric writing for the lay reader for those writers whom he suggested were in the business of promoting a "conservative dogma" regarding the relationship between infants and their excreta, in the place of analysis rooted in the intersection of the individual with the social world (Wertham 1953c:16).

Wertham's most extensive critique of the conservative tendency of post-war psychoanalysis was published in his 1963 *American Journal of Psychotherapy* article "Society and Problem Personalities: Praetorian Psychiatry" (Wertham 1963b). The "problem personalities", according to Wertham, were troubled youths whose behaviour placed them somewhere on a continuum between mental disease and normal. The imprecision of such a definition had opened the door to unlimited subjectivism in psychiatry, leading to an inadequate state of psychopathology with regard to the problem personality and an equation of the term with the more vaguely defined "anti-social" type. Diagnoses of problem personalities, therefore, were apt to be neither strictly scientific nor psychiatric but administrative and rooted in the moral judgments of psychiatric practitioners. More importantly, however, Wertham extended his criticism to demonstrate who benefited from the kinds of labeling which he was decrying in this instance. Wertham suggested in this article that psychiatry was a field and that differences in the social status of individual psychiatrists within that field structured their views. He went on to note that it was the highest paid psychiatrists who had the "greatest ideological influence" (409). As a privileged social group, Wertham argued, psychiatrists had a vested interest in obscuring class divisions within society. While Wertham acknowledged that "the existence of social classes is a historical fact" (409) whose interests were not identical he also observed that most psychiatrists attempted to minimize this by speaking of strata rather than classes and by enumerating quantitative rather than qualitative differences between social groups.

Moreover, Wertham suggested that in personal analysis the psychoanalyzed absorbed the ideological slant of the analyst. This led to a situation in which "more and more psychiatrists are developing an organization man mentality" (410).

The ability to think around the development of psychoanalytical conformism was rooted in re-thinking the contrast between the individual and the masses. Wertham noted that "masses" was a very ambiguous term with historically variant meanings and that the current usage in psychiatry was heavily influenced by Ortega y Gasset, Vilfredo Pareto, Otto Spengler and, especially, Gustav Le Bon. According to Wertham the influence of Le Bon on Freud had led to the development of a two-fold dogma widely accepted by analysts: first, that the masses were always inferior in comparison with the individual; second, that the masses had certain unalterable qualities. Wertham's suggestion was that to regard only the negative characteristics of the mass — as Freud, following Le Bon, did — was prejudicial and intellectually unsound. He reminded his readers that masses are simply agglomerations of individuals and that their reactions depend on many different factors. The inability to think through the distinction between the individual and the mass — or the individual and society — had lead to the exclusion of the social process from psychoanalytic writing because it was taken for granted that social forces did not exist independently of the individual. Yet Wertham maintained that "the pressures of our present society are very great" (411) and in both the normal and problem personality they evoked almost automatic responses. The reality of social pressures on the individual obligated the scientific psychiatrist, in Wertham's eyes, to become a social critic.

The need for social criticism in psychiatry led Wertham to his most significant break with post-war psychiatric orthodoxies. Wertham argued that while the majority of psychiatrists espoused self-expression and self-actualization, what they really desired, by virtue of their privileged class position, was conformism. For Wertham this was best noted, obviously, in the contemporary relationship between psychiatry and the legal system. He suggested that psychiatric attacks on the definition of insanity and legal

concepts such as responsibility, punishment and deterrence which were presented as progressive and humanitarian were actually reactionary, or what he terms "psycho-authoritarianism", the rule of an expert elite. Key to psycho-authoritarianism was a complacency about negative social forces like violence. Wertham argued that in promoting a psychological view of social forces which suggested, for example, that Nazism was the result of Hitler's individual neuroses, psychiatry has allowed "wrong or reactionary" social values to develop within society (413). Psychiatry, Wertham alleged, performed a social function in society regardless of whether or not individual practitioners were aware of it. Wertham identified that social function in the American post-war context as a praetorian function insofar as psychiatrists acted not unlike the praetorian guard of ancient Rome who served to prevent social changes towards the new. Psychiatry was not simply a rationale, as C. Wright Mills referred to it, but actually acted as a powerful adjunct to the constituted instruments of social control. What was progressive in Freud's Vienna, Wertham suggested, was reactionary in the atomic age:

> By leaving problem personalities to the highly subjective, discriminatory labels of an expert elite, by separating the psyche from its social roots, by attacking rational ideas of responsibility, by diverting interest in social affairs into preoccupations and activities with mental health and psychopathology, by placing all faults in the individual, by suggesting, as sociologist Maurice Stein put it, that all social settings are the same and social resistance hopeless — by all such means psychiatry and psychoanalysis play a praetorian role, upholding power and privilege. (414)

Wertham suggested that the reactionary character of post-war psychoanalysis could be seen in both theory in practice. To Wertham the explanation of historical events by reference to the Oedipus complex was just as reactionary as the ongoing segregation of psychiatric hospitals. In the place of these praetorian tendencies Wertham suggested that it was necessary for analysts to remember that it was only possible to speak of the mental health of the individual and not of the group because, despite the protestations of Erich Fromm, there was no such thing as a sane society. He further suggested that it was impossible to solve social ills through psychiatry. Yet by the same token it was reckless to ignore the wider social dimension in the analysis of individual patients. Wertham concluded by

suggesting: "If we do our best clinical work for the individual, and face social problems scientifically with equal concreteness on their own level, we shall make progress in better understanding the relationship between the two" (415). The key here was Wertham's connection between science and criticism and the equal emphasis on the individual as well as the social which he set against a conservative Freudian psychoanalysis which he characterized as overly individualistic, uncritical and asocial. Thus Wertham can be seen to have been calling for a socially grounded psychiatry which nevertheless maintained its connection to the scientific domain. In this way Wertham's earliest writings on science and medicine played a crucial formative role in the development of his position as a socially concerned psychiatrist and cultural critic in the postwar period.

Conclusion

In many ways Fredric Wertham was almost totally isolated as a psychiatric thinker in the postwar period. His constant denunciations of orthodox Freudianism as asocial, reactionary and needlessly individualistic certainly separated him from the mainstream of psychoanalytic societies and organizations. At the same time he was equally critical of most other notable critics of Freudian orthodoxy. In *The Circle of Guilt*, for instance, he complained that the best known Freudian apostates — Erich Fromm, Harry Stack Sullivan, Karen Horney, Clara Thompson and Abram Kardiner — did not "go far enough and do not take account of the full extent of the underlying dynamic interaction between personal and impersonal factors" (Wertham 1956:69). He argued instead that a person's thoughts and actions were determined not only by subjective wishes but in equal measure by his objective social position. This left Wertham virtually alone despite the fact that his work obviously intersected with so many of the most important debates in psychiatry and psychoanalysis of his day. Wertham was involved at various moments in the mental hygiene movement, the debates about the future of forensic psychiatry and efforts to combine psychoanalysis and science through neurology and projective psychology.

Nonetheless his relentless insistence on combining psychiatry with a progressive politics and concern for culture often left him as the odd man out. In many ways Wertham's widely reported involvement with the Ezra Pound case ("Wertham Assails" 1949) could have been the culmination of Wertham's writings on social psychiatry because the case so clearly combined his primary interests: a concern with fascism and the politics of human violence; the role of the intellectual in relation to politics and culture; and the intersection of psychiatry and the legal system. Yet the Pound case remains little more than a footnote in Wertham's career. Instead the culmination of these interests would reappear in the mid-1950s and eclipse everything else that Wertham had written or accomplished. With the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954 and the campaign to reform the comic book industry Wertham was able to bring together the strands that had run through his work up until that time. It married his interest in mental hygiene and the prevention of human violence and juvenile delinquency with his concern for the relative merits and effects of high and mass culture. It was the combination of these interests and Wertham's particular background and training that made *Seduction of the Innocent* both an important and idiosyncratic intervention into postwar debates about mass culture and the effects of the mass media on the lives of children.

In turning in the next chapter to a specific analysis of the particular ways in which his politics, aesthetic predispositions and medical training coalesced in *Seduction of the Innocent* it will be possible to make clear reference to the specific differences which existed between Wertham's conception of media effects and the dominant paradigm which was developed by American mass communication researchers in the postwar period. Indeed, while both approaches will be shown to draw on an aesthetic rejection of mass culture drawn from traditions which characterized literary criticism in this century, it will also become apparent that Wertham's clinical and liberal approach stressing the inter-connectedness of social and individual psychic factors in juvenile delinquency was completely at odds with more conservative and individualistic approaches rooted in the

social sciences. In this way it will be possible to suggest the specific means by which Wertham has been excluded from the received histories of communications research.

Chapter Four:
Wertham and the Critique of Comic Books

By 1957 Wertham's critique of comic books was well enough known that he was the specific target of the legendary American satire magazine, *Mad*. The mock article entitled "Baseball is Ruining Our Children" appeared under the byline Frederick Werthless, M.D. ("Baseball" 1957). Alongside a dozen Wally Wood illustrations depicting leeringly aggressive baseball players the text of the article mocked psychological and mono-causationist beliefs regarding juvenile delinquency by exaggerating the rhetoric of traditional critics of mass culture:

> For many years, I worked closely with "juvenile delinquents". Then my hair turned gray, and they kicked me out of their gang. But while I was with them, I studied them. I questioned them, probed their minds, uncovered their ids, examined their egos, and rifled their pockets. And in every single case I examined, I repeatedly came up with the same shocking fact: *At one time or another, every one of those poor misguided children had been exposed to the game of "Baseball"!* They had either *played* it themselves, or *watched* it being played... not to mention the countless other indirect exposures such as *"Baseball Magazines"*, *"Baseball Record Books"*, and the worst offender of all, *"Baseball Bubble-Gum Cards"*.
>
> Yes, the game of "Baseball" is souring the soil of society's garden, rotting our flowering youth. ("Baseball" 1957)

The illustration captions continued in this vein, citing specific examples of the values that children were supposed to be learning from the game: pitchers teach deceptive practices; batters encourage the use of force; arguing with the umpire leads to lack of respect for authority; and so on. Yet what was most noticeable about this parody was the precision with which the rhetorical style of Fredric Wertham was mocked. The garden metaphor employed by the writer, for instance, was a particular favorite of Wertham's and was used on more than one occasion in *Seduction of the Innocent*. This reason for the fidelity in the parody became obvious, however, if one knew all the players involved. *Mad* was, by 1957, the only comic book left in the EC stable of titles. EC had been hard hit by the furor over comic books in the middle of the decade and its publisher, William Gaines, had been personally chastised for publishing salacious literature on the front page of the *New York*

Times. Gaines was a vocal defender of the types of comic books that Wertham criticized in his articles and in his book, and the testimony of the two men before the Senate Subcommittee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency on 21 April 1954 came to define the pro- and anti-comics camps in the mid-1950s. With this knowledge, then, it is possible to see the *Mad* article as a sort of last gasp from a comics publisher who largely felt that he had lost the discursive battle about the role of comics in the lives of children — and consequently the majority of his publishing company — to Wertham and other crusaders against mass culture.

Comics publishers like William Gaines had lost the battle for public opinion in the 1950s largely because comics were successfully positioned as a part of an allegedly degrading postwar mass culture. In *The Lonely Crowd* David Riesman decried the child market for mass media because "the child begins to be bombarded by radio and comics from the moment he can listen and just barely read" and these media "train the young for the frontiers of consumption" (Riesman 1950:101-102). Riesman compared other-directed comics-reading children who he saw "lying on the bed or floor, reading and trading comics and preferences among comics" (102) unfavorably with the inner-directed and solitary readers of the past. In this way he brought comic books fully into the critiques of mass culture which were enumerated in the first and second chapters of this thesis. In order to come to terms with the precise ways in which comics functioned as a significant part of the critique of mass culture in the postwar period it is necessary to trace the history of commentary on the form. These commentaries, which originated from social scientists, educators, librarians, parents and literary critics, can be roughly broken down into three historical periods which marked the era of greatest concern about the role of the comic book: pre-war and wartime accounts, immediate postwar commentaries and writings from the 1950s. Each of these periods will be addressed in the pages which follow in order that a basis can be established for the subsequent evaluation of the specific contribution of Fredric Wertham to the debate about comics, mass culture and media effects.

Pre-War and Wartime Concerns about Comics

An 18 April 1942 *Business Week* article was among the first magazines to note the rapid rise of the comic book. That article suggested that in December 1941 there had been 148 comic book titles for sale on New York newsstands and that total national sales of all comic books had climbed to more than 15 million copies per month. At the same time *Business Week* noted two things that would soon change about the comics in the United States. The first was that advertisers had still not caught on to this new trend. The second was that there was at that point no organized opposition to the comic book as a mass cultural form ("Superman Scores" 1942:54-56). An article in *Recreation* from later that same year began to sound an alarmist tone when it noted that 75% of the leisure-reading of American children was devoted to comic books ("Regarding Comics Magazines" 1942:689). Further readership surveys demonstrated that by the end of 1943 95% of children aged eight to eleven and 84% of children aged twelve to seventeen read comics, while 35% of adults aged eighteen to thirty did the same ("Escapist Paydirt" 1943:55). It was clear, therefore, that at the height of the Second World War comic books had emerged as a significant American leisure time activity with particular appeal to children. The stage was set, therefore, for a rash of articles from a variety of sources that would alternately condemn and condone comic books.

Librarians and Educators Address the Comics

Among the most vocal participants in the wartime debate about comic books were American librarians and public school teachers. This is not surprising given the fact that the former group viewed itself as charged with protecting the nation's literary heritage and the latter conceived of their duty as at least partially responsible for the safeguarding of American children. During the war the reaction of librarians to comic books generally took

two forms: one group saw them as essentially harmless diversions while the other viewed them as a legitimate threat to literacy. Gweneira Williams and Jane Wilson were emblematic of the point of view that comics were generally harmless. Arguing that it was time to "cease being Victorian about comics" (1942a:204) they suggested that comics were a form of "mental candy bars" that satisfied particular needs of children that books did not (1942b:1490). Williams and Wilson suggested that the popularity of comic books stemmed from the harmless thrill which they imparted to children and went on to suggest that if librarians were genuinely concerned about comics that they should find books which provided the same sorts of enjoyment that children found in comic books (1942b:1496). Opponents of the comics generally embraced the suggestion to replace "the highly colored enemy" (S.J.K. 1941b:846) with books as well. Arguing the anti-mass culture line when she suggested that comic books represented a "pseudo-culture", Eva Anttonen suggested in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* that comics were ruining the library experience for youngsters by convincing low-class "'Dead End' kids" that "the library is a 'sissy place'" (Anttonen 1941:567). She concluded that the only solution to the problem posed by comics was to "bring out all our dragons" (595) and expose children to high-quality adventure literature. This sentiment was echoed in the same journal the following month. Brushing off the suggestion that bad comics could be combated by the substitution of good comics the columnist S.J.K. wrote: "what we have is still an aesthetic monstrosity, a monument to bad taste in color and design, a disconcerting surrender to sensationalism" (S.J.K. 1941a:670). The job of the librarian, it was suggested, was to train children away from things like comic book and towards an appreciation of superior literature. In this way it can be noted that wartime librarians, whether generally in favour or generally opposed to comic books, relied on and reified a series of high culture assumptions about the relative merits of mass and elite culture for children. In fact, these assumptions, it will become clear, defined the entire wartime and postwar consensus about comic books and were shared by critics and defenders alike.

Education journals, like library publications, paid great attention to the problem posed by comic books in the mid-century era, although they tended to do so through reference to classroom-based research. In one of the first articles dedicated to comics in an education journal Roger Gay concluded on the basis of his own reading of newspaper comic strips that while some children seemed to imitate the actions of comic strip heroes such as Tarzan, most comics were "harmless enough" (Gay 1937:208). Later studies, however, attempted to approach the question from a more scientific perspective than could be found by simply reading and classifying strips. Specifically, education researchers sought to determine the preferences of children for various comic books and comic strips. Sister Katharine McCarthy and Marion Smith, for instance, argued that comic books constituted a new form of children's literature when they surveyed the preferences of 8,600 school aged children in Duluth and found that they had read 25,000 comic books in the previous week (McCarthy and Smith 1943:98). In drawing conclusions from these findings McCarthy and Smith shifted from dispassionate researchers to moral crusaders, noting that the findings were "disconcerting" because "lurid" comic books could do harm to the "maladjusted child" (98-100). Other researchers, however, were less prone to condemnations. Following a survey of 121 children in Phoenix, Flida Cooper Kinneman praised comic books because "even the poorer readers can scan these rapidly", but she agreed with librarians insofar as she suggested that good books should be substituted for comics in a child's reading whenever possible (1943:332). The importance of value judgments in shaping the conclusions of educational researchers can be seen clearly in the work of George Hill. In a 1940 study of 240 children in Philadelphia, Hill and Estelle Trent concluded simply that boys and girls preferred different types of comic strips, that white children read more strips than black children and that all children liked strips featuring action, adventure and humour (1940:32-36). A year later, however, following the burgeoning public outcry about comics at the end of 1940, Hill's position shifted and he condemned comics for their poor language, morals and their tendency to teach bad habits

while suggesting that it was necessary for parents to guide children away from comics and towards edifying literature (Hill 1941:413-414). To this end, then, it is possible to see the degree to which the moral and aesthetic condemnation of comics and mass culture in the 1940s successfully impinged upon ostensibly dispassionate research and led researchers to negatively juxtapose the reading of comics with the reading of consecrated or classical literature.

This is not to say, however, that comics were without defenders during the war, far from it. Ruth Strang, for instance, argued that comic books met certain needs of children at certain moments in their development. She suggested that eventually children would outgrow their fascination with comics and that responsible parents should advocate moderation rather than abstinence where comics were concerned (Strang 1943:342). The leading researcher on children's preferences in comic books during the war was certainly Paul Witty, who published a series of articles on the topic in 1941 and 1942. Witty's conclusions help to illustrate the high degree of confusion and ambivalence about comic books that surrounded their defenders at this time. Witty's most significant contribution to the study of comics came with the publication of a series of articles about readership preferences of children which appeared in the *Journal of Experimental Education*, the *Journal of Educational Psychology* and *Educational Administration and Supervision*. Each of these were remarkably similar insofar as they surveyed the reading preferences of children in grades four through six, seven and eight and nine through twelve respectively (Witty 1941a; Witty, Smith and Coomer 1942; Witty and Coomer 1942). These studies were given wider influence when, in response to suggestions in that magazine that comic books were entirely without merit, Witty summarized his findings in *National Parent-Teacher* (Witty 1942). In these studies Witty and his associates concluded that comic books were among the most popular of all children's leisure activities but that interest in comics declined as children aged. In a related study Witty concluded that the amount of comic book reading done by a child did not seriously impact the other types of reading done by the

child, and that in terms of intelligence, academic achievement and social adjustment there was no difference between heavy and non-readers of comic books (Witty 1941b:109). Yet at the same time as he was defending comics from charges that they were harmful and that their reading should be discouraged, Witty himself undercut the significance of his own conclusions by suggesting "excessive reading in this area may lead to a decline in artistic appreciation, and a taste for shoddy, distorted presentations" (Witty, Smith and Coomer 1942:181). The solution, he suggested in agreement with so many other critics of the period, was to provide children with good literature in the place of comics despite the fact that his own research indicated no significant differences between avid and non-readers of comic books. To this degree it is possible to see that even defenders of mass culture in this period were susceptible to the suasion of anti-mass culture charges.

While most librarians and educators insisted on the substitution of good literature for bad comics in children's literary diets another option did present itself during the war. In 1941 the Parents' Institute, the publishers of *Parents' Magazine*, entered the anti-comic book fray with an effort to combat bad comics through the substitution of good comics. Their initial effort was called *True Comics* and its launch was widely reported in educational journals ("'Tis True" 1941:598). Within a few months the Parents' Institute line had grown to three comics whose goal, according to publisher George Hecht, was "sublimating and redirecting a powerful and now deeply-seated childhood interest" ("How Much" 1941:436). These efforts to fight comics with comics appealed to many because it seemed unlikely that the mass culture tide could be entirely diverted. Louise Seaman Bechtel noted in 1941 that the monthly circulation of comic books at more than ten million per month was five times greater than the annual circulation of children's books (Bechtel 1941:297). Bechtel suggested that, with its circulation already at half a million copies per issue, *True Comics* could begin to turn the tide on bad comics. Other advocates of good comics, like Josette Frank of the Children's Bureau, suggested that good comics far outweighed the bad nationally and that publishers such as National who had their own

advisory boards were dedicated to cleaning up the industry and working with parents for the protection of the nation's children. Frank, who was employed by National as a consultant, would become one of the leading voices speaking up in favor of comic books during the war as social scientists employed by the comic book industry attempted to shift the terms of the debate.

Advocates for the Comics

Certainly the strongest wartime defense of comic books came in December 1944 with the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology*. In his opening editorial Harvey Zorbaugh suggested that "it is time the amazing cultural phenomenon of the growth of the comics is subjected to dispassionate scrutiny" (Zorbaugh 1944a:194), but he failed to indicate the degree to which dispassionate scrutiny did not seem to imply disinterested research. This issue contained seven articles, six of which were written by researchers or critics employed directly by a comic book publisher. Advisory boards for comics publishers had come into fashion in the early 1940s as comic books first came under attack for degrading the act of reading and contributing to the corruption of morals. National, the publisher of comics featuring Superman and Batman, established a large advisory board which included Josette Frank, Roger Thorndike, W. W. D. Sones, C. Bowie Millican, Gene Tunney and Pearl S. Buck ("Comics and Their Audience" 1942:1479). In later years National would add Laura Bender and Harcourt Peppard to their board (Ellsworth 1949:294). The Fawcett board included Sidonie M. Gruenberg, Ernest G. Osborne, Al Williams and Harvey Zorbaugh, who edited the special issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology* (Nyberg 1998:15).

The journal opened with a celebratory essay by Zorbaugh, the chair of the Department of Educational Sociology at New York University, which simply argued that comics had emerged as major medium of communication and a favorite form of literature that was influencing American culture (Zorbaugh 1944b). Zorbaugh's essay contained little

argument and no original research, although it ended with a call for such (203). Ironically, given its complete lack of original scientific research, this piece was given wider circulation when it was condensed and published in *Science Digest* under the provocative title: "Comics — Food for Half-Wits?" (Zorbaugh 1945). Similarly, the essay by Sidonie Gruenberg, director of the Child Study Association of America, contained no research and instead settled for an argument which cited a number of comics which she felt were good for children — including comics from Fawcett, on whose advisory board she sat — and suggested that comics required an undefined amount of time to develop as a legitimate art form and should remain unhampered until that time (Gruenberg 1944:206-211). Josette Frank adopted a similar position when she suggested that some comics were good for children while others were not quite as good. It was the duty of parents and educators, Frank argued, to take notice of comic books but she also assured readers that there was nothing serious to take notice of. Frank insisted, for instance, that "comics always end well" and that there was absolutely no evidence that the reading of comics could be linked to rising crime rates (Frank 1944:216-217). Frank would reiterate these claims in a booklet published five years later by the Public Affairs Committee where she would promote the most popular character of the publisher on whose staff she served by suggesting: "Superman strikes at the roots of juvenile delinquency" (Frank 1949a:4). What united the essays of Frank, Gruenberg and Zorbaugh was the fact that each presented comic books in a generally positive light while allowing that some comic book publishers — but not the ones with whom they themselves worked — produced work that was questionable. Further, none of the three presented research findings that could in any way be termed scientific, relying instead on positive rhetoric supported only by their own claims to expertise by virtue of their status in the Child Study Association or employment at NYU.

The same cannot be said for the work of other contributors to the special issue of the *Journal*. The essay by Lauretta Bender, "The Psychology of Children's Reading and the Comics", drew upon her research as a psychiatrist at Bellevue and a professor at NYU

Medical School. Bender's essay opened with an explanation of her theory of fantasy as an integral part of childhood development and her understanding of the ways in which fantasy worked in art. Bender argued that comics were beneficial to children insofar as they stimulated fantasies:

> We concluded that the comics (dealing with universal problems of relationship of the self to physical and social reality; replete with rapid action and repetition; given continuity by a central character who, like Caspar, invites identification; free to experiment with fantastic solutions, but with good ultimately triumphing over evil), like the folklore of other times, serve as a means to stimulate the child's fantasy life and so help him solve the individual and sociological problems inherent in his living. (Bender 1944:226)

Bender went on to suggest that the so-called "good comics", such as those published by the Parents' Institute were actually more threatening to children than the bad because "they offer no solution to the problem of aggression in the world" (227). Bender's argument here was an extension of her previous work on this topic (Bender and Lourie 1941) which had been widely reported and cited. That work had suggested "normal, well-balanced children are not upset by even the more horrible scenes in the comics as long as the reason for the threat is clear and the issues are well stated" ("Let Children Read" 1941:124). Bender's insistence that the "normal" child was unharmed by comics would subsequently be taken up by a number of defenders of the comic book who sought to suggest that if there were a correlation between comic books and juvenile delinquency the fault lay not with the media but with the children who consumed the media because those children were "abnormal" or "maladjusted".

The remaining essays in the special section on comic books generally lacked the type of insights which could be found in Bender's work. Paul Witty contributed an essay which failed to live up to the standard set by his previous writings on the subject, and which essentially served as nothing more than a survey of U.S. Army training techniques reliant on visual aids such as film strips and comics (Witty 1944). The essay by W.W.D. Sones focused on comics and their utility for education and relied heavily on Witty's prior research as well as the work of Roger Thorndike. Sones suggested that comic books were

useful tools for teaching poor readers the fundamentals of language acquisition because they "employ a language that apparently is almost universally understood" (Sones 1944:233). The claim that comic books were useful in the teaching of reading skills and vocabulary building generally relied on just one 1941 article, "Words and the Comics" by Roger Thorndike, which was endlessly cited by proponents of comic books in the decades that followed its initial publication (Williams and Wilson 1942a; Gleason 1952; Emans 1960). This was despite the fact that as years passed it became less and less applicable to ongoing controversies. Thorndike's research into comic book vocabulary was, in fact, extremely limited. He studied the vocabulary in only four individual comics, all of which were published in 1940 by a single company — National, the publisher on whose advisory board he served. Thorndike found that each of the four comics he studied contained about 10,000 words and that additionally each comic contained about 1,000 words that were beyond the most common. He concluded that the comic books offered a "substantial reading experience" that required the ability to read at about the fifth or sixth grade level for full comprehension (Thorndike 1941:113). While this study had obvious limitations regarding the size and representativeness of the sample, it needs to be noted that the study was one of the few efforts to approach comic books from a strictly scientific perspective in the wartime years. Most participants in the debate about comics — both pro and con — were content to rely upon largely unsubstantiated claims based on personal interpretations, biases and appeals to authority. Indeed, these sorts of claims would take center stage not only in the social science journals, but more importantly in the general interest magazines of the day.

The Wartime Anti-Comics Crusade Begins

Most historians of the comic book trace the birth of anti-comic book concern to a single influential editorial in the *Chicago Daily News* from 8 May 1940. That editorial, "A National Disgrace" by Sterling North, was widely reprinted. According to Margaret Frakes

in the two years which followed the original publication of the essay the *Daily News* had received more than 25 million requests for copies (Frakes 1942:1351). Given that sort of number it is clear that something had changed in the discursive landscape. North's article was short and direct, a call to arms for concerned parents. He began his editorial by referring to comic books as "a poisonous mushroom growth" that took more than a million dollars out of the pockets of youngsters every month for "graphic insanity" (North 1940:56). Examining 108 comic books on sale around Chicago, North made a strong distinction between the positive influence of newspaper comic strips and the negative impact of comic books, when he concluded that seventy per cent of the latter were "of a nature no respectable newspaper would think of accepting". The bulk of the comic books, North continued, made the dime novels of the past appear to be classic literature because the newer comic books were

> badly drawn, badly written and badly printed — a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems — the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color, their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories (56).

North concluded that "unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the 'comic' magazine" (56). The proposed solution was the same one suggested by most librarians and educators: a renewed emphasis on quality literature for children. North suggested plainly that the "antidote to the 'comic' magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore. The parent (and the teacher — ed.) who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence" (56). These charges were repeated in March 1941 when North reprinted his original editorial with new commentary that stressed the importance of reviving oral story-telling traditions within the family (North 1941a), and again when he suggested in an article that the key to a child's healthy future lay not only with good books but with an active life of arts and crafts (North 1941b). North's articles, with their emphasis on the mass produced elements of the comic books and their status as

an increasingly large cultural industry, paved the way for subsequent investigations of the comic book which placed the medium within traditions of anti-mass culture commentary.

One of the most bizarre defenses of comic books during the war addressed growing concerns about comic books and their relation to an increasingly mass society head on. William Moulton Marston, the inventor of the lie detector and the creator and writer of the Wonder Woman comic books for National, argued in *The American Scholar* that comic books could not be understood by intellectuals because they addressed the primal parts of the brain rather than the reflective (Marston 1944:36). Marston went on to make the unusual argument that Superman-style stories were good for children because they cultivated a wish for power:

> Do you want him (or her) to cultivate weakling's aims, sissified attitudes? ... The wish to be super-strong is a healthy wish, a vital, compelling, power-producing desire. The more the *Superman — Wonder Woman* picture stories build up this inner compulsion by stimulating the child's natural longing to battle and overcome obstacles, particularly evil ones, the better chance your child has for self-advancement in the world. (Marston 1944:40)

This perspective, which was ridiculed in a subsequent letter to the editor from the noted literary critic Cleanth Brooks (Brooks and Heilman 1944:247-252), was not widely shared. Indeed, comic books were more likely to be chastised for contributing to a climate of violence and fascism than celebrated as Marston suggested. In 1945, for instance, *Time* reported that Walter Ong had condemned Superman as a Nazi and suggested that Wonder Woman reflected "Hitlerite paganism" ("Are Comics Fascist?" 1945:68). Similar complaints would originate from a wide variety of sources. James Vlamos wrote in the *American Mercury* that comic books fester "the most dismaying mass of undiluted horror and prodigious impossibility ever visited on the sanity of a nation's youth" and suggested that comic books demonstrated to children "the nihilistic man of the totalitarian ideology" (Vlamos 1941:412, 416). Writing in the *Christian Century* Margaret Frakes suggested that comic books were inculcating racism with their wartime caricatures of the Japanese and that the concept of the superhero was inherently fascist (Frakes 1942:1349-1350). Thomas Doyle reiterated these claims when he suggested that Superman reflected a Nietzchean

ideology and that comic books generally represented a moral decadence which had defined the United States since the end of the First World War (Doyle 1943:549-554). Finally, Lovell Thompson argued in the *Atlantic Monthly* that comic books were "feebly vicious material" whose readers had opted for a "goalless existence of decadence" in a "sub-hell where the devil himself is disciplined" (Thompson 1942:128). The quick rise of widespread concern about the increasing moral decadence and potentially fascist spirit of the comic book during the war points to the way that the medium was rapidly caught up in ongoing discourses about mass culture that pre-dated the form itself and which shaped the way that it was received by critics and, ultimately, the public. As the war concluded these concerns did not abate but rather continued to grow to such a degree that actions to stem anti-comic book sentiments were required to secure the industry's future. The factors which contributed to postwar efforts at self-regulation can be seen in the intersection of comic books and the general critique of mass culture.

First Efforts at Comic Book Regulation: The Post-War Period

The rapid expansion of the comic book industry following the end of the Second World War was a cause for great concern for many commentators concerned with questions of mass culture generally. A 1948 article in *Library Journal* was one of the first to point out the new scale of the so-called comic book problem. Citing figures gathered by the Ayers Newspaper Directory the magazine reported that total sales of comic books in the United States in 1946 had totaled more than 540 million copies, or an average of 45 million each month. This was in comparison to the total number of books of all kinds sold in 1947, which totaled only 429 million copies (Smith 1948: 1651). That comic books had surpassed books as the number one literary form in the United States — at least in units sold — was deemed a major problem for librarians and educators. Despite ongoing research which tended to conclude that no serious differences existed between children who

read comic books excessively and those who read them not at all (Heisler 1947; Heisler 1948), increasingly the tone of articles about comic books tended to take on a mien associated with a moral panic. The *National Education Association Journal*, for instance, cited a case wherein a six year old Pennsylvania boy was charged with shooting and killing his twelve year old brother for a comic book. The *Journal* argued that "what goes into the mind comes out in life" and advocated the restriction of comic books, suggesting that freedom of the press "was never intended to protect indecency or the perversion of the child mind" ("Ubiquitous Comics" 1948:570). Three solutions immediately suggested themselves. The first of these was the most extreme and condoned by few. Comics burnings took place in a number of communities in 1948, including Chicago and Binghamton, NY ("Fighting Gunfire" 1948:54), but this practice was generally decried for its negative effects on children, as well as for the fact that it promoted authoritarianism and had a negative impact on democracy (Tieleman 1949:299-300). A toned down version of this approach constituted the second option, namely critics who suggested forming organizations to fight for new legislation to control comic books. Jean Gray Harker, for example, suggested in the *Library Journal* that it was impossible to control what media children might come into contact with when they were separated from parental authority. Thus, librarians and concerned parents were duty bound to clean-up all comics. Harker's vow to battle the comic book industry was among the earliest explicit calls to action to be found in a professional library journal:

> Not I, *I'm* going to fight them! I will buy all the good books we can afford. I will encourage my children to go to the library, and I will discuss their reading with them. I'm going to talk to groups of parents in our local P.T.A.s. I shall ask conscientious parents and other citizens to urge swift passage of a state crime comic censorship law. (Harker 1948:1707)

Less than two months later, however, the same publication editorialized against legislative action to clean-up comic books. Suggesting that the problem of comic books was serious but also one which required realistic solutions, *Library Journal* advocated taking a wait-and-see attitude with regard to new efforts within the comics industry to establish self-

regulation ("What is the Solution" 1949:180). The move towards self-regulation had come into being as a result of the heightened calls for action in the American media in the immediate postwar period, calls which ultimately resulted in action from a number of comics publishers.

The Case Against the Comics

Three key exchanges drove the comic book industry toward self-regulation in 1947 and 1948. Each of these was a well-publicized critique of comic books and the combined impact of the three led publishers to take actions intended to thwart further criticisms. In March 1948 a nationally-aired radio debate was held in New York which pitted the *Saturday Review*'s John Mason Brown and the novelist Marya Mannes against *L'il Abner* cartoonist Al Capp and *True Comics* publisher George Hecht ("Bane" 1948:70-72). Capp's defense of the comic strip, in which he argued that children are usually right about what was good for them, probably did little to defuse the attacks launched against the comics by Brown and Mannes. In his opening statement Brown marshaled a number of typically high-brow condemnations of mass culture, terming comic books "the lowest, most despicable, and most harmful sort of trash" and enumerating a series of aesthetic objections to the form:

> As a writer, I resent the way in which they get along with the poorest kind of writing. I hate their lack of both style and ethics. I hate their appeal to illiteracy and their bad grammar. I loathe their tiresome toughness, their cheap thrills, their imbecilic laughter.
>
> I despise them for making only the story count and not the HOW of its telling. I detest them, in spite of their alleged thrills and gags, because they have no subtlety , and certainly no beauty. Their power of seduction, I believe, lies in the fact that they make everything too easy. They substitute bad drawing for good description. They reduce the wonders of the language to crude monosyllables, and narratives to no more than printed motion pictures. (Brown 1948:31)

Mannes, Brown's partner in the debate, argued from a similar position. Her 1947 *New Republic* article on comic books, "Junior Has a Craving", condemned comics because they required no effort or concentration to read, suggesting that "comic books in their present form are the absence of thought. They are, in fact, the greatest intellectual narcotic on the

market" (Mannes 1947:20). Mannes' argument surpassed that of Brown insofar as she suggested that the negative impact of the mass cultural comic book went beyond the merely aesthetic to include the political. Equating American enthusiasm for comic books with pre-war German enthusiasm for Nazism she warned that one possible consequence of comic books "might be a people incapable of reading a page of ordinary text. Another would be a society based on the impact of fist on a jaw. A third would be a nation that left it to the man in the costume. None of these prospects is exactly attractive" (23). The leveling of common anti-mass culture arguments at comics in the postwar period — with Mannes going so far as to suggest that while Charles Dickens had been a popular artist Al Capp was nothing more than "a conveyor belt" ("Bane" 1948:70) — formed the basis for the anti-comic book drive. The factor that would push comic book publishers towards self-regulation would be the extension of the anti-mass culture argument through reference to actual harm promoted in popular forums. Evidence for these claims would be provided by Fredric Wertham.

Two articles which appeared in the spring of 1948 had a tremendous impact on the postwar debate about comic books. The first of these was Judith Crist's March 1948 *Collier's* profile of Wertham entitled "Horror in the Nursery" which emphasized a number of points about comics which Wertham would reiterate again and again over the course of the following decade (Crist 1948). First, Wertham stressed the mass nature of the comic book, suggesting that as many as 60 million copies were printed each month. Second, he criticized publishers' advisory board members as "psycho-prima donnas" who did not do actual clinical work with children: "The fact that some child psychiatrists endorse comic books does not prove the healthy state of the comic books. It only proves the unhealthy state of child psychiatry" (23). Finally, Wertham pressed for legislation against comic books suggesting that "the time has come to legislate these books off the newsstands and out of candy stores" and he decried the fact that law enforcement officials were more likely to blame individual children for delinquency than to act against the social causes of

criminality: "It is obviously easier to sentence a child to life imprisonment than to curb a hundred-million-dollar business" (23).

This article on Wertham was shortly followed by an article on comics by Wertham for the *Saturday Review of Literature*. The article, entitled "The Comics... Very Funny!", attained widespread attention when it was condensed and published by *The Reader's Digest*, at that time America's best-read magazine. In this article Wertham made his case that the common denominator in juvenile delinquency was comic books. He found this situation deplorable because existing social attitudes meant that children who were being seduced into delinquency were being punished while the publishers — the truly culpable in Wertham's estimation — remained free to reap extravagant profits. Wertham invoked traditional anti-mass culture arguments when he noted that "comic books are the greatest book publishing success in history and the greatest mass influence on children". Furthermore, the illustrations which accompanied the article were labeled "'Marijuana of the Nursery'" (7), a clear reference to the phrase which John Mason Brown had popularized in his debate with Al Capp. Wertham went on to reject seventeen specific arguments made by the proponents of comic books, ranging from the theories which indicated that only children with pre-existing mental disorders were influenced negatively by comics or that comic books aided in the release of dangerous pent-up aggression, to the assertions that law and order ultimately triumph in all comics and that they constitute a healthy outlet for children's fantasies. Both of these suggestions, Wertham argued, were serious misreadings of Freud. While he termed comic books a "systematic poisoning of the well of childhood spontaneity" (29) he stopped short in this instance of calling for legislative action against the comics. Nonetheless, others were making that call on his behalf and a number of states had begun to investigate the possibility of outlawing comic books. By the summer of 1948, a few months following the publication of Wertham's article, a number of publishers had banded together in order to bring some sort of self-regulation to the comic book industry.

Postwar Efforts to Regulate and Ban Comic Books

The Association of Comics Magazine Publishers was officially created on 1 July 1948 when fourteen publishers with a combined circulation of more than 14 million comic books per month, or approximately one third of the industry, elected Phil Keenan president and agreed to abide by a self-regulatory code ("Code for Comics" 1948:62). The new association appointed an advisory committee to "take positive steps toward improving comics magazines and making maximum use of them as a medium for education" ("Librarian Named" 1949:37). The executive director of the advisory committee was Henry E. Schultz. Schultz was charged with insuring that the directives of the code were adhered to by its members. These strictures included rules relating to sex, crime, sadistic torture, vulgar language, divorce and racism ("Purified" 1948:56). The credibility of the ACMP was severely undermined by a number of factors, not the least of which was the fact that the majority of comics publishers refused to join the organization. Dell and National, for instance, each maintained that their own in-house codes were more stringent than that of the ACMP and therefore the organization was redundant. Others simply resented having to pay the screening fees to support the association ("New York Officials" 1949:978). Regardless of the reasons, the fact remained that the ACMP was largely seen as ineffective by both parents' organizations and legislators who already had their own agencies in place. By the end of 1948, for instance, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers had "mapped a drive against lewd comics" and efforts to regulate comic books had been undertaken in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Detroit and Dubuque ("Fighting Gunfire" 1948:55).

Efforts to ban the publication and circulation of comic books at the end of the 1940s stemmed from a number of cities and states, although ultimately none of these efforts was entirely successful. Moreover, different drives sought differing aims where comic books were concerned. Some, as in St. Paul, Minnesota and Cincinnati, Ohio, sought to influence publishers to produce acceptable comics and reduce offensive titles through the circulation

of approved reading lists (Motter 1949; "What Comic Books Pass" 1949). Nonetheless, the promotion of so-called good comic books remained a marginal concern as efforts to control the medium gained momentum. An article in *The Horn Book*, for instance, suggested that the tide was turning against the concept of the appropriate comic book when it argued that Bible-based comics were an admission of failure in the war for children's reading habits ("At Long Last" 1948:233). That war was stepped up a notch in the fall of 1948 when Los Angeles passed a county ordinance which banned the sale of all comic books which represented the commission of a crime to children under the age of eighteen ("Unfunny" 1948; "Not So Funny" 1948). Shortly thereafter, the state of New York, led by State Senator Benjamin Feinberg, sought to curb the circulation of comic books in that state. Feinberg's bill, which would have required comic books to obtain a permit before being allowed to be put on sale in New York, passed both the state House and Senate with strong majorities ("State Senate" 1949). This law brought the anti-mass culture politics of New York news sources into some question. The *New York Times*, for instance, agreed that comic books are "injurious to children" but nonetheless editorialized against the law as invasion of the free press ("Comic Book Censorship" 1949). Similarly *The Nation* decried the "appalling" sales levels of comic books and suggested that they were driving an entire generation towards illiteracy, but concluded that comic books were being scape-goated and that any real problems with them could be dealt with using existing postal regulations ("We Would" 1949). Ultimately the New York bill was not enacted into law when it was vetoed by Governor Dewey as "overly vague" ("Comic Book Curb" 1949) and the Los Angeles County ordinance was ruled unconstitutional by the California Superior Court (Nyberg 1998:41). Some hope was offered to anti-comic book crusaders at this time, however, when Canada adopted a law restricting the circulation of crime comic books ("Canada's Comics" 1949; "Outlawed" 1949) and when the sale of crime comic books at U.S. Army post exchanges was halted because they went "beyond the line of decency" (Barclay 1949:26). The decision to limit the sale of crime comic books to grown men in the armed

forces while, as the *New York Times* noted in their lead paragraph on the story, "youngsters with ten cents will be able to go on buying them indefinitely" (Barclay 1949:26) further strengthened the resolve of anti-comic book crusaders and helped to cast doubt on the pronouncement by social science researchers that comics had no ill effects on their readers.

Postwar Experts Debate the Comics

Two symposiums in the late-1940s articulated the divergent opinions about comic books at the close of that decade. The first, sponsored and hosted by Wertham, presented work by psychiatrists which suggested that comic books had a negative impact on children who read them. The second, again appearing in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* and again edited by Zorbaugh, sought to defuse these suggestions. Wertham's symposium, "The Psychopathology of Comic Books", was held on 19 March 1948. Wertham's statement at the conference was edited and reprinted in the *Saturday Review* as "The Comics... Very Funny! (Wertham 1948d), while the other presentations were published in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, on whose editorial board Wertham served. Aside from Wertham, the seminar presented the findings of four researchers, each of whom had serious reservations about comic books, particularly with regard to the way that they treated aggression. The first of these was Gerson Legman. He argued that comics focused on "impossible aggressions" such as torture and killing and that the violence found within comics was the primary reason for their tremendous success and rapid growth (Legman 1948). Hilde Mosse continued this line of argument when she disputed claims made on behalf of comic books by other psychiatrists that the form helped children to release pent-up aggression in a cathartic manner. Rejecting Freud's assertions pertaining to the death instinct, Mosse suggested that early Freudian writings were more useful in addressing the pertinent questions, and that psychiatrists should not promote the venting of the death instinct in children but rather should work to affirm the life instinct. Mosse concluded by

suggesting that aggression was not innate, as orthodox Freudians maintained, but was a social phenomenon which could be controlled. The problem with comic books, therefore, was that they interfered with emotional development by heightening frustration and aggression (Mosse 1948). Paula Elkisch, a speaker who had done clinical studies of 80 children and their relation to comics for her paper, argued that comics not only heightened frustration in children but also created a conflict in readers that was the result of guilt about reading material that they realized was not suitable (Elkisch 1948). Finally, Marvin Blumberg condemned comic books for the way in which they "smother violence with more violence, so when they attempt to battle social prejudices their emphasis and appealing sadism is so strong that the triumph of right at the end is a weak anticlimax" (Blumberg 1948:488). Collectively these essays provided a case that comics offered children unhealthy escapes from reality, taught violence as a solution to social problems and stirred impulses which challenged the growth of socially useful behavior. While the commentators stopped short of equating comic books with the rise in juvenile delinquency at the symposium they did, nonetheless, lay the groundwork for such a conclusion.

At the opposite end of the spectrum on the comic book question, the second special issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology* to be dedicated to the question of comic books in five years was very much like the first, especially insofar as it presented the views only of experts in the employ of comic book publishers or those with a very firm pro-comic book message. Returning from the 1944 issue were Josette Frank and editor Harvey Zorbaugh. Frank's essay, "Some Questions and Answers for Teachers and Parents", privileged the former while it ignored the latter and took almost no positions at all. Instead she raised a number of questions about comics and then answered each by noting that expert opinion was divided and that no conclusions could be drawn from the available data. She concluded by suggesting that it was the duty of parents, therefore, to guide the reading of their own children (Frank 1949b). Zorbaugh's essay sought to address the question of whether or not adults were truly concerned about children's reading or whether the crisis

had been whipped up by the press. Zorbaugh concluded that a difference existed in the way that comic books and comic strips were regarded by parents, and further suggested that only 36 per cent of adults were unqualifiedly positive about comic books (Zorbaugh 1949:234). Another essay, by Henry Schultz, suggested that the entire frenzy about comics was the result of scare-mongering by Wertham, who was described as writing "vigorously and emotionally, if not scientifically and logically" (Schultz 1949:215). Schultz went on to suggest that self-regulation by the ACMP, despite the fact that the organization oversaw only one third of the industry, was the only "intelligent solution" (222). Interestingly, what was not pointed out anywhere in the issue was the fact that Schultz was the executive director of the ACMP and not, as the contributor's notes imply, a disinterested attorney.

Certainly the most forcefully argued essay in the 1949 special issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology* was written by Frederic Thrasher, a member of the Attorney General's Conference on Juvenile Delinquency. In his essay, "The Comics and Delinquency: Cause or Scapegoat", Thrasher went on the offensive against Wertham's research as it was presented in the *Saturday Review* and *Collier's*. Citing Wertham as an example of a monistic or single-cause theory of causation, Thrasher suggested that Wertham's work presented "no valid research" and disregarded established research protocols (Thrasher 1949:195). To this end Thrasher dismissed Wertham's contributions to the study of juvenile delinquency:

> Wertham's dark picture of the influence of comics is more forensic than scientific and illustrates a dangerous habit of projecting our social frustrations upon some specific trait of our culture, which becomes a sort of 'whipping boy' for our failure to control the whole gamut of social breakdown. (195)

Thrasher argued that the causes of anti-social behaviour were complex and that it was necessary to study many factors with the utmost objectivity in order to determine which were most important (200). That Wertham made exactly the same argument did not impress Thrasher. Thrasher simply dismissed Wertham's ongoing claims that comics were only one factor of many which contributed to juvenile delinquency by suggesting that he argued for mono-causation even when he explicitly stated that he was not doing so (201).

Furthermore, Thrasher condemned Wertham for failing to provide research data, citing the *Collier's* article specifically. That Wertham was not the author of that article, and that *Collier's* could in no way be confused with a scientific journal in which research data might have to be appropriate for inclusion, is of no concern to this critique of his work. Thrasher went on to suggest that the inadequacies of Wertham's presentation in the *Saturday Review* included a lack of a complete overview of all comics published and the absence of a statistical summary of his cases (203). Ultimately Thrasher's rejection of Wertham's work hinged on two important points: first, that Wertham's work had been publicized in non-scientific public-interest magazines rather than scientific or medical journals; second, that his psychiatric methodology was "open to question" because it was not identical to the case study methodologies established by anthropology, psychology or sociology (204). Thus, from Thrasher's standpoint, it would be impossible for Wertham's conclusions to be valid even if his data were presented in *Collier's* because he fundamentally disagreed with the proposition that psychiatric inquiry constituted a scientific methodology. These objections would be met by Wertham in his more comprehensive study of comic books, *Seduction of the Innocent*, as the controversy over comic books headed towards its ultimate denouement in the mid-1950s.

The Status of Comic Books in the 1950s

Following the 1948 creation of the ACMP as a self-regulatory body and the failure of anti-comics ordinances in 1949, the controversy about comic books began to settle down in the first years of the 1950s. While many organizations adopted a wait-and-see approach to the ACMP and its attempted clean-up of crime comic books, efforts to control the lurid content of the form continued, albeit in a reduced form. The New York State Senate, for instance, followed up on Dewey's 1949 veto of anti-comics legislation by holding closed door hearings on the topic in June and August of 1950. According to the reporting in the

New York Times, at these meetings a number of judges, lawyers and mothers' clubs representatives testified in support of a renewed effort to draft legislation while Henry Schultz of the ACMP opposed any form of regulation by the state ("Witnesses Favor" 1950; "Oppose State" 1950). At a subsequent closed-door hearing in December 1950 Wertham testified on the need to clean-up the comic book industry and made specific recommendations regarding legislation. He argued that comic books constituted a "public health problem", exactly the same argument which he would later take with regard to the problem of racial segregation in the Delaware case, and further linked the two interests with his specific charge that comics taught race hatred to children:

> In the 40,000,000 to 80,000,000 crime comic books sold each month, Dr. Wertham told the committee, the hero is nearly always "regular featured and 'an athletic, pure American white man'".
>
> "The villains, on the other hand, are foreign-born, Jews, Orientals, Slavs, Italians and dark-skinned races." ("Psychiatrist Asks" 1950:50).

A year later, at a public meeting to discuss a renewed effort at controlling comic books in New York, Wertham again called for a public health law which would restrict the sale of crime comic books to children aged sixteen or older ("Health Law Urged" 1950). The legislation which was ultimately adopted by the New York legislature in February 1952 called for a ban on publications "principally made up of pictures, whether or not accompanied by any written or printed matter, of fictional deeds of crime, bloodshed, lust or heinous acts, which tend to incite minors to violent or depraved or immoral acts" (in Nyberg 1998:48). This law, like its predecessor in 1949, was vetoed by Governor Dewey because he felt that it would not stand up to a challenge on constitutional grounds ("Dewey Vetoes" 1952). At the same time that the comic book industry was winning battles in the legislative arena, it seemed that a shift in public opinion was also beginning to take shape.

As late as the fall of 1953 *Newsweek* magazine would be able to run articles with titles such as "More Friends for Comics", although that positive outlook would soon shift. The positive outlook for comics at that time stemmed from a National Association for Mental Health affirmation that comic books "have a constructive influence on the young"

and that they were not responsible for juvenile delinquency ("More Friends" 1953:50). This finding followed the conclusion of the Senate Crime Investigating Committee which surveyed experts on juvenile delinquency in 1950 and reported that a majority of the surveyed exhibited doubt that comic books caused juvenile delinquency ("Many Doubt" 1950). At the same time the comic book industry was mounting a successful public relations campaign aimed at convincing educators and librarians that comics had potential uses in education. Thus the ACMP supported the objectives of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools to encourage grass-roots participation in public schools throughout the country ("Comics to the Rescue" 1950). The "potentially educational" nature of comic books was a concern of Ruth Bakwin in a 1953 article on the psychological aspects of the form. Bakwin, who conducted no original research but who cited industry-approved comics experts Bender, Frank, Sones and Zorbaugh, argued that it was doubtful that comics were responsible for mental disturbances or that they impacted on language development or interest in reading. She concluded that comics offered a "high potential for education" that had heretofore been neglected (Bakwin 1953:635). A very similar argument was made in *Today's Health* by crime comic book publisher, and former ACMP president, Lev Gleason. Citing a similar collection of experts (Gruenberg, Frank, Sones, Witty, Thorndike and Bender) Gleason suggested that "now that the comics magazines have been popular for nearly 15 years, psychologists and educators have been able to make extensive studies of their effects... Comics magazines, they declare, offer an amazing potential" (Gleason 1952:40). Gleason went on to articulate a number of assumed advantages and strengths of the comic book format before suggesting that most publishers had a strong desire to improve the content of the comics but were waiting for parents to take a strong financial interest in the matter by supporting so-called good comics with their pocketbooks (54).

These pro-comic book assumptions, and others, were re-reinforced by Josette Frank in her 1954 book *Your Child's Reading Today* (Frank 1954), which dealt with

comic books in a single chapter. Frank argued in this instance that the wholesale condemnation of comic books was unwarranted and could not be substantiated. Citing Thorndike's then fifteen year-old research on vocabulary in the comics she concluded that "comics have many plus values" (251). She suggested that the most serious of the comic book critics' charges was the suggestion that irresponsible publishers were profiting from the inclusion of horror and sex in comic books, but downplayed that conclusion when she argued that "experience and observation show that these are not the comics read and enjoyed by the vast number of children" (252). Frank rejected the claims made by "wrathful critics" like Wertham that comics led to juvenile delinquency, and she insisted that most psychologists and psychiatrists saw the need for more study of the question. At the same time, however, she was able to suggest some definite psychological conclusions, including the idea that comic books did not create fears in children but simply brought existing fears to the surface. In this way comics performed a service by alerting parents and psychologists to potential problems children might be facing psychologically (253). Finally, Frank reiterated her own previous claims that comic books ultimately led children to "better reading" (255). To this degree it is possible to see that Frank's position in regard to comics reading had not been altered over the course of the decade. She still maintained that comics were essentially harmless diversions and argued that it was the responsibility of parents, rather than the industry or the state, to oversee the reading habits of children. Her arguments still relied on the twin assumption that the majority of comics on the market were of the so-called good type and, further, that comic book reading was simply a childhood stage which children would pass through on the road to more ennobling literary values. These were not, however, notions that were universally held in the mid-century period.

Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency

In the 1950 survey of juvenile delinquency experts conducted by the Senate Crime Investigating Committee, a number of serious concerns to the medium had been raised.

Among the notable opponents to comic books at this time were the American Medical Association, the American Legion, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Council of Juvenile Court Judges and the National Organization for Decent Literature. The ambivalence of a number of crime experts on the topic was perhaps best summed up by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover when he argued that comics which were restrained in presentation and which conformed to prescribed standards of taste while teaching a true anti-crime lesson were educational. At the same time, however, Hoover held some reservations and added that:

> crime books, comics and other stories packed with criminal activity and presented in such a way as to glorify crime and the criminal may be dangerous, particularly in the hands of an unstable child. A comic book which is replete with the lurid and macabre; which places the criminal in a unique position by making him a hero; which makes lawlessness attractive; which ridicules decency and honesty; which leaves the impression that graft and corruption are necessary evils of American life; which depicts the life of the criminal as exciting and glamorous may influence the susceptible boy or girl who already possesses anti-social tendencies. (U.S. Congress 1950:6).

Hoover's individualistic approach to juvenile delinquency suggested that it was "susceptible" or "unstable" children who were negatively effected by comic books. Thus, although it was at odds with Wertham's conception of the influence of the form it nonetheless helped spur ongoing interest in and research on the topic.

Thomas Hoult's "Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency", published in 1949 with the conclusions more widely circulated by a *Today's Health* article in 1950, challenged Florence Heisler's earlier findings that comics had little or no impact on their readers in the small town of Farmingdale, New York. Hoult dismissed Heisler's sample group as overly small and consequently unscientific (Hoult 1949:280). His study compared the reading habits of 235 children arrested for juvenile delinquency in Los Angeles with 235 non-delinquent children matched to the first group by age, social and economic status, race and education. In surveying these two groups Hoult found that the children charged with delinquency read 2,853 "harmful" comic books while the non-delinquents had read only 1,786. He concluded that delinquent children read a greater number of comic books and

significantly more "harmful" comic books than did non-delinquents. Hoult argued that this finding did not indicate a causative relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency but that it was, nonetheless, a significant finding and that "there is undoubtedly some connection that merits further careful investigation" (Hoult 1949:284). The popularization of these findings was even more forceful, concluding that comic books were as much a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency as were slums and suggesting that "we now have enough information to suspect that comic books dealing exclusively with criminal behavior tend to help keep the spirit of crime alive in delinquency areas" (Hoult and Hoult 1950:54). Other research in the 1950s sought to draw conclusions about the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency through reference to content analyses. Morton Malter, for instance, studied the content of 185 comic books published in the first two months of 1951 and concluded that Wertham was wrong to suggest that crime comics were the dominant genre, unless one included westerns as crime comics (which Wertham did), in which case he was correct (Malter 1952). A similar study conducted in 1954 by Marilyn Graalfs concluded that scenes of violence accounted for fourteen per cent of all panels in comic books of all types, and that as much as twenty-six per cent of all panels in western comics and twenty-two per cent of panels in crime comics illustrated some form of violence. Graalfs further concluded that one quarter of those panels depicted a person who was dead or injured (Graalfs 1954:92). All of this research, however, would be displaced in the spring of 1954 by the publication of the single volume which would dominate discussion of the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency from that point forward, Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent.*

Seduction of the Innocent and Wertham's Case Against Comics

Writing about his participation as lead counsel for the NAACP in the Delaware desegregation case, Jack Greenberg recalled his expert witness, Fredric Wertham:

> Wertham was of an imperious nature and quite temperamental, and everything had to be precisely as he wanted it. He insisted on testifying first, ahead of the other experts, offering the reason that by the time the trial began he would have examined the children and his testimony would be the most detailed, and he didn't want to face the burden of defending the testimony of preceding witnesses. He had an injured knee and until almost the last minute I couldn't be sure that he would show up. One point of tension was Wertham's view that comic books, particularly those that depicted sadism, violence, and racism, had a very harmful influence on children. As we discussed his testimony Wertham kept veering off into denouncing the malignant influence of comic books, and I kept trying to steer him back to the case at hand, thinking the comic book issue irrelevant and distracting. (Greenberg 1994:137)

That Wertham wished to equate the fight to end segregation with the fight to clean-up the comic book industry cannot come as a surprise. Indeed, to Wertham both of these social crises were problems for social psychiatry that could be dealt with through principles imported from mental hygiene and which were intended to secure the public health by preventing future harm. Both segregation and comic books, Wertham believed, were part of a larger mosaic which contributed to social inequalities. He further insisted that each was a factor which could be isolated and dealt with in a scientific manner through legislation. In fact, as Greenberg recounted, Wertham was able to draw the connection explicitly between the negative effects of state sanctioned school segregation and comic books as he was cross-examined on the witness stand in the Delaware trial using the racist imagery in a copy of *Jumbo Comics*:

> The children read that, and they are there indoctrinated with the fact that you can do all kinds of things to colored races. Now, the school problem partly, as you say, reinforces that, but it is very much more, because after all these commercial people who sell these things to children do so to make money. The State does it as acting morally... So that the State really stabs very much deeper than these things do. (in Greenberg 1994:138).

For Wertham, therefore, there can be no doubt that these problems were roughly comparable and required similar solutions. The specificities of Wertham's commentary about comic books in the 1950s left little doubt as to the problems which he diagnosed and the corrective measures which he prescribed. In outlining his claims here it will be possible to demonstrate the degree to which his charges were dependent not only on his particular

view of psychiatry, but on the dominant thinking about mass culture and the mass society prevalent in the postwar era.

Although they were most explicitly enunciated in his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* Wertham's arguments about comic books were refined in a series of articles and speeches which began with his 29 May 1948 *Saturday Review* article, "The Comics... Very Funny!" (Wertham 1948d). One week after that article appeared Wertham spoke on the nationally-aired CBS radio broadcast, *In My Opinion*, and his speech was subsequently reprinted in the Quaker journal, *Friends Intelligencer* (Wertham 1948e). In this article Wertham's intellectual debt to anti-mass culture crusaders of the period can be clearly seen. In the first instance he suggested that a "serious battle" was under way between American parents and "a small group of willful men making about ten million dollars a year profit — the owners of the comic-book publishing houses" (395). Wertham's concern with the profit-minded nature of mass culture supported his argument relating to the substantial differences he perceived between violence in the comic books and violence in so-called great literature:

> Some fathers have told me that it "hasn't done any harm to my child; after all, when he reads Hamlet he doesn't see ghosts and want to put poison in my ear." The answer is easy: first of all, comic books are not as artistic as *Hamlet*. Second, there's only one *Hamlet* (and most children don't read it), whereas comic books come by the millions. Third, there has been no other literature for adults or for children in the history of the world, at any period or in any nation, that showed in pictures and in words, over and over again, half-nude girls in all positions being branded, burned, bound, tied to wheels, blinded, pressed between spikes, thrown to snakes and wild animals, crushed with rocks, slowly drowned or smothered, or having their veins punctured and their blood drawn off. (396)

Here Wertham linked aesthetic preferences which suggested that Shakespeare was art while comic books self-evidently were not, with the question of mass production and the representation of violence in order to conflate the three into a single argument against the comic book format. This anti-mass culture argument which opposed education and commerce would reappear in a 1954 article in *Wilson Library Bulletin* in which Wertham complained that "reading is the greatest educational force that mankind has ever devised. Comics, on the other hand, are the greatest anti-educational influence that man's greed has

ever concocted. From this point of view comic books are part of a larger problem. We have reduced children to a market" (Wertham 1954d:611). In this instance it is possible to see that Wertham regarded the notion of a commercialized culture for children generally as far more pressing than the specific question of comic books. Moreover, Wertham seemed to indicate that the problem was even greater insofar as mass culture was becoming increasingly acceptable to the guardians of children's culture. Writing in *Religious Education* subsequent to the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* Wertham suggested that "in former times smut and trash were frowned upon in children's reading. Either it was actively combated or it was minimized, curbed and barely tolerated. Nowadays it is not only defended, but is actually praised as being good for children!" (Wertham 1954e:395). Clearly, therefore, Wertham's commentaries of comic books during this time need to be understood as existing generally in accord with the dominant definitions of culture which circulated in the period, particularly insofar as they relied upon a rejection of mass culture and a celebration of legitimated high culture. Further, Wertham clearly aligned himself in this instance with earlier traditions of literary-based dismissals of mass culture against what he depicted as a naively pro-comics position held by educators and child guidance experts.

At the same time, however, Wertham's critique of comic books also drew on a series of scientific principles which stemmed from his particular brand of psychiatry. In the first place Wertham's constant rejections of the work of experts employed by the comic book industry relied not simply on his constant tendency to point out the degree to which their findings were suspect because they lacked financial independence, but also on a rejection of orthodox Freudianism and theories of innate aggression:

> The apologists of comic books, who function under the auspices of the comic-book business (although the public is not let in on that secret), are sociologists, educators, psychiatrists, lawyers, and psychologists. They all agree that this enormous over-stimulation of fantasy with scenes of sex and violence is completely harmless. They all rely on arguments derived from misunderstood Freud and bandy around such words as "aggression", "release", "vicarious" and "fantasy world". They use free associations to bolster up free enterprise. (Wertham 1948d:29).

Wertham's rejection of orthodox Freudianism and the theory of innate aggression which was promoted by defenders of the comic book like Lauretta Bender rested on the presumption that there was no such thing as neutral scientific inquiry. He further argued that child psychology had failed to take proper account of the massive influence of the mass media on children's lives. Specifically citing the failings of Josette Frank and Sidonie Gruenberg, Wertham wrote:

> Much of what passes today as official child psychology is faulty for two reasons. In the first place it disregards ethical values, which can and should be taught, and which can be and are vitiated by outside influences. Instead of appreciating the role of ethics, it puts all the emphasis on the "necessity" for unbridled self-expression for the child. Secondly, it is obsolete because it disregards the enormous influence of mass media, especially comic books. (Wertham 1954e:398)

To correct these sorts of lapses Wertham proposed a five-fold analysis of the influence of comic books on children. Speaking before the American Prison Association in 1948 Wertham defined his approach as an analysis of typical cases; an analysis of comic books; an analysis of the scientific problems involved; an analysis of the methods of the comic book publishers and an analysis of the practical steps which could be taken to address the preceding (Wertham 1948f). This approach would be replicated six years later in *Seduction of the Innocent* as Wertham worked to synthesize an approach to comic books which drew equally on the mass culture critique popular in the postwar period as well as his own idiosyncratic conception of a socially-grounded psychiatric practice.

Seduction of the Innocent and Juvenile Delinquency

That *Seduction of the Innocent* was written for a lay rather than a scientific readership is evidenced by its loosely discursive structure which ranged across topics only to return to them later. While this meant that the book often presented arguments only to reiterate them much later in the book there was, nonetheless, a generalizable progression to the argument presented in the book which will be followed here. The book's first chapter, for instance, introduced the theme of comic books and juvenile delinquency, which was not dealt with concretely until the sixth chapter. Nonetheless, Wertham's foregrounding of that

material in his introductory remarks demonstrated the degree to which the book was centrally concerned with this thematic. Wertham opened his book by advancing an argument derived from his notion of social psychiatry, namely that in order to understand juvenile delinquency it was necessary to understand the social settings from which delinquency sprang. Furthermore, it was necessary to understand the life history of the delinquent generally as well as the ways in which the delinquent's life experience was reflected in wish and fantasy specifically. These facts, it went almost without saying, could only be derived through clinical social psychiatry of the type practiced at the Lafargue Clinic (Wertham 1954a:3). The public viewed juvenile delinquency as a problem of individual behavior but Wertham, grounded as he was in a more socialized view of behavior, rejected this view. To this end Wertham explicitly rejected the philosophy of innate aggression which he felt was the necessary underpinning of the individualistic view of delinquency when he discussed the case of a boy charged with the random shooting of a man at the Polo Grounds in New York:

> I do not believe in the philosophy that children have instinctive urges to commit such acts. In going over his life, I had asked him about his reading. He was enthusiastic about comic books. I looked over some of those he liked best. They were filled with alluring tales of shooting, knifing, hitting and strangling. He was so intelligent, frank and open that I considered him not an inferior child, but a superior one. I know that many people glibly call such a child maladjusted; but in reality he was a child well adjusted to what we had offered him to adjust to. In other words, I felt this was a seduced child" (11-12)

He went on to suggest that society was cruel to children insofar as they were left "entirely unprotected" when they were shown crime, delinquency and sexual abnormality in comic books but the punishment that they received if they succumbed to the suggestions of these media were more severe than if an adult similarly strayed from the path of virtue. This notion, that children are preyed upon and victimized by an adult culture which corrupted them and then blamed them, was a central motif throughout Wertham's book.

In the sixth chapter of *Seduction of the Innocent* Wertham argued that juvenile delinquency did not simply happen naturally but was created by adults as a reflection of America's postwar social values. To this end he suggested that definitions of juvenile

delinquency were mirrors of society that resulted in the punishment, rather than the protection, of children (149). Following the reasoning that delinquency was a social phenomenon Wertham suggested that the rise of juvenile crime in the Depression pointed to the fact that adults were accessories insofar as they had created the economic climate which fostered childhood criminality. Wertham insisted that "the delinquency of a child is not a disease; it is a symptom, individually and socially. You cannot understand or remedy a social phenomenon like delinquency by redefining it simply as an individual emotional disorder." (156-157). To this end, Wertham suggested, juvenile delinquency needed to be studied in relation to other forms of social behavior. Moreover, Wertham's conception of delinquency as a social phenomenon allowed him to acknowledge the fact that it was caused by a "constellation of many factors" (10), of which comic books were only one. Although Thrasher accused him of presenting a mono-causationist theory of delinquency it is clear that Wertham regarded comics as only a "contributing factor" (10) — and not the actual cause — of juvenile crime. Wertham stated this explicitly in a variety of ways and a number of times: "*Of course* there are other evil influences to which we expose children" (1954e:400); "Crime comics are certainly not the only factor, nor in many cases are they even the most important one, but there can be no doubt that they are the most unnecessary and least excusable one" (1954a:166).

Moreover, Wertham's argument about comic books was remarkably similar to his commentary on racial segregation and invoked the same logic in order to suggest reforms. In opening his chapter on juvenile delinquency Wertham quoted Adolf Meyer on the ridiculousness of refusing to act against a single factor simply because it was not the only factor (147), an argument which he had also made in regard to school segregation (Wertham 1952). In both cases Wertham invoked the same metaphor to explain the need for a preventative public health approach to the problems. Wertham agreed with his critics when they suggested that not all children exposed to segregation or comic books would

suffer psychological damage, but he dismissed the notion that that meant no action should be taken to correct the situation. Wertham argued that:

> I do not say that every child who reads comic books becomes a delinquent or becomes abnormal. Nor does the inhaling of tubercle bacilli (which we all do in a large city) mean that every one of us comes down with tuberculosis. And yet we forbid spitting in the subway. Not every piece of cheap, poisonous candy causes illness to the children who eat it, and yet we passed a pure food law to abolish bad candy. Don't you agree with me that the mind is as sensitive as the lungs and as the stomach — especially the mind of a child? (Wertham 1948e:396)

These comments are nearly identical to his remarks on school segregation:

> Thousands of people in large cities inhale tubercle bacilli into their lungs. And yet only a relatively small number of these infected multitudes come down with the disease tuberculosis. We do not say that we do not have to pay any attention to the tubercle bacillus because enormous numbers of people do not become overly ill from it. The tubercle bacillus in cases not developing the disease is potentially injurious. This is scientific reasoning in the sphere of public health. In child psychiatry and child guidance, unfortunately, this type of reasoning is often lacking. (Wertham 1952:97)

Thus it is possible to see that Wertham's argument about juvenile delinquency hinged on several important interlocking points. Essentially Wertham argued that juvenile delinquency was not an individual but rather a social phenomenon. He further argued that comic books were not the single — or even primary — causal factor in triggering juvenile delinquency, but were merely one contributing factor. Nonetheless, he concluded that action to control that factor was justified on the basis that it did not make any sense to refuse to treat a contributing factor even if it was not the only important factor at play. This reasoning was derived equally from his political orientation evidenced in his work to end school segregation and from his notion of social psychiatry, which sought to combine preventative public health measures inspired by the mental hygiene movement with a liberal political perspective that considered individual behavior in relation to existing social structures. To make the argument that action against the comic books was necessary, however, Wertham necessarily had to demonstrate that they were, like the tubercle bacilli, a harmful factor and not simply a scapegoat.

One crucial line of argument in this regard stemmed from Wertham's condemnation of comics not simply as a contributing factor in juvenile delinquency but in his denunciation

of the form as a corrupting agent of mass culture. The second chapter of *Seduction of the Innocent* traced a history of the American comic book industry and suggested the degree to which he saw comic books as a problem simply because of their enormous pervasiveness. For Wertham the sheer circulation of comic books posed a problem. Estimating that between 75 and 80 million comic books were sold in the United States each month (29) Wertham argued that crime comics were the largest growth segment of the industry. He suggested that between 1937 and 1947 only 19 comics could be classified as crime comics, which he defined as: "comic books that depict crime, whether the setting is urban, Western, science-fiction, jungle, adventure or the realm of supermen, "horror" of super-natural beings" (20). By 1948, however, Wertham estimated that half of all new comics were pure crime books, while the other half were westerns featuring criminal themes. Moreover, like other critics of mass culture at the time Wertham suggested that the themes of these crime comics tended to endorse an increasingly authoritarian society. He cited racism in jungle comics wherein blacks were visually equated with apes and superheroes who dressed in fashions that resembled the Nazi SS (32). Superman, Wertham argued, tended to solve problems through the use of force and thereby taught children to be submissive to authoritarianism (34). All of this occurred, he noted, in comics which sold hundreds of thousands of copies each month but which went, nonetheless, almost totally unread by people concerned with raising children. Wertham proposed to correct that oversight through the use of a scientific methodology which would demonstrate the negative impact of this form of mass culture once and for all. The bulk of *Seduction of the Innocent* was dedicated to that task.

Comic Books and Media Effects

Wertham set out to answer three questions in *Seduction of the Innocent*: do comic books influence children's behavior? If so, how? And in what way and how long does the effect last (48)?. In conducting the research to answer those questions Wertham and his

associates at the Lafargue Clinic rejected traditional social science methodologies in favour of a psychiatric approach. Wertham rejected the questionnaire methodology because it was inadequate: "To ask children a series of simple questions and expect real enlightenment from their answers is even more misleading than to carry out the same procedure with adults. The younger the child, the more erroneous are the conclusion likely to be drawn" (49). Instead Wertham opted to utilize "all the methods of modern psychiatry which were suitable and possible in the individual case" in order to determine the effects of comic books (49). Essentially what this meant was that Wertham incorporated the study of comic books into the general routine work of mental hygiene and child psychiatry at the Lafargue Clinic. This allowed "the largest cross-section of children" to be studied because they were recommended to the clinic from the juvenile police bureau, from pediatric wards and from private practices. Therefore a "large proportion" of the children studied were "normal children" who came to the clinic's attention for some social reason rather than because of a psychological concern (50). Once inside the clinic these children were examined in a variety of ways. They were the subjects of clinical interviews which were used to determine their life histories. Children were given standardized tests including the Rorschach Test, the Thematic Apperception Test, Intelligence Tests and the Mosaic Test, which Wertham himself pioneered, among others (55-57). The results of these standardized tests, Wertham reported, pointed out that "children who suffer from any really serious intrinsic psychopathological condition, including those with psychoses, are *less* influenced by comic book reading" (57-58). Additionally, children were observed in playroom situations which demonstrated the degree to which comics were a social phenomenon whereby even non-readers could be influenced through contact with comic book consumers (64). These multiple approaches to the research, all of which were discounted by critics such as Thrasher as non-scientific and consequently invalid, ultimately directed Wertham to conclude that "not the experience itself, as an observer records and evaluates it, but the way it is reflected and experienced by the person himself, is what counts and what explains the

psychological results" (78). To this end, Wertham suggested, only the clinical methodology used by psychiatry could get to the answers about the ways in which comics were actually used by their audiences. In this way Wertham argued that the study of media effects was best left to psychiatry and that it could not be properly approached from research perspectives which were based on methodologies which were ostensibly more scientific, disinterested and objective. The renunciation of social scientific methodologies which dominated the study of media and children in the mid-century era is the greatest single distinction between Wertham's work in *Seduction of the Innocent* and that of the communications researchers who would minimize his contribution to the field.

In the fourth chapter of *Seduction of the Innocent* Wertham again affirmed his belief that there was no direct causal relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency (86). Nonetheless, he did stress several important effects which he felt characterized comic books generally. The first of these was the fact that comics were "anti-educational" and interfered with normal mental growth (89). Adopting the arguments of the day Wertham suggested that comics were not a legitimate form of art or communication and, therefore, children had nothing to show for all the time that they spent reading comics (90). A more pressing concern, however, stemmed from the fact that Wertham viewed comics as contributing to what he termed "moral disarmament", a process whereby the superego and the higher functions of social responsibility were blunted (91). As an "unparalleled distillation of viciousness" comics affected the child's "ethical image" by romanticizing force (92). Wertham, for instance, argued that there existed an "exact parallel to the blunting of sensibilities in the direction of cruelty that has characterized a whole generation of central European youth fed on the Nietzsche-Nazi myth of the exceptional man who is beyond good and evil" and the Superman conceit in comic books (97). This ethical confusion was reinforced, he argued, by the role of imitation. Wertham suggested that identification, the emotional aspect of reading, was corrupted by an ongoing confusion in most crime comics between the hero and the villain. He noted that comic books were

conditioning children to identify with the strongest character in a given story, "however evil he may be" (116). This type of identification could, Wertham argued, intersect with a variety of pre-existing tendencies and tip the balance of a child's predilections towards delinquency. Wertham summarized the potential effects of comic books by arguing that they were a form of "mass conditioning" that exerted negative effects along these lines:

> 1) The comic-book format is an invitation to illiteracy.
> 2) Crime comic books create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit.
> 3) They create a readiness for temptation.
> 4) They stimulate unwholesome fantasies.
> 5) they suggest criminal or sexually abnormal ideas.
> 6) they furnish the rationalization for them, which may be ethically even more harmful than the impulse.
> 7) They suggest the forms a delinquent impulse may take and supply details of technique.
> 8) They may tip the scales toward maladjustment or delinquency. (118)

These general effects, however, were augmented by other influences specifically relating to areas like sexuality and self-esteem which were the subjects of their own more narrowly focused chapters. Essentially, however, these were side arguments which only provided further evidence for Wertham's primary charges instead of outlining new sets of presumed effects of comic books on child readers. Wertham, for instance, condemned the representation of sexual violence in comic books for the way in which it created an ethical confusion in readers and contributed to a potentially unnatural childhood development (175). Similarly he charged that advertising in comic books which promised to reshape children's bodies through weight loss or muscle gain, played on childhood insecurities in a vicious fashion (198). Still, these remained subsidiary concerns of the larger charges against comic books, including the suggestion that comics interfered with the development of reading skills.

Seduction of the Innocent's fifth chapter specifically dealt with the effect of comics on literacy. Entitled "Retooling for Illiteracy", it was in this section that Wertham argued his claim that "comic books are death on reading" (121). For Wertham the problem of comics rested with the medium itself, regardless of the content:

> The comic-book format, with its handled balloons scattered over the page, with its emphasis on pictures and their continuity, with its arrows directing the eyes from right to left or even up and down, with its many inarticulate words-that-are-not-words, interferes with learning proper reading habits. (127)

The entire basis of Wertham's critique of comics as a detriment to the acquisition of proper reading skills was founded upon the idea that, despite the problems associated with the lurid content of crime comic books, it was the medium itself which was inherently problematic, and consequently irretrievable for a literate culture. Wertham adopted the traditional high culture argument when he suggested that "the dawn of civilization was marked by the invention of writing. Reading, therefore, is not only one of the cornerstones of civilized life, it is also one of the main foundations of a child's adjustment to it" (121). This argument began from the premise that reading was not an isolated function of the brain, but was in actuality a highly complex performative act. This performance could be disrupted by several factors related to the synthesis of words and images in the comic book form. In the first instance comics handicapped vocabulary because of their emphasis on the visual element rather than the proper word. Furthermore, irregular bits of printing in comics panels disrupted the acquisition of a normal left to right reading pattern. The pictures themselves discouraged reading because people who had reading disabilities could grasp the narrative of a comic book exclusively through the visual elements, what Wertham termed a form of "picture-reading" (139). Wertham further argued that the poor quality paper used to print comics at mid-century led to the development of eyestrain for many comics readers All of this led Wertham to the conclusion that, despite the fact that reading disorders existed before comics, comics were a major contributing factor to contemporary reading disorders. This argument was often made against comics during this period and had been researched and confirmed as early as 1942 (Luckiesh 1942). Wertham further tied the problem of the comic book format into his central argument when he offered that there was a "relatively high correlation between delinquency and reading disorders; that is to say, a disproportionate number of poor or non-readers become delinquent, and a disproportionate number of delinquents have pronounced reading disorders" (136).

Wertham further condemned comics' effect on literacy by reproducing the arguments that many early critics in the education and library field had made about the form, namely that the mass production of comic books allowed them an unfair advantage in competing with "good inexpensive children's books" (31). In reifying the traditional distinction between high and low cultures in the opposition of books and comics Wertham demonstrated the degree to which his critique of the comic books was influenced by anti-mass culture writing generally.

Solving the Comic Book Problem

Having established his charges against crime comic books Wertham then turned his attention to a refutation of the defense of the form provided by other experts, specifically those he named as forming "the defense team" of paid experts in the employ of comic book publishers: Jean Thompson, Sidonie Gruenberg, Harvey Zorbaugh, Lauretta Bender, and Josette Frank (223). Wertham charged that these experts never dealt with the actual content of comic books in their many articles about the form, preferring instead to deal only with vague generalities. By refusing to deal with specifics, Wertham suggested, these experts were better able to marshal their many arguments that comic books were harmless. Wertham addressed each of these arguments in turn. He maintained, for instance, that the suggestion that comic books constituted a form of contemporary folklore allowing children to experiment with reality failed to take into account the fact that comic books, unlike fairy tales, were not symbolic (241). Wertham noted that many orthodox Freudians and other psychiatrists had suggested that comics were a harmless release of aggression, but responded with the observation that this was a misreading of Freud which lacked clinical proof of any kind (247). Wertham went on to insist: "Freud himself never saw a comic book. And I am certain that he would have been horrified — and even more horrified to learn that his name is being used to defend them by some uncritical would-be followers" (270). Wertham further suggested that several arguments forwarded by the experts for the

defense seemed to seek license for publishers to do anything that they wished without responsibilities of any kind. The experts claimed, for instance, that comics have no impact on shaping values except when they provide a healthy moral message such as "crime does not pay". Comic book defenders suggested that only children who were predisposed to criminality in some way were effected by comic books, thereby placing the blame firmly on the individual child rather than on the media. These experts claimed, following Freud, that an individual's character was formed in the earliest years of life and that any subsequent influence was negligible. Further, they suggested that anything a child did would have happened even if the child had never been exposed to comics at all (244-245). These attitudes, Wertham responded, condoned any and all behavior on the part of publishers and ultimately failed to take into account the fact the roots of delinquency lay in a balance of factors (246). Ironically, this was a charge often leveled at Wertham himself by his critics, and one he responded to in *Seduction of the Innocent* at length. He again acknowledged the concept of multiple and complex causation: "Of course there are other factors beside comic books. There are always other factors." (242). He went on to suggest, however, that:

> the study of one factor does not obliterate the importance of other factors. On the contrary, it may highlight them. What people really mean when they use the let's-not-blame-any-one-factor argument is that they do not like this particular factor. It is new to them and for years they have been overlooking it. If they were psychoanalysts, they were caught with their couches up. They do not object to specific factors if they are intrinsic and noncommittal and can be dated far enough back in a child's life. They do not object to social factors provided they are vaguely lumped together as "environment", "our entire social fabric", "culture" or "socio-economic conditions". (243)

In its simplest terms Wertham's conclusion was that the experts who claimed that comics had little or no influence over behavior were apolitical and unwilling to take a firm stand on any substantive issue, preferring instead to hide behind generalities or a psychiatric belief which stressed continuity over change. Wertham's conclusions about the effects of comic books, on the other hand, need to be understood as relating to his politically motivated and progressive ideas about the social uses of psychiatry and the possibilities for postwar

liberalism in the face of an overwhelming insistence on individualistic explanations for human behavior.

Following a chapter which examined the success of anti-comic book crusades in countries such as England, France and Canada, Wertham opened his penultimate chapter by wondering what was the collective responsibility of him and his readers. He suggested that despite the pronouncements of the child guidance experts comics were simply too large a problem for parents to deal with themselves and, consequently, legislative action was required (301). Citing his participation for the defense in several censorship trials Wertham insisted that he was opposed to censorship of any kind, which he defined as "control of one agency by another" (326). He maintained that efforts at self-regulation, such as the ACMP code, had "completely failed" (328) and called instead for a public health-based law which would prohibit the display and sale of comic books to children under the age of fifteen. The justification for this law, Wertham argued, would be his own clinical studies into the effect of comic books which gave "expression to the vague gropings of the more enlightened part of public opinion which seeks a curb on the rising tide of education for violence" (332). Wertham further noted that he had made this exact same sort of suggestion in reference to school desegregation and that his logic had been adopted by the Delaware courts in their decision to end racially-based education practices. Wertham continued: "the analogy with the comic-book question is obvious. But whereas in the case of school segregation something new was accomplished, with crime comic books the same reasoning did not work" because many experts in delinquency

> regard juvenile delinquents as if they were totally different from other children. Even liberal writers write of "the mark of Cain which an evil destiny brands on some of our children." They believe that emotionally strong children are unaffected, while only emotionally insecure children are exposed. This is pure speculation. It means the distinction between an invulnerable élite and a vulnerable common group. Reflect what snobbishness is involved. (337)

For Wertham the distinction between censorship of material for adults and the restriction of material targeted at children was justified by the same logic which led to the desegregation of America's schools. Each was clearly a public health problem which affected all children

in some important way. He believed, however, that the clean-up of the comic book industry was being retarded by the biases of American liberals who instinctively rejected arguments made about culture that they had endorsed as it was applied to public policy in the schools. To this end Wertham noted wryly that "crime comics are a severe test of the liberalism of liberals" (339). Moreover, in his conclusion Wertham argued that the central problem of the mass media was not the comic books themselves but the society from which they sprang:

> I had started from comic books, had gone on to study the needs and desires of children and had come to adults. I had learned that it is not a question of the comic books but of the mentality from which comic books spring, and that it was not the mentality of children but the mentality of adults. What I found was not an individual condition of children, but a social condition of adults. (394)

Thus, Wertham affirmed the most basic tenets of his social psychiatry by subsuming his concerns about comic books within a larger concern about the direction of postwar social life generally. That this progressivist intention was generally overlooked by subsequent commentators responding to his work on comic books can be seen by turning to an examination of the various ways that *Seduction of the Innocent* was taken up by scholarly and critical communities in the wake of its publication in the spring of 1954.

Reactions to *Seduction of the Innocent*

The type of detailed scientific refutations of Wertham's research presented by Frederic Thrasher in 1949 were notably absent following the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. Indeed, searching for a well-argued rebuttal to Wertham's work to include in a special section examining comic books and juvenile delinquency *Congressional Digest* was forced to reprint Thrasher's earlier essay (Wertham 1954f; Thrasher 1954). The most obvious reason for this was that Wertham's book effectively stifled much of the debate about comic books in the mid-1950s. Few of the defense team members whom he directly cited in his text, for instance, published responses to the book. Instead his text

received glowing reviews from the educational and library journals who had long been split on the subject of comic book reading. Certainly the most enthusiastic of the reviews came from the *National Education Association Journal*, which celebrated Wertham's attempts to move beyond the study of individual cases and toward an understanding of the social causes of juvenile delinquency. Referring to the book as one which would "help to build the understanding essential to the growth and survival of our free democratic society" the editorial went on to pronounce *Seduction of the Innocent* as the "most important book of 1954", and suggested that it should be in the library of every parent, teacher, preacher and juvenile court judge (Morgan 1954:473). Other reviewers in professional journals were no less kind. *The Library Journal*, for instance, praised Wertham's work for its "substantial evidence" that could "not be laughed away" ("Non-Fiction" 1954:622) while the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* cited his "unusually praiseworthy effort to combat evil" (Wolf 1954:547). Mixed reviews could also be found, of course, but even these stressed the importance of the work. Writing in *Library Journal*, Thomas Zimmerman suggested that Wertham was an alarmist whose arguments would lead to an abridgment of freedom of the press. Arguing that "there is no easy answer" Zimmerman returned to earlier arguments presented by librarians for the solution to the comic book problem by suggesting that parents should address comics in their own homes by presenting children with "good books" (Zimmerman 1954:1607). Anita Mishler, writing in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, also raised concerns about the book, although she ultimately suggested that it should be applauded "despite its shortcomings" (Mishler 1955:117). She suggested, for instance, that despite the fact that Wertham's work was "more polemical than scientific" there was no choice but to agree with his central finding that comic books added nothing to the life of a child and his insistence that aggression should be productively channeled in a civilization rather than mindlessly released (116-117).

If *Seduction of the Innocent* consolidated the anti-comic book sentiment in professional journals where it had been previously mixed, it also solidified opposition in

religious magazines which had always been skeptical. In a two-part review of Wertham's book in June 1954, for instance, Harold Gardiner of *America* reiterated many of the arguments made by Wertham while suggesting that he had "never seen a more completely documented indictment" (Gardiner 1954a:321). He went on to suggest that "this is a book that every Catholic parent ought to ponder" (Gardiner 1954b:342). A similarly toned review could be found in the pages of *The Catholic World* under the inflammatory title "Crime Comics Must Go!", which suggested that if crime comics publishers refused to clean-up their product they would have to be legislated out of existence as an "intolerable nuisance" (Sheerin 1954:19). Each of these magazines adopted a strong moral objection to comic books and both writers suggested that it was the responsibility of the Senate Subcommittee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency to recommend strong legislation which would accomplish the sort of control on comic books advocated by Wertham.

While many non-religious general interest or public affairs magazines would concur with their opposition to comics in the wake of the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, they nonetheless demurred at the possibility of congressional action to regulate or clean-up the industry on free speech grounds. Few general interest magazines, it seems, could afford to completely ignore Wertham's research. Sterling North, whose comments in 1940 had largely begun the mid-century anti-comics crusade, called *Seduction of the Innocent* "the most important book of the year. Brilliantly written. Completely accurate. Thoroughly documented" (in M.D.L. 1954:884). Winfred Overholser, a psychiatrist whom Wertham had condemned for his participation in the Ezra Pound case, wrote in the *Saturday Review* that Wertham had presented "incontrovertible evidence" that the comic book was "a pernicious influence in the education of the young" (Overholser 1954:16). The *New Yorker* dedicated seven pages to summarizing the findings presented in Wertham's work and concluded that it provided "potent ammunition" to use against Superman and his publishers (Gibbs 1954). The *Nation*, which had editorialized against the New York anti-comic book legislation in 1949 while at the same time condemning comics, repeated its earlier stance.

Arguing that comic books were fascistic and racist, Ward Moore suggested that Wertham had circumstantial evidence about effects, at the very least, on his side. Moore, however, parted with Wertham where recommendations were concerned, arguing that censorship of any kind would be worse than the comic books that needed to be contained (Moore 1954: 426-427). Thus the reactions to Wertham's research in professional, religious and middlebrow magazines presented a very narrow range. Few commentators dismissed the work outright, with the vast majority of reviewers noting the degree to which they agreed with the book's central findings, if not the ultimate conclusions. Yet when the book was treated by scholars and critics who regarded themselves as the leading thinkers of the day, the so-called New York Intellectuals were more noticeably split on the work and the vast majority of the opinion came down in opposition to Wertham, despite the fact that he so clearly drew on critical presuppositions which they had collectively championed for decades.

The New York Intellectuals Respond

Interestingly, it was three of the New York Intellectuals, Clifton Fadiman, C. Wright Mills and Gilbert Seldes, who were most often at odds with the group as a whole who were most supportive of Wertham's work. In placing *Seduction of the Innocent* as a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club Fadiman called it "the most shocking book to appear in this country since Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*" (in Gilbert 1986:104). Wertham's book, however, was subsequently denied circulation by the Club in a scandal which Wertham maintained was engineered by his opponents (Wertham 1954e). Seldes, long the most active advocate in favor of the popular arts in the New York Intellectuals circle, found little to support in writing about comic books and their adult readers in the early-1950s. Writing in his 1951 book *The Great Audience* Seldes traced a history of anti-comic book concern from Sterling North to Fredric Wertham. Seldes bemoaned the fact that "year after year Dr. Fredric Wertham brings forth panels showing new ugliness and

sadistic atrocities; year after year his testimony is brushed aside as extravagant and out of date" (Seldes 1957: 91). Seldes' pre-*Seduction* support for Wertham's research project was subsequently matched by Mills when he praised the book in the *New York Times Book Review* for its "careful observations and sober reflections" and his "most commendable service to the public" (Mills 1954:20). Mills suggested that "any careful reader" could only agree with Wertham's findings and his conclusions, and he further suggested that the questions which he raised should be the subject of further study. Mills' support of Wertham, whom he had quoted approvingly on another topic in *White Collar* (Mills 1951:xi), may have been a result of their ongoing dedication to processes of social change in the 1950s, a dedication which many other critics had abandoned while adopting the politics of the postwar consensus. Nonetheless, Mills was very supportive of Wertham and his work and he wrote a brief note to him following the book's publication which wished him "Good luck: Hope you're read widely" (in Gilbert 1986:103). These commentaries, however, would be the exceptions that proved the rule as far as the New York Intellectuals and Fredric Wertham were concerned, as other commentators would cast a much more skeptical eye over his work.

Norbert Muhlen, writing in the influential journal *Commentary* in 1949, was probably the first of the New York Intellectuals to address Wertham's work on comics specifically. Muhlen's article, "Comic Books and Other Horrors: Pre School for Totalitarian Society?" (Muhlen 1949), combined many of the traditional postwar concerns about mass culture into a single article with specific reference to comics. Muhlen noted that the comic book was the least inhibited of all mass cultural forms and that, as a consequence, it had become dedicated to "dehumanizing violence" (81). Characterizing the situation as "an American nightmare" (82), Muhlen noted that scientists had weighed in both for and against the comic book, leading to what he termed "a civil war among psychiatrists" (83). After assessing the charges made by both sides Muhlen conceded that he remained unconvinced that, despite their obvious aesthetic defects, comics had

demonstrably negative effects on their readers. Citing Wertham's earlier insistence on the complex causation of criminality in *Dark Legend* Muhlen suggested that Wertham had become a mono-causationist and betrayed his own earlier writing (84). Muhlen suggested that comic books did not cause juvenile delinquency and, further, offered the possibility that comics and juvenile delinquency might in fact stem from the same common root. This, of course, was very similar to the argument which Wertham actually made while at odds with the caricature of Wertham's argument often presented by his critics. Muhlen further approximated Wertham's arguments when he suggested that comic books were a child's education into violence and that the heroes of many comics were themselves totalitarian (85). Muhlen's closing comments were a distillation of general anti-mass culture sentiment directed at comics. He suggested that the form was leading to the "robotization of the individual" similar to what had occurred in Germany and Russia (87). Thus, while Muhlen rejected Wertham's suggestion that comic books led to juvenile delinquency he did feel that they were leading toward "an authoritarian rather than a democratic society" (87). Muhlen's very marginal distinctions between his own beliefs and those of Wertham demonstrate at once both the degree to which the two writers drew on common assumptions about the place and effect of mass culture in the postwar period and the need of the New York Intellectual circle to stake out a unique position on cultural questions whereby they would not be accused of simply reiterating the arguments of others, even in instances when distinctions were almost negligible between positions.

Reuel Denney, Riesman's collaborator on *The Lonely Crowd*, wrote the *New Republic*'s review of *Seduction of the Innocent*, dismissing both the book and its author. Suggesting that Wertham was a "psychiatrist well known for his popularizing", Denney argued generally that "arguments from psychological experts are already suspect", thereby negating any claim to authority Wertham might have been able to maintain (Denney 1954a:18). Denney further argued that Wertham's theory of meaning creation was over-simplified insofar as it seemed to subscribe unambiguous meanings to images from comic

books. Calling Wertham's writing "shop-worn", "high-pitched", "tedious" and "narrow", he condemned the book for failing to make its argument in a scientific fashion (18). In a subsequent response to a letter from Wertham which corrected the critic on a factual matter and remarked upon the "bilious" nature of his review (Wertham 1954g:22) Denney pointed out that the "bile flow" in the review was "stimulated by the doctor's mixture" (Denney 1954b:22). Denney's comments on Wertham were not restricted to the pages of the *New Republic*, however. He also wrote about Wertham at some length in his 1957 book *The Astonished Muse* (Denney 1957). Here Denney argued that the base idea for all condemnations of mass culture was the belief that it had usurped print, that print had usurped conversation and that conversation had usurped contemplation (163). He further suggested that those who would replace mass culture with "good literature" were engaged in a form of moral panic. Chief among his examples of this type of thinking was Wertham who was charged with having "taken advantage of the sense of the 'media crisis' distributed among the older and parental groups to suggest shotgun definitions of the problem and its solution" (164). Denney argued that Wertham had associated comic books and juvenile delinquency "without evidence of any weight" (164). Further, he suggested that the audience for this type of panic were those parents who were cultural lowbrows, the least educated and those who read the least. Denney suggested, finally, that even if Wertham was genuinely sensitive to a real problem, and even if his facts were true but poorly documented, he would be responsible for introducing into discussions of the media a number of false assumptions because he had ignored cross-cultural complexities (165).

Other members of the New York Intellectuals circle took similar swipes at Wertham throughout the 1950s. I noted in the first chapter the responses of Leslie Fiedler and Robert Warshow, both of whom took great pains to reject Wertham's writings on culture and politics. Wertham's name crops up time and again in Rosenberg and White's volume, *Mass Culture*, which reprinted those articles. Ernest Van Den Haag, for instance, snidely referred to *Seduction of the Innocent*'s tendency to utilize traditional "common sense" as

psychological insight, while at the same time dismissing the political concerns of the book: "Dr. Wertham in dressing Mom up as a psychiatrist also used some para-Marxist clichés from the attic" (Van Den Haag 1957:530). David Manning White similarly dismissed Wertham out of hand with the image of him "frightening the wits out of the Parent-Teachers Association of Scarsdale with his oversimplified message" (White 1957:13). Wertham, it seems, was everywhere that the New York Intellectuals felt that they needed to be. As late as 1960, Daniel Bell still felt the need to respond to Wertham's concerns about the relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency. Arguing that juvenile delinquency was not on the rise in the 1950s but had actually been decreasing, Bell cited Wertham's findings on the "undeniably gory content of comic books" but dismissed them almost without comment, explaining that "comics may simply lead a child to escape from reality and to deaden his feelings about the brutality in the world" (Bell 1960:145). As with Muhlen this was a narrow distinction because Wertham too would argue that "undeniably gory content" of comics deadened a reader's feelings about brutality. Indeed, that was one of his major claims. What is clear from these responses, therefore, is the degree to which the commentaries of the New York Intellectuals failed to actively engage Wertham's arguments and instead rested on a rebuttal of a caricature which they themselves had constructed. The most common attack on Wertham by the New York Intellectuals was to agree with his most basic premises regarding the inherently damaging qualities of mass culture, but then to dismiss his conclusions as unsupported by the data, while at the same time generating no counter-evidence of their own assertions. For a scientifically-grounded rebuttal of Wertham's conception of media effects it would be necessary to await the contributions of communication scholars. In the end, however, the fact that the majority of the New York Intellectuals forcefully disagreed with Wertham and his findings was of little concern. As the enthusiastic reception in the rest of the press demonstrated, *Seduction of the Innocent* was to have considerable impact in shaping the debate about comic books, even going so far as to have demonstrable effects of its own.

Cleaning Up the Comics: The Comics Code Authority

Seduction of the Innocent was published in April 1954. At the same time the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency chaired by Senator Robert Hendrickson, which had been established 27 April 1953, was investigating the role of the mass media as a contributing factor in youth crime. That the subcommittee's hearings on comic books virtually coincided with the publication of the book ensured a high visibility for both and made Wertham's work crucial to the study of the relationship between mass culture and juvenile delinquency. Wertham had been critical of the earlier efforts of the subcommittee in *Seduction of the Innocent*, dismissing Senator Estes Kefauver, the ranking Democrat on the committee and the man who would author its report in 1955 after the Democrats regained control of the Senate in the 1954 election, for his failure to become better informed on the comic book issue (Wertham 1954a:346). Nonetheless, when the subcommittee resumed its investigation into comic books on 21 and 22 April 1954 in New York Wertham was one of the most notable experts to testify.

Wertham testified before the subcommittee in the afternoon of 21 April 1954. His opening remarks and his responses to questions from the senators and the counsel for the subcommittee essentially reiterated his charges from *Seduction of the Innocent*, and Wertham went so far as to suggest that he would repeat any portion of that text under oath since every word was true (U.S. Senate 1954:877). After his opening statement of credentials and an explanation of his methodology, Wertham bluntly stated his belief that comic books were not the sole cause of youth crime: "nobody would claim comic books alone are the cause of juvenile delinquency" (871). Wertham went on to suggest that because children with morbid psychological problems are often wrapped up in their own psychic worlds that it was primarily "normal" children who were negatively effected by

comic books. This occurred, Wertham argued, by a process of seduction which he suggested dated back to ancient Roman tradition of bread and circuses:

> If you consult, as we have done, the first modern scientific psychologist who lived a long time ago, you will find the answer. That psychologist was St. Augustine. This was long before the comic book era, of course, but he describes in detail how when he was a very, very young man he was in Rome and he saw these very bloody, sadistic spectacles all around him, where the gladiators fought each other with swords and daggers, and he didn't like it. He didn't any part of it.
>
> But there was so much going on and his friends went and finally he went and he noticed, as he expresses it, that the became unconsciously delighted with it and he kept on going.
>
> In other words, he was tempted, he was seduced by this mass appeal, and he went.
>
> I think it is exactly the same thing, if the children see these kinds of things over and over again, they can't go to a dentist, they can't go to a clinic, they can't go to a ward in a hospital, everywhere they see this where women are beaten up, where people are shot and killed, and finally they become, as St. Augustine said, unconsciously delighted. (872)

Wertham's argument about the seductive power of mass culture sat in opposition to the belief that it was only predisposed children who were injured by comic books. He suggested that there was "no more erroneous theory about child behavior than to assume that children must be predisposed to do anything wrong" (875). Instead he suggested that a number of factors, including comic books, conspired to seduce and betray America's youth and indoctrinate them into corrosive values. To this end Wertham suggested that the propagandistic value of comic books was so strong that "Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic-book industry. They get the children much younger. They teach them race hatred at the age of 4 before they can read" (880). Faced with this crisis Wertham repeated his call to isolate the single factor of comic books with national legislation based on the public health ideal which would prohibit the circulation and display of comic books to children under the age of fifteen. Wertham suggested that this type of law would bypass claims of censorship because publishers would remain free to produce material with violent or objectionable content for adult audiences, and children would even be able to see that material if their parents approved:

> You see, if a father wants to go to a store and says, "I have a little boy of seven. He doesn't know how to rape a girl; he doesn't know how to rob a store. Please sell

> me one of the comic books," let the man sell him one, but I don't think the boy should be able to go see this rape on the cover and buy the comic book. (878)

Wertham's testimony before the senate subcommittee, therefore, placed his remarks in *Seduction of the Innocent* firmly in the public policy arena, where they stood as a notable benchmark in the history of governmental efforts to investigate the effects of the mass media and mass culture.

Immediately following Wertham's testimony were the comments of Bill Gaines, the publisher of EC Comics, noteworthy for their horror comics and for *Mad*, which would later parody Wertham as Frederick Werthless. Gaines' testimony was the high-point of the first day of the hearings, and his comments were extensively quoted. Gaines opened his testimony by noting that because his father had been the man who had started the modern comic book industry and that, further, because he personally had published the first horror comic book, therefore he was the man to blame if blame were to be cast. Gaines, however, saw the comic book controversy entirely in terms of taste. Arguing that his company and others had provided millions of hours of entertainment for children, he suggested that "some may not like them. That is a matter of personal taste. It would be just as difficult to explain the harmless thrill of a horror story to a Dr. Wertham as it would be to explain the sublimity of love to a frigid old maid" (U.S. Senate 1954:883). Gaines proceeded to defend a number of the comics stories which had been introduced into evidence earlier in the day by subcommittee executive director Richard Clendenen and by Wertham. After arguing that one of his stories which Wertham had condemned as racist actually sent an anti-racist message to readers, Gaines was asked why he believed comics could send positive messages to readers but not negative ones. He responded by suggesting that there was no such thing as an unintentional message in comics: "when we write a story with a message, it is deliberately written in such a way that the message, as I say, is spelled out carefully in the captions. The preaching, if you want to call it, is spelled out carefully in the captions" (885). Further, when he was pressed on the question of whether a foster child might experience fears or anxieties after reading a story in which foster parents were

revealed to be werewolves Gaines dismissed the possibility because "none of the captions said anything like "If you are unhappy with your stepmother, shoot her." (885). Certainly the most controversial aspect of Gaines' testimony, however, came when he was asked what limits he, as a publisher of horror comics, put on what he would circulate to children. Gaines responded that the only limits were those of his own sense of good taste. He was then presented with the cover of most recent issue of one of his horror comics which depicted a man with a bloody ax holding a severed woman's head and asked if that was in good taste. The subsequent exchange was quoted on the front page of the *New York Times*, as well as in *Time*, *Newsweek* and in other news sources (Kihss 1954a; "Horror Comics" 1954; "Are Comics Horrible?" 1954):

> Senator Kefauver: Do You think that is in good taste?
>
> Mr. Gaines: Yes, sir; I do, for the cover of a horror comic. A cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the neck could be seen dripping blood from it and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody.
>
> Senator Kefauver: You have blood coming out of her mouth.
>
> Mr. Gaines: A little. (887)

The negative reaction to this particular exchange harmed the comic book defenders as much or more than anything that Wertham testified to, especially as it demonstrated the degree to which comics publishers seemed to be out of touch with the concerns of the day. Gaines' testimony reinforced Wertham's contentions about the degrading influence of mass culture and further underscored his contentions that publishers were venally seeking to profit by peddling lurid material to children. Insofar as the first day's hearings would be reduced in the press coverage to an argument between Wertham and Gaines it is difficult to imagine how the comic book industry could have profited in any way from the experience.

Other testimony presented by the twenty-two witnesses who came before the subcommittee did little to shore up the position of the comic book industry. Henry Schultz of the ACMP, for instance, was forced to admit that "the seal has lost its imprint and its value in many ways" (U.S. Senate 1954:868). Testifying to rebut the arguments of

Wertham and Harris Peck, both of whom suggested that comic books had a negative effect on readers, were Lauretta Bender and Gunnar Dybwad, executive director of the Child Study Association. Asked if comics had negative effects, Dybwad refused to take a stand, arguing that widespread distribution of mass culture was symptomatic of larger problems in society and suggesting that he had not seen the clinical evidence to justify any claim either way (Nyberg 1998:75). Bender called horror comics "unspeakably silly" and suggested that children laughed at them and, moreover, that a child would not read any comic that caused them anxiety (Nyberg 1998:75). The testimony of Dybwad and Bender was discredited, however, by Kefauver who attacked the Child Study Association for failing to disclose the fact that three of its members were, as Wertham had charged, paid consultants to the comic book industry: "You have deceived the public... by putting out advice to parents with the principal research and writing done by people in the pay of publishers, and you do not divulge these facts" ("Horror Comics" 1954:78). He went on to charge that the CSA had intentionally minimized the comic book problem by promoting industrial self-regulation and parental supervision as curatives in the place of legislation (Kihss 1954b: 29).

Representatives of comic book publishers and the National Cartoonists Society put up little defense of the industry generally, and their comments tended to support Wertham's arguments, particularly as they pertained to mass culture. *Pogo* creator and NCS president Walt Kelly testified on behalf of newspaper comic strip artists saying that while the organization opposed any legislative action with regard to comic books they did, nonetheless, recognize "the great danger of the magazines in question" (U.S. Senate 1954:893). Kelly went on to insist on a firm distinction between the highly censored and positive comic strip and the more dangerous and uncontrolled comic books. *Steve Canyon* creator Milton Caniff, appearing alongside Kelly, reinforced this opposition when he suggested that they were "attempting not to debate with Dr. Wertham, whose opinion we value very highly" but rather they were trying to make the point that newspaper strips

served the public good through their tendency to entertain and to inform (U.S. Senate 1954:896). Kelly and Caniff resorted to a high/low split in comics formats by insisting on a clear distinction between the comic strip and comic book. Helen Meyer of Dell Comics, then the largest single publisher in the industry, furthered the high/low division within comic books when she drew a division between the work that her own company published and that of companies like Gaines' EC. Meyer pointed out that Dell had never published crime or horror comics and that they were anxious to publicize that fact lest their company be tarred by an overly broad anti-comic book brush. She noted that Dell had refused to join the ACMP because she felt that that organization simply wished to use good publishers such as Dell as "an umbrella for the crime comic publishers", and she concluded by stating that "we abhor horror and crime comics. We would like to see them out of the picture because it taints us" (in Nyberg 1998:77). The hearings, therefore, firmly reinforced the existing place of the comic book within the general framework of postwar concerns about the effects of mass culture. Wertham was able to make the equation of comic books and mass culture forcefully and then saw his argument buttressed from within the industry by Kelly, Caniff and Meyer. Further, his opponents were either discredited as biased or were hoist on their own petards, as was the case with William Gaines, thereby helping to prove in the public's eye the charges that Wertham had long leveled at the industry. Faced with such a poor performance at the hearings, the comic book industry would scramble to adopt changes before the subcommittee could issue a negative report.

The Creation of the Comics Code Authority

Editorial codes were not new in the field of comics. National Comics, Dell Comics and Fawcett Comics had had codes since the beginning of the 1940s and the ACMP code had applied to about one third of all comics publishers in the later portion of that decade and into the 1950s before losing whatever force it had. The new code, however, would be stricter and more inclusive, covering almost all of the industry. On 17 September 1954, the

New York Times ran a front-page photo of the new comic book "czar", Charles F. Murphy (Harrison 1954:1). Murphy was identified as a "vigorous campaigner against juvenile delinquency" who would "administer a code of ethics whereby publishers hope to purge the business of objectionable comics" (1). Murphy was to take office as director of the newly formed Comics Magazine Association of America on 1 October and he pledged that horror comics would be eliminated from the industry at once by what he promised would be the strongest editorial code of any media form, which he said would be written and presented to the public by 15 November (25). In the following week Gaines announced that he was discontinuing the majority of his titles in order to replace them with a "clean, clean line" ("Horror on the Newsstands" 1954:77). Gaines' subsequent refusal to join the CMAA was cited as "disturbing" by *America* ("Comic Book 'Czar'" 1954:3) which later termed the code "noble, if a little vague" ("Progress" 1954:114). That code was announced in the first week of November and applied to 24 of the 27 extant publishers ("No More" 1954:55). Opting out were EC, Dell and Gilberton, the publisher of the *Classics Illustrated* line of comic book adaptations of canonical literature. Responding to a comment in *America* that only code-approved comics should be permitted to children, Dell's Walter Mitchell explained his company's refusal to subscribe:

> The reason Dell does not belong to the newly formed group is that, though it applauds the association's worthy objections to eliminate "horror and terror" comics, it takes exception to the rest of its platform, i.e., merely to regulate (rather than eliminate entirely) love, crime and other comics of questionable nature.
>
> Dell can do much more good by staying out of the new group and by continuing to set a higher standard for the rest of the industry. (Mitchell 1954:308)

Gilberton's refusal stemmed from a similar objection rooted in their sense that the material that they published was of a superior quality and thus required no code approval because it relied so heavily on an educating and improving tendency associated with literature (Sawyer 1987:8). For the majority of the industry, however, the code was required to appease parents and magazine distributors. EC did eventually concede to join the CMAA and the organization functioned for decades to deflect criticism away from comic books and from the charges made by Wertham and other critics. This was, of course, its single

mission. As David Finn, the public relations advisor hired by the comic book industry in 1954, explained in his memoirs:

> public relations efforts to reduce the severity of criticism often disguise rather than reveal the essential conflicts involved. The purpose of such efforts is not to create an atmosphere in which the reforms demanded by critics will be made; it is to find a way to make the smallest possible concessions necessary to end the controversy. Only rarely is there a genuine willingness to face up to the real conflicts involved and to resolve them fairly. (Finn 1969:174)

Finn acknowledged what many critics, Wertham included, had charged at the time but were unable to change as concern with comic books abated in the wake of renewed self-regulation and the appearance of change.

After the Comics Code: The End of the Anti-Comic Book Crusade

While the Comics Code did not end commentary on comics entirely in the United States, it is nonetheless clear that it severely curtailed the discussion. Moreover, post-Code comments generally took on a different tone. In the first place critics generally welcomed the advent of the code and were appreciative that the industry had taken these steps. Dorothy Barclay, writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, called the code seal of approval "a welcome sign" but warned parents to remain vigilant and to combat the effects of comics reading by providing children with good books in the place of bad comics (Barclay 1955:48). The *Christian Century* praised the code for its challenge to mass culture and for its efforts to raise "the level of popular taste" ("What About" 1955:389). Still other critics altered their tone entirely. Humour, for instance, became one of the dominant discursive modes around the crime comic book now that the question had been effectively settled. *Newsweek* columnist John Lardner argued that comic books weren't bad but the wrong people were reading them, and he suggested that if criminals were learning crime techniques from them as Wertham argued then it was incumbent on the police to learn those same techniques from comic books in order to thwart crime (Lardner 1955:58). In England, which was witnessing a tremendous concern about the importation of American horror comic books around this same time (Barker 1984), the *Spectator* ran a contest

honoring the best poem about horror comics ("The Boy" 1955:304). This light-hearted approach to the comic book question suggests the degree to which comics were no longer regarded as an entirely serious threat to the nation's youth following the adoption of the Comics Code.

Which is not to say, however, that all criticism of the comics dissipated entirely. Indeed, in the first year of the code sporadic complaints about comic books still continued to appear. Writing in the *American Mercury* Ruth Inglis noted that the non-Code *Classics Illustrated* line had gotten gorier in the wake of their refusal to join the CMAA (Inglis 1955:120). Similarly, the *Wilson Library Bulletin* maintained its anti-comic books position, rooted as it was in an anti-mass culture stance from the beginning. Noting that the best thing that could be said for comics was that it could not be proven that they were definitively harmful the *Bulletin* went on to call comic books "appalling", "odious", "abominable", and "virulent", before concluding once again that the surest way to control comics reading was to expose children to good books (M.D.L. 1955:651). And, of course, Wertham remained a critic of the form. In a post-script to his original anti-comic book article, Wertham published "It's Still Murder" in the 9 April 1955 issue of the *Saturday Review*. Subtitled "What Parents Still Don't Know About Comic Books", Wertham renewed his attack in light of the changes wrought by the Comics Code. He suggested that Kefauver had once again betrayed American families by failing to indict the comic book industry when he authored the subcommittee report in early 1955 (Wertham 1955b:11). Furthermore, the subcommittee had ultimately endorsed the point of view that only predisposed children were affected by comic books, a decision which angered Wertham. He went to outline a number of specific objections to the Comics Code and cited a number of transgressions which he had been able to find in Code-approved comics. Wertham concluded by suggesting that "at present it is far safer for a mother to let her child have a comic book without a seal of approval than one with such a seal. If comic books, as the industry claims, are the folklore of today, then the codes are the fables." (48). Wertham

also advanced his attack in an article in *Religious Education* (Wertham 1954e). There he pointed out that the Code administrator, Charles Murphy, was a former crime comics publisher himself, having released titles such as *Tales of Horror* which emphasized "salaciously, suggestively drawn girls" (404). Furthermore, Wertham noted that Murphy himself was to be paid by the comics publishers and consequently the independence of his office was seriously in doubt because the CMAA would be run by exactly the same group of publishers who had previously run the failed ACMP code. Wertham's fundamental disagreement with the Code was straightforward:

> The comics publishers have had "codes" and "self-censorship" before, announced with great fanfare, — but never achieving anything except to delude some of the public into thinking something was being done, and that consequently *they* didn't have to bother about it any more. Whenever people begin to show signs of doing something themselves about controlling crime comics, the publishers come out with a "code" or something to divert attention, and avert action. You do not need a code to leave out harmful ingredients from comic books. All you need is to *do* it. All this talk about "codes" is just misleading. (405).

Despite his disapproval, however, the Code endured and ultimately quelled the comic book controversy. At the 1956 National Mass Media Awards sponsored by the Thomas Edison Foundation, comic books were honored for the first time alongside other media like radio, film and television for their contribution to the nation's culture. Ironically, no Code-approved comics were honored as the awards were swept by the non-Code publishers Dell and Gilberton, but the ongoing self-regulation by the industry was applauded as a productive step forward nonetheless ("First Comic" 1956).

Conclusion

By 1960 discussions of comic books had all but disappeared from both the national media and professional journals. Writing in the *Elementary School Journal* in 1960 about vocabulary in the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of *Treasure Island*, Robert Emans noted that "the controversy has apparently subsided. At least, it is not being aired in the nation's magazines. Little that now appears on the subject has the emotionality of the past" (Emans 1960:253). While one of the reasons for this change was certainly the fact that the Comics

Code continued to be a strong influence over the nation's comics publishers, another reason seems obvious as well. That reason was the rise of television as a new mass cultural form. As early as 1950 critics had compared comic books and television as the mutually destructive twins of juvenile-targeted mass culture. Dorothy Barclay, for instance noted that studies showed that children stopped reading comic books when their parents bought televisions. She suggested that both forms be replaced by good books (Barclay 1950). By 1952 Paul Witty, who had conducted early effects research on comic books, was warning parents about television's rapid growth and the probability that it formed an "even greater problem" (Witty 1952:50). Three years later he would suggest that television had taken over as children's most preferred leisure activity. He further warned that excessive television viewing correlated to low academic attainment (Witty 1955:18), where he had previously suggested that no such connection existed between comic books and scholasticism. That these comments perpetuated traditional thinking about mass culture in the Cold War goes almost without saying. What is clear, therefore, is that the rise of television in the late-1950s and through the 1960s displaced comic books, not only as a form of entertainment for children but as a source for concern among parents and cultural commentators. It is important to note, for instance, that the senate subcommittee which had investigated comic books in 1954 proceeded to investigate television later that same year. This was one of the first notable governmental forays into the study of the effects of television, and those studies in many ways helped lead to the development of the media effects research paradigm as it has developed in the field of communication studies. By examining those studies in detail now, the continuity between the anti-comic book movement and the study of television effects will become evident, as will the ways in which each grew out of a larger concern with mass culture generally.

Chapter Five:
Mass Communication and Media Effects

In his introduction to the 1949 edition of Joseph Klapper's influential study *The Effects of Mass Communication* Paul Lazarsfeld speculated as to why it was that the study of media effects was not yet a well-established specialization. For Lazarsfeld the problem with media effects studies in the immediate postwar years had been caused by a methodological crisis. Where once media effects had been debated by public intellectuals assured of the untested validity of their own theses, the terrain now belonged to researchers trained in the social sciences who remained unconvinced. About media effects, therefore, Lazarsfeld suggested that:

> the main difficulty lies in formulating the problem correctly. For the trouble started exactly when empirical research stepped in where once the social philosopher had reigned supreme. To the latter there was never any doubt that first the orator and then the newspaper and now television are social forces of great power. (Lazarsfeld 1949:1-2)

The shift which Lazarsfeld described was evident in early research by communications scholars into comic books. Research undertaken by Katherine Wolf and Marjorie Fiske of Lazarsfeld's Bureau for Applied Social Research at Columbia University stressed, in contradistinction to Wertham, children's individual and developmental needs. In "The Children Talk About Comics" Wolf and Fiske argued that "comics satisfy a real developmental need in normal children and are harmful only for children who are already maladjusted and susceptible to harm" (50). Having conducted one-hour interviews with 104 children between the ages of seven and seventeen Wolf and Fiske were able to classify reader preferences along an age-based schema. They then determined the needs which they found to be satisfied by comic books in each age group. More importantly, however, the authors suggested that so-called normal children ultimately outgrew their interest in comic books while the "maladjusted" child fixated on the medium. The source of maladjustment was not the media, however, but the family. Wolf and Fiske proposed that psychological

or social maladjustment was present in a child before he or she turned to comics in the first place: "The possible dangerous effects of comics on fans must not be overestimated. The child's problems existed before he became a fan, and the comics came along to relieve him" (35). These findings, published in the Lazarsfeld and Stanton-edited volume *Communications Research, 1948-1949*, were far-removed from those of Fredric Wertham, whose first comments on comic books appeared at almost exactly the same moment in time. It is the distance between Wolf and Fiske's conception of a needs-satisfying media industry and Wertham's articulation of a debasing and corrupting culture that delimited the difference between empirically trained social scientists and what Lazarsfeld termed "social philosophers" in the postwar period. That difference is the subject of this chapter and it can be best illustrated by shifting the point of reference to the debate over television which emerged in the early-1950s and which has continued moreorless to this day. In shifting terrain from comic books to television it is necessary to keep in mind the degree to which the study of both of these media was rooted in similar yet distinct research traditions. With the exception of Wolf and Fiske comic books were rarely studied from research perspectives specifically rooted in communications and the dominant media effects paradigm was little utilised in relation to discussions of the form. Television, on the other hand, was quickly taken up by communications researchers in the mid-1950s as it emerged as the leading cause of concern in the domain of mass communication. In altering the object of study, therefore, research methods and approaches were also realigned. Just as comic books were rarely read through the specific lens of the media effects paradigm it can be argued that television was seldom regarded from any other perspective.

In the first chapter of this thesis I noted that Herbert Gans had outlined four general critiques of mass culture which he suggested were generally recurrent throughout history. The first two critiques, that mass culture was a defective commercial enterprise and a threat to high culture, were addressed in the first chapter. Mass culture's ostensible threat to society was discussed in chapter two. At this point I would like to turn to the remaining

critique identified by Gans, the threat which mass culture was supposed to pose to its own audience (30). Gans suggested that the theory of harmful effects rested on three assumptions: that the behavior for which mass culture was held responsible actually existed; that the content of mass culture provided models for that behavior; and that it therefore had negative effects (31). In this chapter I argue that the critique of mass culture reached its pinnacle with the coincidental rise of television and of empirically-grounded social science mass media research in the postwar period. I suggest that the media effects paradigm which developed from the study of television was supported by an assumption rooted in pre-existing critiques developed by "social philosophers". They held that mass culture was atomizing and narcotizing and further that television was its nadir. To this end I posit that the development of the media effects paradigm in communications studies following the Second World War was the result of a professionalizing tendency which produced mass communication research as a specialization of American sociology. Furthermore, it was legitimated at governmental inquiries which privileged empirical forms of data-collecting in the place of more subjective or critical approaches to knowledge. Television, as Patrick Brantlinger has noted, is the mass medium that took the abolition of the "aura" of older cultural forms to its absolute limit (249). It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover television at the heart of the apotheosis of the anti-mass culture critique.

Media Effects Research in the Twentieth-Century

The development of the media effects paradigm in the study of mass communication had at its roots the progressive and pragmatic dimensions of American empirical sociology. This intellectual project found its greatest expression in the Chicago School of Sociology in the first decades of the twentieth-century. In the first three decades of the twentieth-century at the University of Chicago social scientists such as Robert Park, Charles Horton Cooley,

John Dewey and George Herbert Mead planted the seeds for the first real flowering of sociology in the United States. Further, by developing a theory of socialization through communication the Chicago scholars cast the mold for future research into the effects of the mass media (Rogers 1994:138). Perhaps the most influential of the Chicago group was Robert Park, whose interest in the effects of urbanization helped guide the research interests of the entire department. Park postulated four major social processes at work in the organization of the city, competition, communication, accommodation and assimilation. He suggested that each wave of immigrants arriving in new urban centers experienced the same sorts of social disorganization. Thus the study of city-based micro-phenomena such as youth gangs came to define American sociology under the influence of the Chicago School. Equally importantly, this focus on research which held potentially ameliorative tendencies oriented American sociology towards the empirically grounded study of social problems. Park, whose only book studied the role of the immigrant press in the adjustment of new populations, foregrounded the study of mass communication in sociology and has been called the first real theorist of the mass media (Rogers 1994:189). This claim is certainly supported by Park's involvement with the Payne Fund Studies of the effects of motion pictures on youth, the first large-scale social science study of the impact of the mass media on behavior and attitudes.

The Payne Fund Studies, 1929 - 1933

As the largest ever study of the effect of mass media on children the so-called Payne Fund Studies played an important role in setting the stage for research into television which would arise two decades later. Indeed, Carmen Luke has argued that the Payne Fund Studies are the "root" at the tree of derivation of the media effects theory insofar as it set the research agenda for seemingly all of the studies which were to follow it (1990:36). The undertaking, which was organized primarily by sociologists at the University of Chicago, rested on the assumption that motion pictures were a moral problem which could be

ameliorated by sociological and scientific intervention. The potential benefits of this kind of research to society prompted many of the scholars to join the studies despite — or perhaps because of — their own intellectual and aesthetic prejudices against the cinema (Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller 1996:62). It is apparent, therefore, that the studies were undertaken in an intellectual atmosphere influenced by oppositions between elite and mass culture which characterized the first half of the twentieth-century, as I outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. The eight volumes which comprised the published results included studies of information intake and retention, surveys of attitudinal change, effects on the physical and emotional health of child viewers, records of attendance and content, and, most importantly, studies on the effect of motion pictures on the behavior of young audiences. Throughout the course of its five-year project the Payne Fund researchers sided with scientific objectivity over advocacy in the ongoing debate between value-oriented social policy research and value-neutral objectivity (Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller 1996:58). Ultimately, however, the conclusions were presented in such a way as to reinforce ongoing anti-mass culture moralizing of the period.

The findings of the Payne Fund Studies were summarized in a single volume by W. W. Charters entitled *Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary.* Charters broke down the findings of the Studies in two broad groupings: researchers who studied film content and attendance, and researchers broadly focused on media effects (1933:5). The effects researchers addressed their work to the influence of films on behavior and conduct, suggesting that a correspondence existed between movies and behavior. Charters dismissed such a simple cause-and-effect hypothesis equating film attendance and youth criminality, but did not absolve the media altogether:

> To say that the movies are solely responsible for anti-social conduct, delinquency, or crime is not valid. To assert contrariwise that delinquents are not affected by them is clearly indefensible. Validity probably rests with a combination of the two — tendencies toward unapproved conduct and movie influence work together to produce more movie interest on the one hand and more anti-social conduct on the other. The two factors drive toward progressive aggravation of unhealthful conditions. (Charters 1933:13)

Charters' claim that some films influenced some children some of the time would become a hallmark of sociological media effects research in the decades which followed. Children who were influenced by movies, he argued, were already "maladjusted" (1933:16). Nonetheless, the Payne Fund researchers were unwilling to place the blame entirely on the maladjusted child, reserving some genuine concern for the content of motion pictures. Charters stated bluntly that "crime pictures have a pronounced effect upon delinquents. Minor delinquencies are aggravated by these pictures in many cases; cues for criminal actions are presented and are sometimes copied by young delinquents" (1933:54). Moreover, he argued that the content of films featured too much sexual and criminal content (1933:60). Thus, while the Payne Fund Studies rejected a theory of simple media effects causation they nonetheless provided a basis for the type of public policy advocacy which they had ostensibly rejected. Indeed, Charters' call for a legitimate and uplifting children's cinema which would parallel the development of children's literature (1933:62) demonstrates the degree to which scientific objectivity often brushed up against reformist tendencies in the early years of research into the effects of the mass media.

That the Payne Fund Studies summary volume would lend itself to moralizing and reformist tendencies is not surprising given the fact that the study itself was undertaken to bolster efforts to reform the American cinema. The film industry had been under attack virtually since its inception, but by the end of the 1920s criticisms were beginning to have an impact. To forestall ongoing criticism the film industry adopted a Production Code in 1930 and began to enforce that code through the Production Code Administration in 1934, the year following the publication of the results of the Payne Fund Studies and its popularized findings in Henry Forman's *Our Movie Made Children*. Media criticism, self-regulation and scientific inquiry were the three major factors in the research agenda of the Payne Fund Studies. This is worth noting because all three were marshaled again in the postwar era when new concerns emerged over comic books and television. The research agendas in the postwar period relied heavily on both dominant tendencies in American

sociology as well as the specific consensus about the relationship between mass and elite cultures which characterized the Payne Fund Studies. Perhaps the most important element that the Payne Fund Studies brought to the debate, therefore, was the opening of the opportunity for sociologists and psychologists to claim both the mass media and children as viable objects of study. This tendency recurred in both the debate around comic books and television in the 1950s. Thus it can be concluded that the Payne Fund Studies of motion pictures undertaken by sociologists at the University of Chicago laid the groundwork for what would become the media effects paradigm in mass communication research in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Status of Television in the 1950s

Despite nostalgic depictions of the 1950s as television's golden age it is clear that the new medium was regarded with same sorts of apprehension and suspicion as were previous mass cultural forms. In a widely quoted 1949 *Saturday Review* article, for instance, Norman Cousins wrote about television in much the same way that Wertham wrote about comic books. In fact Cousins went so far as to equate the two media when he argued that "the terror comic strips were bad enough, but they are rapidly on the way to playing squeaky second fiddles to television as prime movers in juvenile misconduct and delinquency" (1953:69). Cousins suggested that television was worse than comics insofar as it was endorsed by parents where comic books were not. Moreover, he invoked mass culture's threat to civilization when he bemoaned the perception that television had forsaken its democratic potential. What had displaced that potential, Cousins suggested, was "an invasion against good taste as no other communications medium has known" which featured a "mass-produced series of plodding stereotypes and low-quality programs" (70). Cousins concluded by suggesting that the future of television was being "murdered in the cradle" (71). Similar sentiments were voiced by the *New York Times* television editor, Jack Gould. He argued that "television is getting pretty bad. The high hopes for video

which were held by so many are vanishing before our eyes. The medium is heading hell-bent for the rut of innocuity, mediocrity and sameness that made a drab if blatant jukebox of radio" (1953:71). Gould contended that television had become an "eye-wearying monstrosity" (71) that could only be saved if its most talented writers would commit to elevate its degraded status. Common to these arguments — and others like them — are the themes which have run through all condemnations of mass culture in the twentieth-century: a belief that the medium is crassly commercial, degrading and targeted towards society's lowest common denominator. What is clear, therefore, is that initial studies of television and its role in American culture in the 1950s were conducted in the midst of a condemning and judgmental discursive field that had more in common with the mass culture critiques than the more empirically-grounded Payne Fund Studies.

One of the first books to address television at length originated from precisely this point of view. Leo Bogart's 1956 volume *The Age of Television* placed the new medium within the traditions of a number of the critiques of mass culture circulating at the time. Bogart opened his book by suggesting that the postwar United States was the "supreme embodiment" of the great society but that its social bonds of community were in the process of being displaced by new bonds provided by the mass media (1956:1-2). Bogart argued that the increasingly middle-class United States, with its expanding purchasing power and leisure time, was in danger of being colonized by mass culture generally, and television in particular. Drawing a series of distinctions between elite and mass culture relating to audience size, content and the nature of the art experience Bogart proceeded to outline a series of characteristics which he held were inherent in television. He suggested that television's illusion of realism and traffic in universal symbols generated a powerful official character and aura about it. This aura allowed television to highlight the glamorous nature of celebrities and provide an illusion of intimacy between the viewer and the viewed (24-29). Bogart's emphasis on illusions tellingly demonstrated his conclusions. He argued that television viewing was essentially passive in comparison with reading because television's

meanings were "manifest and easily absorbed" (34). Faced with a limited choice of available programming and a complete absence of participation Bogart concluded that television was an inferior communications medium which lacked "a strong ideological flavor" because ultimately the viewer "likes it bland" (36). Bogart's conclusions, while couched in reasonably dry terms, ultimately reinforced existing suspicions about mass culture by reiterating the most common complaints of the postwar period.

Bogart's distrust of the effect of television on American society was mirrored by the work of a number of psychiatrists who argued that the medium was having a negative impact on the psychological make-up of viewers. Lawrence Freedman, for example, questioned whether television caused passivity, delinquency or violence in its viewers but concluded that insufficient research existed on these questions to make that determination. He did, however, feel confident in reinforcing the notion that maladjusted children could be harmed by television viewing:

> Psychopathic youngsters, whose identifications with meaningful adult figures have been seriously impaired, whose self-censoring and self-governing mechanisms are defective, are likely to be shallow and transitory in their relations with others. Poised to rebel, unsure of their own image, distant in their relationships, they may use the television criminal as their model of rebellion and be precipitated and guided by him. (192)

While Freedman charged television with contributing to criminality in cases where children were said to be predisposed towards violence or "poised to rebel" he stopped short of ascribing to television the broad social effects that mass culture critics ascribed to the medium (193). This was not the case, however, with Eugene Glynn who argued in 1956 that television formed the viewer's character by acting upon the unconscious. The effect of television, he suggested, was to trap the viewer in the oral stage of development and thereby foster passivity and receptivity. Television, through its increasing ubiquity, could even take over from the mother. It had the potential to fix the oral stage and consequently insure passivity as the dominant American psychological orientation (178-179). Glynn echoed the arguments of postwar critics of the mass society when he suggested that the "new American character is one of conformity" which featured the search for "security, not

glory, comfort in the group, not individual prominence" (180). Ultimately Glynn feared that television will "find itself degraded into an instrument for the shaping of a group man" (182). Insofar as psychiatry had taken a position in relation to television, therefore, it seemed to have reached a conclusion shared by cultural critics and communication scholars alike; namely that as a mass cultural form television threatened both its viewers and the nation as a whole.

These were the assumptions that structured early research into television by fledgling mass communication scholars as it developed in the early-1950s. Although television had been developed in the 1930s the war and then postwar production problems had held back its widescale introduction until 1948. Studies of the new medium followed almost immediately and drew on existing research into film and radio, as well as on the critical discourse surrounding mass culture generally. In this respect, then, television scholarship shared much with research on comic books. Paul Witty, for instance, who had played a key role in scholarship on comic books, wrote a series of articles which stressed the similarities between comic books and television. His conclusions about the latter mirrored his findings about the former and he argued for an increase in "worthwhile" programming (in Luke 1990:65). The earliest social science research on television focused on television usage and program preferences, generally arguing from a Parsonian sociological perspective that children were active selectors of the programs which they watched. Luke has suggested that the watershed year for research concerned with television and children was 1954, coincidentally the year that concern about comic books peaked with the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* and the adoption of the Comics Code. In that year four articles specifically relating to children and television appeared. Two dealt with the effect of viewing on education, one addressed the child's motivation to watch and one commented on the possibility of television addiction and pathological behavior. 1954 also saw the publication of Dallas Smythe's first comprehensive content analysis of television programming and Theodor Adorno's comments on television, cultural consumers and the

curse of modern mass culture (Luke 1990:80). Together these articles marked a shift away from the alarmist critiques of mass culture and towards a type of restrained, scientific objectivism. Yet, mass communication researchers were unable to entirely rid themselves of the type of moralizing judgments which had characterized the work of commentators who had preceded them. In the Wilbur Schramm-edited textbook *Mass Communications* (1960) Waples, Berelson and Bradshaw drew a distinction between the type of effects provided by "genuinely artistic writing which helps the reader to view reality through the author's more observing eyes" and "comic strips, joke columns, human interest stories, and other diverting items, which come between the reader and his worries" (490). In the same volume Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton would decry mass culture as a respectable and efficient social narcotic (501) while complaining that "the women who are daily entranced for three or four hours by some twelve consecutive "soap operas", all cut to the same dismal pattern, exhibit an appalling lack of aesthetic judgment" (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1957:466). What is clear, therefore, is that the shift away from moralizing critiques of television and mass culture towards more objective studies was not able to completely sever ties between the two. From this vantage point, therefore, it is possible to regard the burgeoning mass communication research as the politely scientific face of a condemning tendency which had governed commentaries on mass culture for decades.

The Media Effects Paradigm Comes of Age

Following the definitional parameter established by Thomas Kuhn a scientific paradigm in the most general sense is a "particular coherent tradition of scientific research". Similarly, Kuhn indicated that there are "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (in Hodge and Tripp 1986:190). Insofar as mass communication researchers constituted a community of practitioners in the postwar period it is safe to say that three texts formed the model problems and solutions to questions of media effects. These texts included the first

two wide-scale English-language studies of television, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* by Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961), and *Television and the Child* by Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958). The third is Joseph Klapper's study of media effects generally, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960). Published over a four year span these three volumes marked the turn towards Parsonian sociology in the study of the mass media. The shared approach in these volumes stressed objectivity through the use of statistical research methodologies and reference to scientific standards of validation. Moreover, these books shared not only an approach to the questions under investigation but also a series of general conclusions. Each publication endorsed "the null inference" of media effects, or the suggestion that media have only a limited and minor impact on individual behavior (Comstock et al. 1978:388). Although it was challenged by later scholars of communication this shared conclusion formed the initial assumptions of the media effects paradigm and influenced subsequent developments in the field. If it is true, as Wilbur Schramm argued in his 1960 textbook *Mass Communications*, that "the effects of communication are, of course, the chief reason for all communication study" (Schramm 1960:465) then it becomes necessary to regard these texts as among the most important in the development of mass communication as a field of study in the postwar period.

Television and the Child

Perhaps the most important single finding of the study undertaken by British researchers Hilde Himmelweit, A.N. Oppenheim and Pamela Vince and their associates was the fact that "television is used by different children in different ways" (1958:xiv). This blunt statement helped to shift discussion of television away from the broadly polemical statements of the past and towards a more nuanced and tentative understanding of the relationship between media and audiences. The authors explicitly note this distinction from the work which preceded their own in the opening pages of their report. They insisted, for instance, that prior condemnations of television were "heavily influenced by

personal attitudes" and that they were "often contradictory" (2). Nonetheless, they admitted that the initial shape of their own study was largely influenced by the anti-mass culture writings of the postwar era:

> We were faced with the difficulty that the 'effects' of television could manifest themselves in almost every aspect of children's lives. To find out what to measure, and where to draw the line, we therefore turned to the many opinions that had been expressed about the effects of the medium. (2)

The resulting volume, *Television and the Child*, would serve either to corroborate or correct the arguments put forward by previous critics.

Television and the Child is organized to reflect the investigation into a series of presumed effects of the medium. Thus individual chapters survey the composition of the child audience for television before moving on to catalogue reactions to conflict and crime on screen. Four chapters survey a broad range of effects including the impact on values, knowledge and school performance, leisure interests and physical health. According to their findings, the most noticeable impact of television was its effect on leisure time. The authors suggested that television had displaced functionally similar activities altogether while transforming others. Thus the nature of childhood radio listening was altered as television programs displaced similarly-themed radio programming, and comic book reading among children with television sets in their homes was "permanently reduced" (36). The researchers concluded that the appeal of television was significantly stronger than that of other aspects of mass culture, yet were loathe to attribute significant effects to the new zenith of commercial culture. They noted, for instance, that while television did seem to impact the number of books and comics that children read it did not affect their school work (21). They found that while certain types of programming frightened some children they remained unconvinced that a link between violence on television and childhood aggression could be assumed. They did hold out the possibility that "it could precipitate [aggression] in those few children who are emotionally disturbed" (20). Traditional concerns about mass culture were not entirely obviated. For example, the authors expressed a concern about the possibility that television was creating a generation of

addicts, although again in this instance the blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of the individual child whose "emotional insecurity and maladjustment seem to impel him towards excessive consumption of any available mass medium" (29).

The conclusions promoted by Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince were emblematic of social science research into the mass media at this point in history. They issued a qualified endorsement which straddled the fence on most questions: "Television, then is not as black as it is painted, but neither is it the great harbinger of culture and enlightenment which its enthusiasts tend to claim for it" (40). The authors maintained the need to overthrow previous moralizing understandings of mass culture which exaggerated the power of the media and charged that they lowered standards of behavior. However, their own recommendations relied on some of the same rhetorics which they deplored. Thus they proposed that it would be "useful" for parents to reduce television viewing by children through the provision of "more attractive alternatives" (46), a suggestion which seemingly echoed the proposition that librarians replace comic books with "good literature" in years past. Further, they argued for a reduction of televised violence despite their own conclusion that the impact of televisual violence on children was minimal. The authors suggested that "inessential" violence should be removed from programming and that violence of any kind should not be aired on television prior to ten o'clock at night (54). These suggestions demonstrate the degree to which older assumptions about the influence of mass culture persisted even into the establishment of a new paradigm which had explicitly renounced them. This tendency would be reinforced less than half a decade later with the publication of the second large-scale study of the effects of television on children.

Television in the Lives of Our Children

The conclusions of Schramm, Lyle and Parker in *Television in the Lives of Our Children* were very much in accord with the work of their British counterparts. In what has become a "classic statement" on media effects (Luke 1990:116) they suggested that

> For *some* children, under *some* conditions, *some* television is harmful. For *other* children, under *other* conditions, it may be beneficial. For *most* children, under *most* conditions, *most* television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial. (1)

Key to this understanding of selective influence was the idea that children are active selectors of media. Describing television as a "shiny cafeteria" from which selections are made, the authors contended that "it is children who are most active in this relationship. It is they who use television, rather than television that uses them" (1-2). This conception of the child viewer as an active participant in the viewing process was a direct challenge to prior conceptions of the audience for mass culture. It is clear, nonetheless, that the authors maintained a conception of television as an important form of mass culture. To this end they traced the rapid rise of the medium in the United States and the importance of television in the lives of children. They argued that as much as one sixth of a child's waking hours were spent in front of a television (12). Like Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince they traced the impact of television on other forms of mass culture. They concluded that television had largely reshaped the relationship between children and older forms of mass culture, drastically reducing comic book consumption and altering the use of radio and newspapers (15-21). This impact was derived from the fact that television seemed to be superior at fulfilling the fantasy needs of its audience than older media were (71). The study of effects which followed the research on preferences and consumption, therefore, was influenced by the understanding that television had become the single most important form of mass culture for children in the United States by canceling out much of the appeal of other media.

As the dominant form of mass culture in the postwar period, therefore, television was ascribed all of the negative effects which had previously been used to characterize and condemn other media forms. These allegations formed the background for the investigations undertaken by Schramm, Lyle and Parker as they set out to confirm or deny the charges. For instance, the fear that children learned too much from the media was countered by the observation that the majority of learning from television was incidental

(75). At best it was argued that television could help build vocabulary for some children (86). The minimized effects thesis proposed by the authors essentially argued that television had entered into a pre-existing pattern of influences on children and that it would be incorrect to presume that any behavior of a child is due solely to television (146). The researchers enumerated four types of effects which they believed necessitated further study. They discarded the possibility of physical effects while noting that television might cause eyestrain for some children (146). Similarly they were dismissive of charges that television had a negative effect on a child's emotional development by frightening or over-exciting the child (149-150). In terms of cognitive effects the researchers felt that possible beneficial effects — ranging from the elevation of taste by the promotion of high culture, to the improved education of young people — had been thwarted, although they also argued that television had seemed to have had little negative impact on formal education (151-154). Finally, in the arena of behavioral effects they again hedged their bets. The authors noted that a connection between television viewing and juvenile delinquency had been assumed by critics yet not proven. They responded that no single influence could be said to cause behavior but qualified this response by agreeing with Lawrence Freedman's contention that the psychopathic child who was poised to rebel may be inspired to crime by television. They further indicated that while juvenile delinquency cases had doubled in the decade since the introduction of television in the United States the primary cause of youth criminality was still the family, not the media. Indeed, they went so far as to indicate that

> our belief is that the kind of child we send to television, rather than television itself, is the chief element in delinquency. According to our best current understanding of delinquency, the delinquent child (unless he is psychopathic) is typically not different from other children in standards or knowledge or intelligence, but rather in the speed with which he can rouse his aggressive feelings, and the intensity and violence of his hostility. (165-166)

In cases of juvenile delinquency the media simply served to feed the "malignant impulses that already exist" in the delinquent child (166). Television, therefore, was at best a contributory cause of youth violence. Despite these findings, the authors ultimately condemned televised violence. They asked rhetorically:

> Is this the best we can do? Is this the only way we can find to interest children and at the same time attract the large audiences that sponsors require? It seems to us that this might be a matter of pride as well as conscience for broadcasters. These are men of great skill and talent: is it really true that they find it necessary to appeal to large audiences of children with a stream of physical violence, abnormal excitement, and crime? (177)

This passage demonstrated the degree to which ostensibly objective mass communication research still rested on assumptions of quality and appropriateness that had defined the critique of mass culture for decades. Thus it would fall to scholars writing more generally about the media to draw hardened distinctions between these traditions by removing the discussion of actual examples altogether.

The Effects of Mass Communication

Joseph Klapper's *The Effects of Mass Communication* achieved the clearest distinction between social science research into the effects of mass communication and prior traditions of moralizing critique. As such the book was the strongest statement of the null inference which ascribed little or no authority to the mass media in the postwar period. Sponsored by the television network CBS, Klapper's book argued that previous efforts to study mass communication had failed the public by providing either no answers at all or contradictory findings (3). He suggested that his phenomenistic approach would shift the terrain of the debate away from the "hypodermic theory" of direct effects towards a functionalist approach which regarded the media as an influence on behavior rather than a cause. This theory was derived from the work of Lazarsfeld and Katz who had developed the "two-step flow" theory of communication. This theory led Klapper to a series of generalizations about the media. First, he asserted that mass communication was not a cause of effects but a mediating factor in behavior. Second, mass communication reinforced existing predispositions rather than creating new ones. Finally, the efficacy of the mass media was determined by the context of the communicational situation (8). These

generalizations were the subject of inquiry throughout the rest of the book, which focused equally on changes to attitudes and behaviors.

Klapper maintained that where attitudes were involved mass communication tended to reinforce opinion more often than it changed opinion (15). Evidence of this position was drawn from Lazarsfeld's 1948 book *The People's Choice* which had found that in the 1944 presidential election only five per cent of voters in a surveyed population had changed their mind on the candidates. The media therefore were held to confirm existing attitudes in voters through a series of factors which mediated the communication experience. These included the tendency of audiences to view media which were generally in accord with their own worldview and to perceive and retain information selectively. Insofar as the media were held to be able to create opinion on news issues Klapper argued that this was the case only when information has been limited and the audience held no pre-conceived opinions (53-56). Similarly, the possibility of converting a viewer's opinion on an issue depended on the ability of the media to create a new opinion on a related issue rather than attempting to directly reverse an existing belief (89). Thus, following the work of Lazarsfeld, Klapper argued that the media performed only a minor role in terms of shaping the opinions and beliefs of the audience that it addressed. Rather than shaping the views of an audience, Klapper suggested that audiences selected media which were generally in accord with their own understanding of the world and which tended to reinforce their own predispositions. From this vantage point, therefore, the increasingly pervasive mass media could be seen as largely ineffectual and uninfluential.

Klapper also addressed his comments to theories of media effects which fell beyond the circle of attitudinal change. Noting that the effect of violent mass culture had been a prevalent social concern among "parents, educators and freelance writers", although not among "disciplined communications researchers" (135), he sought to dismiss the connection between the mass media and criminal behavior. In undertaking the re-evaluation of the connection between media and delinquency Klapper directly addressed the work of

Fredric Wertham on comic books but only in a cursory and dismissive fashion. Klapper insisted:

> it is undoubtedly true, as the critics claim, that some easily available comic books do or did deal with "murder, mayhem, robbery, ... carnage, ... and sadism," but the present author has yet to be convinced that they "offer short courses" in these subjects, let alone in "rape, cannibalism, ... and necrophilia" (137)

Significantly, Klapper's rejection of Wertham's argument in this instance was dependent simply on his own authority as a researcher and not on original research of any kind. In this regard it is difficult to distinguish the ostensibly objective social science researcher from the uninformed freelance writers Klapper had previously criticized. Klapper simply dismissed all research into the relationship between the media and behavior which had preceded him. He insisted that "nothing is known about the relationship, if any, between the incidence of violence in media programs and the likelihood that it will produce effects" (139). Instead he suggested that the variety of claims about the effects of the mass media on behavior were conjectural and lacking in definitive findings of any kind (143). He claimed only that violence in the mass media served "some undefined function for particular personality types" (151). To this end Klapper agreed with the findings of both Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince and Schramm, Lyle and Parker when he suggested that the mass media were "by no means the sole nor the basic cause of the problems" (159). Further, he helped to cement the dominant media effects paradigm when he concurred with the suggestion that if a relationship between media and behavior were to be proven the fault would lay entirely with the individual:

> communications research strongly indicates that media depictions of crime and violence are not prime movers towards such conduct. The content seems rather to reinforce or implement existing and otherwise induced behavioral tendencies. For the well adjusted, it appears to be innocuous or even to be selectively perceived as socially useful. For the maladjusted, particularly the aggressively inclined and the frustrated, it appears to serve, at the very least, as a stimulant to escapist and possibly aggressive fantasy. (157)

Thus Klapper reached conclusions which were identical to the researchers who had focused more narrowly on children and television. Together these three volumes established a dominant media effects paradigm which held that the mass media had a negligible effect on

behavior except in rare cases in which a child was predisposed towards violence. By the early-1960s this point of view had come to dominate the study of mass communications and media effects but its orthodoxy would be challenged by new research approaches in the 1960s and 1970s which sought to confirm or deny the veracity of the paradigm through laboratory experiments.

The Shifting Media Effects Paradigm in the 1960s

Despite the assurances of communications researchers that the effects of televised violence were minimal or non-existent, public concerns about the issue continued unabated into the 1960s. To help counter these concerns CBS sponsored research into television beginning with Gary Steiner's *The People Look at Television*(1963). According to the foreword by Bernard Berelson the goal of the research was to address a fundamental disparity between audiences and researchers. He wrote, "the people have been watching television, and the critics, commentators, and educators have been watching the people watching television. On the whole, the one has liked what it saw; the other, not" (Berelson 1963:vii). The book consisted of research conducted at the Bureau for Applied Social Research which sought to determine the attitudes of Americans towards television. While it evinced no direct concern with the effects of television it did discover that the so-called average viewer felt that television contained too much violence (229). This belief was increasingly put to the test in the 1960s as a new generation of communication scholars emerged from the field of behavioral psychology and challenged the assumptions made by the sociologically-trained researchers who had established the null inference media effects paradigm. These psychologists specialized in laboratory research and helped to shift the dominant understanding of media effects back toward a position which had been previously maintained, without scientific evidence, by high culture critics.

The researchers who entered into the media effects debate in the 1960s worked primarily in an experimental tradition as opposed to the sociological field survey approach

which characterized the work of both Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince and Schramm, Lyle and Parker. The experimental method involved the manipulation of an independent variable and then the measurement of an aspect of behavior, or the dependent variable in order to determine if the changes in the former produced changes in the latter (Liebert et al. 1973:38). This approach was marshaled in support of two contradictory hypotheses throughout the 1960s. Albert Bandura was the first to demonstrate that violent media content had a negative affect on aggression in children by showing them ways to act, even if they did not subsequently act that way. At the same time, however, Seymour Feshbach showed that media had a positive impact on children by purging aggressive tendencies through catharsis (Comstock et al. 1978:129-140). This debate in behavioral psychology placed the media violence question firmly back on the field after it had seemingly been closed by previous researchers, but it did little to resolve the question. Over the course of the decade dozens of lab-based studies would be undertaken to investigate the link between aggression and violent television content. This research activity peaked in 1972 with the publication of the report of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. It included the contributions of no less than twenty-three projects addressing the question with the participation of sixty researchers, but still refused to adopt a firm stance on the question of causation (Hodge and Tripp 1986:194). Clearly in the 1960s the specialty of media effects research in mass communication studies bifurcated and opened the possibility for two competing yet equally recognized approaches to the question: a sociological perspective rooted in survey methodologies and a psychological perspective which utilised an experimental method. It remains to be noted that neither of these traditions promoted critical thinking about the media, and each attempted to shut cultural critics out of the debate even as research cues were taken from those same critics. Rowland has argued that this remodeling of communication research served the interests of the television industry insofar as it allowed the industry to fund research bureaus which would train researchers in non-critical methodologies so that they would undertake research

which would ultimately defend the interests of the television industry (Rowland 1983:28). The flaw in the system, however, stemmed from the ongoing presence of cultural critics condemning media violence from a moral position and the common sense belief among the American public that there was self-evidently some connection between violence on the television screen and rising levels of juvenile delinquency. These competing forces — critics, researchers, the television industry and the public — would ultimately meet face to face in a series of governmental inquiries into television violence that dotted the postwar landscape. Those efforts to resolve the media effects problem would serve an instrumental role in consolidating the power of the dominant media effects research paradigm.

Government Hearings on Television Violence

Carmen Luke has argued that the involvement of the United States federal government in investigations into the effects of mass media during the second half of the twentieth-century has played an important role in legitimizing and formalizing communications research as sanctioned public knowledge (167). Hearings investigating televised violence in 1955 and 1961 highlighted the research findings of those eras. It can be further suggested that the 1972 Surgeon General's report on television violence underlined the experimental findings of the 1960s and set the research agenda for the decade which would follow. The history of federal involvement in American broadcasting begins with the 1934 Communication Act which served to consolidate older communication laws under a common rubric. It established as a goal for the Federal Communications Commission to "encourage the larger and more effective use of radio in the public interest" (in Rowland 1983:54). In the prewar period sociological approaches to media studies were favored by the government as efforts were made to establish accurate audience measurements. Following the war, however, the agenda had shifted and government investigating bodies increasingly began to inquire into the social benefits of the mass

media. The 1952 Harris subcommittee held hearings on television which touched on social science research only passingly. The real concern of the subcommittee was immorality and the threat of communism, not media effects specifically (Rowland 1983:100). At the same time the television industry was in the process of adopting a self-regulating code in an effort to forestall intervention from the government. The National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters Code, like the Comics Code which followed it two years later, was voluntary and unenforceable. The success of this and other self-regulating media codes was dependent, as Matthew Murray has argued, on a Cold War distrust of big government which could be assumed to temper public support for legislative action to regulate or govern the mass media more effectively (131). Nonetheless, the NARTB Code was not a sufficient deterrent to media critics and television came under increasing scrutiny in the years that followed the code's adoption. Three investigations of television warrant special attention because of the light they shed on the shifting position of mass communication research in the postwar era: The Hendrickson-Kefauver subcommittee hearings of 1954; the Dodd subcommittee hearings of 1961-1964; and the hearings on the Surgeon General's Report on Television Violence in 1972. By examining these instances at which social science research, public concern and government policy intersected the development of the media effects paradigm as central to the study of mass communication can be highlighted.

The Hendrickson-Kefauver Subcommittee Hearings, 1954

The Hendrickson-Kefauver subcommittee hearings which investigated television violence in 1954 were held by the same committee which had inquired into comic book publishing earlier in that same year. Charged with determining "the extent and character of juvenile delinquency in the United States and its causes and contributing factors" the subcommittee held hearings on television in June and October 1954. The first round of hearings were similar to the previous hearings on comic books insofar as evidence was presented both in favor of and opposed to television by critics and industry representatives.

For example, Ralph Hardy of NARTB compared television to radio and suggested that both were obviously harmless. He argued that there was absolutely no proof that the mass media had any negative impact on its audience and noted that the vast majority of broadcasters had signed on to the NARTB's self-regulating code (Rowland 1983:101). Critics of television, however, were not swayed by this argument. Clara Logan, president of the National Association for Better Radio and Television, testified about the abundance of violence in children's television and noted the increasing violence of televised westerns. This violence, psychiatrist Eleanor Maccoby argued at the hearings, might heighten aggressive feelings in certain contexts (Bogart 1956:270). Other psychiatrists suggested that there was insufficient evidence to draw that sort of conclusion. Louis Cohen's testimony pointed to the tension between the differing requirements of scientific validity and moral or cultural approbation when he suggested

> I believe that though these bad programs are always rather silly and in bad taste, the degree to which they are actually influential in determining juvenile crime is so vague and probably statistically impossible to evaluate that it would be quite foolish to ascribe to such programs the weight of a causal factor sufficient to justify and thundering campaign against them on this basis. I am personally convinced that they should not be produced, but only because they encourage a degraded taste for a kind of knowledge which is unnecessary for healthy social life. (in Bogart 1956:269)

The opinion of the experts, it seems, was divided only on the question of whether television was a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. The question of the aesthetic quality of television programming — or lack thereof — seemed to be in considerably less doubt.

Among the most important testimony presented at the Hendrickson-Kefauver subcommittee hearings was the first statement of Paul Lazarsfeld on the subject of television. Later reprinted in an issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly* Lazarsfeld's testimony serves as a benchmark in the history of communication studies. He suggested that in 1954, half a decade prior to the publication of work by Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince, Schramm, Lyle and Parker or Klapper, little was known about media effects (Lazarsfeld 1955:243). Lazarsfeld's testimony contained few answers to the question of the impact of

television violence upon children but suggested a number of potential solutions. He advocated, for instance, a centralization of research activities on television which would allow for a greater level of prioritization. He recommended increased funding for research from industry, government and foundational sources (245). Finally, he stressed the need for research which would take a long-range approach to the problem. Lazarsfeld noted that survey and experimental methodologies were best at measuring short-term responses to stimuli but were unable to come to terms with the cumulative effect of viewing so much violence over the course of many years. At the same time, however, he warned that the need for additional research should not be used to defer public policy indefinitely and noted that responsible policy decisions did not necessarily need to wait for all of the facts to arrive before action was taken (246). The subcommittee did not, however, advocate any policy reforms in the end. It did conclude that "television crime programs are potentially much more injurious to children and young people than motion pictures, radio, or comic books" because it was broadcast directly to children who no longer needed to seek out violent entertainment (in Bogart 1956:263). More important, the subcommittee created a discursive space within the process of governmental investigations for further research by the industry and independent social scientists.

The Dodd Subcommittee Hearings, 1961-1964

While the role of mass communication scholars at the Dodd subcommittee hearings in the early-1960s was not greatly expanded from that of the previous inquiry, they nonetheless helped to cement the role of researchers in governmental hearings. Dodd's committee was a later incarnation of the Hendrickson-Kefauver subcommittee under the direction of a new chair and featured some of the same witnesses, including Fredric Wertham. The June and July 1961 hearings of the Dodd subcommittee centered around the question of violence on television, specifically in the program *The Untouchables* and several other action-adventure shows. The following year Dodd challenged earlier network

claims to responsible programming by citing evidence obtained from production companies that network heads had requested greater levels of sex and violence in programs. In 1964 a final day of hearings was held in order to discuss programs like *The Outer Limits* and *Combat*, but by that time the investigation had largely run out of steam (Boddy 1997:171-172). The Dodd subcommittee ultimately did not issue a final report and the investigation trailed off. Of note, however, was the three pronged approach which the committee took towards the problem: public hearings, television monitoring by subcommittee staff members, and a review of the literature on media effects to date (Rowland 1983:308). Occupying one third of the research agenda the literature review provided an opportunity for scholars of mass communication to be publicly associated with research into television effects. Notably the committee referenced the work of Schramm, Lyle and Parker. Schramm testified at the hearings and reiterated Lazarsfeld's call for concerted funding to underwrite long-term effects research. He contended that it would require $50,000 per year for five years to determine the long-term effects of television viewing using survey methodologies. Albert Bandura, on the other hand, requested a similar amount of money over the same period of time for experimental and laboratory-based research (Rowland 1983:112). While the Dodd subcommittee's interim report did recommend funding such a research program it would take nearly a decade before significant government funds were allocated for such a project. The Surgeon General's investigation into television violence would be the force which would position empirical mass communication research as the dominant paradigm once and for all.

The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee, 1972

In 1968, following the assassination of Robert Kennedy, a National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was created. Included in the mandate of this commission was the investigation of the role of television in fostering a climate of violence in the United States. Although much of the commission's research on television was

summative it did initiate content analyses of primetime programming and Saturday-morning children's shows (Rowland 1983:119). Although the majority of NCCPV commissioners were lawyers fully one quarter of the witnesses called to discuss television were social scientists. The testimony of these experts took up two of the five days devoted to the topic. These scientists ranged from those providing statistical analyses of television usage to experimental psychologists such as Leonard Berkowitz and Percy Tannenbaum who argued a sender-receiver model derived from the work of Carl Hovland and to Joseph Klapper, who argued the minimal effects position which he had championed since the 1950s (Rowland 1983:123-124). While it paid close attention to contemporary research in media effects the NCCPV report made only minor policy suggestions, leaving the door open for a more meaningful investigation in the future. That investigation would come from the Surgeon General. Inspired by the success of the Surgeon General's report on cigarette smoking, Senator John Pastore requested that a similar investigation into television violence be undertaken. The result was the Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior.

Endorsed by President Nixon and announced on 16 April 1969 the Advisory Committee studied the problem of television violence for three years. The total cost of the investigation was $1.8 million, which included the cost of twenty-three research projects underwritten by the National Institute for Mental Health (Cater and Strickland 1975:20). Surgeon General William Stewart was named chair of the Advisory Committee and Eli Rubinstein from NIMH was vice-chair and senior staff coordinator. The rest of the committee was put together by asking professional organizations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and other sciences to submit names for potential members. The resulting list of two hundred scholars was reduced to forty and then, following the precedent set in the cigarette investigation, were passed along to industry representatives for their input. In this instance the names were supplied to the three major television networks as well as the National Association of Broadcasters. The industry

effectively blackballed the participation of seven scholars who had done significant amounts of work on the effects of television violence in the past, including Leo Bogart, Albert Bandura, Leonard Berkowitz, and Percy Tannenbaum (Liebert et al. 1973:150). In the end only one person who had actually been on the original list of two hundred names supplied by the scholarly associations was named to the twelve person committee. Further, the Advisory Committee was heavily weighted in favor of experimental and clinical psychologists and researchers whose area of expertise was quantitative sociology or political science. As Rowland has observed, none of committee members, had a background in the humanities and only one or two had any experience with critical or qualitative research methods (1983:150). In addition to the fact that the television industry was permitted to veto the participation of prospective committee members they were also able to place five of their own thirty-five recommended members onto the final twelve person committee. Two of these, Joseph Klapper and Thomas Coffin, were social scientists and network officials, while the remaining three had been employed by the networks as consultants. The ultimate make-up of the Advisory Committee, therefore, was highly favorable to the television industry.

The twenty-three research projects funded by the Television and Social Behavior Program encompassed a variety of quantitative approaches to the study of media violence. Typically researchers attempted to clarify earlier findings or expand on previous results. Cater and Strickland have suggested that apart from ongoing work on content analysis undertaken by George Gerbner and his colleagues the research funded could be divided into two methods: laboratory-based and field-based (33). Taken together the collective results of these studies demonstrated a strong connection between the viewing of television violence and subsequent aggressiveness among children (Cater and Strickland 1975:54). However a May 1970 article in *Science Magazine* disclosing the industry veto of the committee members raised suspicions about the eventual findings. It was decided subsequently that a unanimous report would be required in order to rebuild the credibility

of the undertaking. The resulting compromise document forced the Advisory Committee to take a moderate stance on the question of television violence. Amidst charges that the committee had deliberately misrepresented the research the report was delivered to new Surgeon General Jesse Steinfeld at the end of 1971.

This situation was exacerbated on 11 January 1972 when the *New York Times* ran a front-page article by Jack Gould which misrepresented the findings of the Committee based on documents leaked from network sources. Gould's lead paragraph summarized the findings: "The office of the United States Surgeon General has found that violence in television programming does not have an adverse effect on the majority of the nation's youth but may influence small groups of youngsters predisposed by many factors to aggressive behavior" (in Cater and Strickland 1975:79). The serious error in Gould's report was that despite the numerous qualifications in the final report nowhere did it indicate the television affected only "small groups" of children. The report specified that children so influenced might constitute either "a small portion or a substantial portion of the total population of young television viewers" (in Cater and Strickland 1975:80). Given the confusion Jack Lyle suggested that interested parties ignore the report of the Advisory Committee and instead turn to the summary chapters of the individual research projects. This was not a likely solution for most of the public, however, and consequently Senator Pastore held public hearings on the report over four days in March 1972 in order to build a new consensus about its findings. The hearings were divided to allow five interested groups to present evidence: the Surgeon General and the commissioners themselves; the FCC; social science researchers critical of the findings; the broadcasting industry; and concerned public interest groups. During the hearings Pastore was able to redirect the conclusions of the Advisory Committee to draw a link between violence on television and in real life, even going so far as to force Klapper to admit that "there are certainly indications of a causal relationship" (in Rowland 1983:177). Nonetheless, this three year

governmental undertaking ultimately resulted in no substantial changes to broadcasting policy in the United States. Rowland summarized the effect of the report and hearings:

> it could be said that the 1974 hearings capped a quarter century of effort by politicians and regulators, broadcasting critics, academics, and a wide variety of public groups to secure legitimacy for the application of social science research methods and findings to the process of public policy-making for broadcasting, while yet ignoring questions about whether such research would ever be likely to lead to substantive change in that policy. (224)

Thus while no alterations to public policy resulted from the Surgeon General's report it is clear that the undertaking marked the arrival of mass communication research into media effects on the public stage. The funding of twenty-three projects to investigate television at governmental expense cemented media effects as the dominant paradigm. It was established as quantitative, short-term research which focused on the effects of viewing on individuals through experimental and field-based methodologies. Other approaches to the study of media effects were, it seemed, pushed completely out of the picture. The success of the empirical approach to media effects at positioning itself as the sole viable approach to the topic at governmental hearings over the course of a quarter century essentially closed off the possibility of competing methodologies. One victim of this consolidation was Fredric Wertham.

Fredric Wertham on Media Effects

Wertham himself certainly felt as if the point of view that he had long stressed was minimized by the Surgeon General's Report. In a 1972 article published in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* he condemned the report as "a betrayal of children and their parents, of responsible science, of public health, and of the people's trust in their governmental medical leadership" (219). Wertham enumerated a number of significant objections to the report including the absence of discussion of contrary findings and the absence of clinical methodologies. However, the preponderance of his objection stemmed

from the report's insistence that only a "predisposed" portion of the audience was affected by television violence:

> the only-the-predisposed argument is an old cliché and timeworn alibi, long used by the media industries. It tries to put all the blame on the child and the audience. It is an excuse that evades the whole problem. One cannot scientifically lump all children into two groups, not predisposed and predisposed. Without at least some psychiatric underpinning (totally absent from the report) it just amounts to name-calling. We are supposed to take for granted some prior disability in the child. And is it not also simply prejudice against the poor, the underprivileged, the minorities? Who are these "predisposed"? Has any member of the Committee's research team examined them, and can he tell us by what criteria they were diagnosed? (217)

Wertham's condemnation of the Surgeon General's report echoed a great deal of his post-*Seduction of the Innocent* writing on media violence, a topic with which he was centrally occupied in the 1960s and 1970s. His first published comments on television actually appeared in a chapter of *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) in which he praised the "glorious future" of the medium (1954a:369). He maintained that television, with its ability to generate a feeling of belonging to a larger social project, represented the future of human communication while comic books represented the past (379-381). In the years which would follow, however, increasing levels of violence on television seemed to have considerably dampened Wertham's enthusiasm for television and he emerged as critic of violent programming in his later years. While these criticisms of television shared much in common with his condemnations of comic books they are especially telling when compared to the dominant modes of conceptualizing the effects of television in the postwar period. In short, Wertham's arguments about television violence represent a road not taken in the history of American media effects scholarship.

Wertham on Television Violence

Wertham's critique of violence on television began to fully emerge only in the 1960s. In a February 1960 *Ladies' Home Journal* article entitled "How Movie and TV Violence Affects Children", for instance, Wertham set out to address what he cited as the ten most frequently asked questions about the effects of media violence. A number of these

questions directly touched upon the issues raised by media effects scholarship up to that point in time. Wertham continued his reasoning from *Seduction of the Innocent* and argued that the visual mass media were "not decisive or fundamental" causes of juvenile delinquency. However, they did play a "contributing part in the final tragedy" (166). He went on to suggest that the real effect of mass media violence came in the form of a "subtle general conditioning" to violence, and reasoned that little progress had been made in correcting the situation by researchers who insisted on blaming the family for delinquency while utterly failing to consider broader social influences (166). On this point Wertham firmly disagreed with the dominant hypothesis advanced by sociological media effects research that only "maladjusted" or "predisposed" children were affected by television violence. He insisted that "*all* children are impressionable and therefore susceptible" (168). The biggest problem with media effects research, however, lay with the fact that it could not be proven scientifically beyond a shadow of a doubt. Wertham suggested that it was impossible to prove that television and movie violence was bad for children "with mathematical exactness" and that a great deal of reasoning needed to be left to the judgment of the child expert and sensible parent (169). To this end he drew upon the public health metaphor again and likened the situation to the study of polio epidemics. Wertham noted that medical science was unable to accurately predict which children exposed in an epidemic would develop the illness and which would remain well, but science had agreed therefore on the necessity to protect all children (170). Wertham suggested that a similar approach should be taken to address media violence.

In the years that followed Wertham reiterated this argument on a number of occasions and in increasingly more mainstream venues. Writing again in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in August 1961 he argued that sex crimes were stimulated by the mass media, especially when sadism was present in pornography (89). He repeated his suggestion that it was impossible to predict which children would be adversely affected by media violence in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1962. He argued that "in my psychiatric opinion, many

children — whom we cannot identify beforehand — do not get over the education for brutality and violence with which we now so plentifully supply them" (28). In a *New York Times* article four years later Wertham argued that television coverage of the war in Vietnam was hardening Americans to the war, not against it. Suggesting that the deluge of media violence had made the war coverage look tame by comparison he argued that fictional violence on television and war reporting had begun to blend and strip the latter of its importance and impact. Television, Wertham argued, was no longer the best hope for human communication but rather had become a "vast machinery of hate" in which Americans viewed their enemies and potential enemies only in the worst possible light. Developing the argument he had made earlier in the year in *A Sign for Cain* Wertham maintained that communication was the opposite of violence and that when people could not communicate with each other they could not know one another. Such a situation inevitably led to hatred and violence (Wertham 1966b:23). It is clear, therefore, that Wertham's commentaries on media violence in the 1960s were an extension of his book-length studies *A Sign for Cain* and *Seduction of the Innocent*, each of which grew out of his particular experiences as a psychiatrist and his strong belief in the clinical research methodology and the necessity of a public health approach to the treatment of violence at both the personal and international level. Ultimately this background would shape the way in which Wertham would respond to the rise of a non-clinical social scientific media effects tradition in the field of mass communication research.

Wertham's Response to the Dominant Paradigm

In a review of Robert Shayon's book *Open to Criticism* Wertham noted the degree to which the study of environmental influences on personal development — including the mass media — had come to dominate research in psychiatry and sociology in the postwar era. This interest, however, had not led to greater control over violence in the mass media because "as they function at present regulatory agencies are agencies regulated by the

industries which they are supposed to regulate" (Wertham 1971:651). Wertham had been critical of governmental inquiries into the effects of the mass media since the failure of the Hendrickson-Kefauver committee in 1954, and he had long been a critic of industry self-regulation as a sham. Maintaining that position he criticized the development of film classification in the late-1960s because he felt that it served to maintain the status quo in the film industry and give license to libertarian viewpoints in which any content would be permissible in films (Wertham 1969). Wertham's dismay at the failure of regulating agencies to take action on media violence and his contempt for the self-imposed actions of the industry at the end of the decade went hand in hand with his rejection of the dominant media effects paradigm. Wertham argued that while lay people regarded the effects of media violence as self-evident, communications researchers had worked hard to minimize or ignore the subject (Wertham 1965:830). Specifically citing Schramm, Lyle and Parker as researchers who had proposed that "mass media do not matter much in the life of a child" he gave three reasons why the null inference of media effects had become canonized. The first was the neglect of extrinsic environmental factors in psychopathology with the rise of psychoanalysis (830). Second, the questionnaire method employed by social scientists engaged in field research and developed as a tool for market research and public opinion polling was inadequate to the task of examining the mass media. Wertham suggested that the mass media were a quantitatively and qualitatively different form of influence that could not be measured statistically (831). Finally, he argued that social science researchers were simply influenced by the funding which research bureaus received from the media industry and consequently their findings were tainted (832). Wertham suggested that the only appropriate replacement for these defaults would be the adoption of the clinical method which would entail "long-range clinical examinations and observations, preferably in conjunction with therapy, combined with projective tests and abbreviated psychoanalytical exploration" (833). This approach, he concluded, would highlight often subtle long-range effects on attitude and personality which resulted from exposure to the mass media.

This argument was advanced at greater length in a 1962 article which Wertham published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (Wertham 1962b). Entitled "The Scientific Study of Mass Media Effects", the article had originally been presented as a speech in October 1961 at a *Catholic World*-organized conference on "The Effects Controversy". In this essay Wertham clearly outlined the differences between his own version of media effects and that of the null inference social scientists. Specifically Wertham set out to respond to the three most influential books on the topic: Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince's *Television and the Child*, Schramm, Lyle and Parker's *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, and Klapper's *Effects of Mass Communication*. Discussing *Television and the Child* Wertham argued that it was "just another of the generalizations to the effect that the child's basic responses are determined entirely by the 'basic' personality of the child and not by the stimulation of the screen" (306). Wertham noted that the children discussed in the book were never examined by the researchers and the conclusions about their mental health were derived entirely from questionnaires which they filled out. This necessarily raised questions for Wertham about the ability of the researchers to place the blame for media-inspired violence on the immaturity of children whom the authors had never met (307). Discussing *Television in the Lives of Our Children* Wertham contended that the book was so full of generalizations that no research needed to have been undertaken at all. Again Wertham criticized the use of a questionnaire-based research method as inadequate and "unlife-like". Further, he maintained that the use of statistical averages in each of these volumes had downplayed the significance of negative effects and provided a "totally wrong impression. It is like claiming that there are no multi-millionaires or paupers by using the computation of the average American income" (307). Wertham further criticized the essay by psychiatrist Lawrence Freedman included in the book because it was "all theory instead of clinical fact" and spent more time discussing children in the abstract than television in the specific (307). Finally, discussing Klapper's work, Wertham completely dismissed the contention that "nothing is known about the relationship, if any, between the incidence of

violence in media programs and the likelihood that it will produce effects" (308). He went on to suggest that because these volumes were underwritten by foundations and research agencies they provided evidence of a "currently approved trend" in mass communication research (308). The essential problem with these books, he maintained, was the empirical social science methodology which relied on primitive and subjective statistical measures (309). What was required in the place of statistical field research was the utilization of clinical research which could incorporate the study of the whole child. Wertham suggested that the thesis which maintained that children "are born that way" was fundamentally incorrect and had led to a series of erroneous conclusions (310). Concrete clinical analysis of all the causal connections in the creation of delinquency would, Wertham suggested, ultimately resolve the media effects controversy.

These charges against empirical social science methodologies in media effects research appeared time and again in subsequent articles by Wertham on this topic. In a 1964 *New York Times* article he maintained that there were only two incontrovertible facts about the media effects controversy: that the level of violence in American society had increased in the postwar period; and that there was a lot of violence on television (Wertham 1964a:11). The connection between these observations, Wertham argued, stemmed from the fact that television was "school for violence" whose effects were long-term and could not, therefore, be measured using questionnaire or laboratory-based research methodologies. In an article in *Twentieth Century* that same year Wertham noted that governments the world over spent money to research ways to inflict violence through the use of the military but spent little money on research to prevent violence at all (Wertham 1964b:32). To correct this oversight he proposed the development of a field of "violentology" which would study all aspects of violence from comic books to riots and wars (34). This new science would require an appropriately new approach to the question because traditional mass communication research methodologies

> leave out what is truly human in the child or young adult. Formal replies to formal questions give only a partial and distorted picture. The best statistics cannot make

> up for that. Control groups, so valuable in physical sciences, are inappropriate for emotional and mental phenomena. Such studies as *Television and the Child* by Hilde Himmelweit, which uses the questionnaire-control group-statistical method without any examination of the children, minimize the effects and are misleading. The experimental method creates unlife-like artificial situations, remains entirely on the surface and does not reflect long-range effects. It is only the clinical method, the examination of children with modern methods, individually and in groups, with tests, a study of the social background and a follow-up, that reveals what really happens. (38)

In its simplest terms Wertham suggested that the argument which insisted that the link between mass media violence and violent behavior in children lacked positive proof was without merit. He further argued that it had become a shield behind which media producers and their apologists hid. He maintained on the contrary that the assertion upon which the dominant media effects paradigm rested — that only "predisposed children" were at risk from media violence — had never been validated clinically (Wertham 1968:199).

The essential difference between Wertham and the social science researchers who defined the media effects paradigm in professional journals and at governmental hearings in the postwar period was the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. As early as 1949 Frederick Thrasher had termed Wertham's psychiatric and clinical approach to the study of media effects unscientific, restricted that label exclusively for quantitative methodologies which found their roots in the Chicago School sociology at the beginning of this century. Ultimately Wertham's disavowal of quantitative scholarship and adherence to a clinical method led to his absence from the research tradition altogether. As the field of mass communication research established itself as a unique tradition in the postwar period it did so by initially narrowing its methodological scope and excluding competing and contradictory voices and approaches from the field. Fredric Wertham and the clinical method were one such omission.

The Development of Communications as a Field of Study

Steven Biel has observed that the origins of professional organizations in the American social sciences in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were founded upon a desire to screen "quacks" out of the professions. In this regard professionalization aspired to create what Charles Sanders Peirce termed "a community of the competent" (Biel 1992:11). For the social sciences since the time of the New Deal primary goals have been the identification of social problems, the discovery of root causes of those problems, the tracing of consequences and the analysis of alternative proposals and policies in an objective and detached fashion (Ball 1989:79). The study of mass communication in the United States has been no exception to these objectives. The history of the field in the postwar era has been a struggle to legitimize the field of inquiry by defining the boundaries of research in such a way as to exclude research agendas which did not generally align themselves with a vision of scholarship serving nonpartisan policy objectives. Specifically, the development of communication studies has been derived from the specialization of a particular area of sociology. To this end communications research has historically been torn between the two tendencies which have divided the social sciences generally: the desire to accumulate knowledge for its own sake through dispassionate and objective scientific inquiry and the desire to effect social change through politically committed research (Lyons 1969:7). Postwar concerns about the effect of broad-ranging technological and social change propelled the study of the mass media to a position of genuine importance in the social sciences generally. At the same time, the debate between proponents of committed and dispassionate research was largely settled by the vagaries of research funding. Because funding agencies were far more likely to sponsor research seen to be in the national interest than scholarship which simply sought to develop communications as a discipline the media effects controversy took center stage in the development of the field. Research into television violence rose to pre-eminence as one of the few research questions within the

field which could genuinely be seen as pressing to the nation as a whole . This research agenda was bolstered by developments within the behavioral sciences and a postwar political climate which stressed a concern with individual behavior rather than with the institutions and social processes (Lyons 1969:279). The combined influence of the research funding from private foundations and the impact of methodologies developed in the behavioral sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology insured that the study of mass communication in the United States would be bound to methodologies which were individualistic, empirical, behavioristic and scientistic (Hardt 1992:68)

Willard Rowland has argued that the administrative bias which stemmed from the applied role of communications research in the programs and research bureaus of the 1940s and 1950s allowed the study of communication to be captured by positivistic debates over media effects and consequently drawn into the politically loaded debates about mass culture (Rowland 1988:130). In order to understand the particular way in which the media effects research was enabled to dominate the field of communication studies it is necessary to trace the impact of a few key scholars on the shape of the field. By highlighting the contributions of these early advocates of mass communication research it will be possible to suggest the reasons why the field was ultimately structured as it was, and also to more accurately determine the way in which the research agenda of a scholar such as Fredric Wertham was barred as "quackery".

Wilbur Schramm and the Origins of the Field

Hanno Hardt has argued that the Wilbur Schramm-edited textbook *Mass Communications* (1949) reflected the shift to a social-scientific perspective on mass communication issues and also recognized private corporate media research as a significant component of the research environment (Hardt 1992:93). Insofar as Schramm played a central role in the establishment of mass communications as a distinct field of study in the United States it can be understood that his predispositions informed the development of the

field. Significantly, Schramm founded the world's first doctoral program in mass communication in 1943 when he was the director of the University of Iowa's School of Journalism. During the Second World War he went to work as the educational director at the Office of Facts and Figures and the Office of War Information in Washington, where he formed his vision of communications study while working alongside colleagues like Paul Lazarsfeld, George Gallup and Frank Stanton. Following the war Schramm founded the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, where he was dean of the Division of Communication. In 1955 he moved to Stanford University where he became director of the Institute for Communication Research. Ultimately Schramm played a key role in the development of three of the first five doctoral programs in communication, and his efforts influenced the development of schools at the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Because his origins were in journalism Schramm helped to create the division in communication studies between mass media research and the study of interpersonal communication which developed out of speech programs. Subsequently, the communication research institute model developed by Lazarsfeld and promoted by Schramm allowed psychologists and sociologists to work on questions relating to the mass media without being affiliated with journalism schools. This development would be instrumental in shaping the administrative nature of American communication research in the postwar period.

The study of communication has been the most accepted new social science of the twentieth-century, taking a position alongside the five classical social sciences — political science, economics, sociology, psychology and anthropology — in a vast number of universities since the end of the Second World War. This success owes a great debt to Schramm, who broke many barriers in the field. For instance, he created the first department, wrote the first textbooks and graduated the first doctoral students. At Illinois he became the first person to hold the position of professor of communication and he founded important research institutes. While the rapid growth of mass communication

studies did not occur until the 1960s and 1970s with the proliferation of undergraduate programs it is clear that the field was established by Schramm and his associates in the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore, they placed tremendous emphasis on applied research and a close working relationship with media industries. The structure of these programs and institutes shaped the direction of mass communication research to a tremendous degree, but so too did Schramm's example as a researcher. His book *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, for instance, helped to define the media effects paradigm in communications studies. It sparked hundreds of subsequent studies of the impact of television on children and influenced the Surgeon General of the United States to spend $1.8 million funding communications research into a single question. In an oral history interview Schramm indicated that he wished to be remembered for the single paragraph in *Television in the Lives of Our Children* which defined the null effects thesis of media effects by insisting that the central question was not what television did to children but what children did with television (in Rogers 1994:471). Nonetheless, it seems clear that what Schramm will be most clearly recalled for is his important role in establishing mass communication as a field of study and defining the research questions which would be pursued by a generation of scholars in the field.

Paul Lazarsfeld and the Effects of Mass Communication

While Wilbur Schramm can be credited with having inaugurated the drive to create the study of mass communications as an academic discipline it must also be acknowledged that Paul Lazarsfeld played an important role in molding the direction of research in the field. Indeed, Everett Rogers has termed Lazarsfeld "undoubtedly the most important intellectual influence in shaping modern communication research" (1994:246). Trained as a sociologist Lazarsfeld's best remembered work utilised a survey methodology which ultimately became a crucial tool in American mass communication research. Having worked with the Frankfurt School in Germany Lazarsfeld emigrated to the United States in 1935.

In 1937 he created the Radio Research Project at Princeton University. The project was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and was directed by Lazarsfeld, Henry Cantril and Frank Stanton. The project's research, which was actually carried out at the University of Newark, while not the first empirical study of radio and its audience had the effect of consolidating radio research and providing it with a methodological coherence which it had previously lacked. The roots of the project, like much early mass communication research, resided within a general concern about mass culture. Lazarsfeld's research was funded in order to determine if something could be done "generally to improve the quality of radio programs" (in Rogers 1994:267). The radio project, therefore, would work to determine that an audience existed for high culture in the mass media and existed as a part of the Rockefeller Foundation's larger program for cultural improvement. The radio project used surveys, content analyses, ratings and other secondary data. Further, it inaugurated innovations such as the Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program-Analyzer, a machine to trace listener preferences, and focus group interviewing to examine the relationship between audience and media. David Sills has argued that the "Lazarsfeld Radio Research Project virtually created the field of mass communication research" (Sills 1987:258). While this may overstate the case, it is nonetheless clear that the Radio Research Project had an enormous influence on the shaping of the field.

By 1940 Lazarsfeld and the Radio Research Project had moved to Columbia University. A study undertaken in November of that year ultimately became the basis of Lazarsfeld's first well-known book, *The People's Choice*, which he co-authored with Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet. This volume was a study of the impact of the mass media on voting behavior in Erie County, Ohio during the 1940 presidential election. After interviewing six hundred people monthly over the course of seven months Lazarsfeld and his associates became the first scholars to question the idea of the power of the mass media. They developed a theory of information exchange which stressed what they termed "two-step flow" and the role of opinion leadership. Lazarsfeld suggested that the impact of the

mass media on the shaping of voter preferences was not as great as had been generally hypothesized. In conducting this research in much the same way that he had previously conducted market research Lazarsfeld contributed to the equation of media effects research with a measurable short term attitudinal impact on audiences. The theory of two-step flow which minimized the influence of the mass media was reinforced by a 1945 study of eight hundred women in Decatur, Illinois. The findings were published as *Personal Influence* by Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in 1955. This project, which was led for a time by C. Wright Mills, sought to determine the role of "opinion leaders" in American communities. Mills was fired from the project by Lazarsfeld after a series of disagreements. Mills later condemned Lazarsfeld's market research-inspired sociology in *The Sociological Imagination* as being interested only in the preservation of the status quo. This charge could equally be applied to the work of Joseph Klapper, Lazarsfeld's student and the firmest proponent of the limited effects thesis proposed by Lazarsfeld and his associates at the Bureau of Applied Social Research. Rowland has suggested that Mills was essentially correct in his critique when he pointed to the services Lazarsfeld performed for media industries. By providing research which minimized the role of the mass media in shaping opinion Lazarsfeld helped to stem governmental regulatory scrutiny. Consequently his work was well-received by the industry and his students became increasingly in demand, thus helping to further propagate the type of survey-based research which he had developed and taught. Moreover, the findings of limited effects insured a continuing source of research funding from the media industry. Lazarsfeld's work on personal influence and opinion leadership, therefore, became important reference works in the field and helped to shift research emphasis away from the cultural impact of mass communication and toward questions of information flow.

In retrospect it easy to see, as Rogers has pointed out, that Lazarsfeld's contribution to the field had a cost in paths not taken (314). For instance, the emphasis on a minimal effects paradigm downplayed investigation of ownership and control of the mass media and

ignored the macro-level communications context in favor of micro-level investigations. At the same time the one-way communication paradigm which seemed apt for the study of radio or television rooted itself in a moralizing concern about children. Despite his insistence on the limited effects of mass communication it is nonetheless evident that Lazarsfeld was influenced by postwar concerns about mass culture. In his essay with Robert Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action", Lazarsfeld identified a social consequence of the mass media as what he termed "the narcotizing dysfunction" (464). Termed a dysfunction because they argued that it was self-evidently not in the interests of society to have a population which was inert, Lazarsfeld and Merton suggested that the media's superficial concern with social problems cloaked mass apathy. This argument, which suggested that mass communication had become the most respectable and efficient social narcotic, is classically aligned with postwar concerns about America as a mass society. Moreover, the authors demonstrated the degree to which traditional contempt for mass culture influenced developing mass communication studies when they agreed with condemning cultural critics that "there can be no doubt that the women who are daily entranced for three or four hours by some twelve consecutive 'soap operas', all cut to the same dismal pattern, exhibit and appalling lack of esthetic judgment" (466). Writing in an era which placed a premium on the bracketing out of social values from social science this type of condemnation is revealing insofar as it suggests that even the most administrative research on mass communication was undergirded by a concern with the negative influence of mass culture. In coming to terms with the establishment of the field of mass communication study following in the tradition of Wilbur Schramm and Paul Lazarsfeld, therefore, the degree to which anti-mass culture biases intruded into the ostensibly objective research methods needs to be remembered. Ultimately what becomes apparent, however, is the degree to which the condemnation by mass communication researchers of someone like Fredric Wertham rested not so much on his denunciations of mass culture, a trait which he held in common with mass communication scholars, but on

his methodological approach. The field of communication study was founded on an empirical and administrative survey-based form of sociological inquiry and ultimately augmented by contributions from similar and related fields such as Harold Lasswell's work on propaganda analysis and Carl Hovland's experimental research on persuasion. Nowhere in that paradigm was a space left available for clinical methodologies nor for the general study of the cultural impact of the mass media which Wertham favored and would continue to develop until his retirement.

The Road Not Taken: Wertham on Fanzines

The difference between Wertham and his opponents in the field of mass communication studies can be highlighted by turning to his final book, *The World of Fanzines* (Wertham 1973). This book, published well into Wertham's retirement when he was seventy-eight years old, bore little resemblance to his other works except that as it built on earlier statements that violence was the anti-thesis of communication. The book was, as its title suggests, a study of fanzines (fan magazines), primarily from a sociological or even anthropological point of view rather than from the perspective of a psychiatrist. Wertham stated that he first learned of the existence of fanzines while working with Gino (of *Dark Legend*) in the 1930s, but that he had not given them any thought until he began to receive them in the mail in the 1960s from fanzine editors who were aware of his position on comic books. Since that time Wertham had undertaken a systematic study of the medium, searching out more fanzines, subscribing to others and even contributing the occasional letter or article and consenting to be interviewed. His interest in the form stemmed from his belief that fanzines were a sincere and spontaneous form of communication. It had been neglected by communications scholars and psychiatrists because of a certain snobbishness which suggested that they were unworthy of scholarly attention. He praised the fact that fanzines were not polluted by the greed and arrogance that dominated the mass media but

instead were something "intensely personal" (35). As someone who had become increasingly concerned about the mechanization of daily life as his career wore on, Wertham regarded fanzines positively as a counterforce to the mass media.

During the course of the book Wertham traced the history of the development of the fanzine as a medium of communication with particular emphasis placed on what he termed the three pillars of fanzines: science fiction, fantasy and comic books. His discussion of comic books was particularly illuminating in relation to his work from the 1950s, particularly insofar as he made clear distinctions between comic books — which he saw as the product of the economic crisis brought on by the American Depression of the 1930s — and comic strips, which he regarded as a legitimate art form whose roots lay in the Europe of the 19th century. This distinction between art and commerce led Wertham to praise fanzines concerned with comic books even as he was unwilling to recant his position on the comic books of the 1940s and 1950s. What Wertham valued in the fanzines was the fact that they were free of censorship and commercial interests, two forces of which he was equally suspect. Moreover, Wertham regarded fanzines as distinct from the mass media because they were not "covered with the dust of dullness" but were written in ways that were fresh and non-cliché (87). After tracing the typical constitution of fanzines Wertham concluded that they occupied a space in the history of American culture that had been unfairly overlooked by historians, psychologists and communication scholars. From the point of view of the psychiatrist he answered the hypothetical question of whether participation in fanzine culture was psychologically healthy. He affirmed the value of the urge to create and to communicate with others. Fanzine work, Wertham suggested, was social rather than psychological and fanzine writers and editors were not alienated from society but rather maintained a deep desire to communicate and socialize with others who shared similar interests. Given that the post-war era consisted of a consumer society Wertham celebrated the fanzine for its refusal to become a part of that culture. He conceptualized this refusal not as a form of opposition but of resistance and suggested that

fanzine publishing was itself a form of implied social criticism. In the end Wertham concluded that "communication is the opposite of violence and every facet of communication has a legitimate place" (133). His commentary on the world of fanzines provided a lens through which his criticism of mass culture and media violence could be properly refocused. Separated from the hyperbole and name-calling that accompanied the moral panic around comic books in the 1950s Wertham's criticisms can be seen more accurately as a liberalist critique of the influence of the mass media which sought not the end or even curtailment of a particular medium of communication but a re-conceptualization of social relations. What Wertham most clearly advocated with *Seduction of the Innocent* and his other writings on the subject of the mass media was a new series of social relations between adults and children, between individuals and society, and between art and commerce. With this in mind, I argue that Wertham's work was excluded from more traditional approaches to media effects scholarship on two counts. In the first place it was more critical of the capitalist media industries than the normative scholarship. In the second instance it paid much greater attention to the ways in which audiences used the media over the long-term. Wertham's approach to the study of media effects, therefore, can be seen to fall outside the dominant traditions of the social scientific and behavioristic research paradigm as it developed in conjunction with government and industry research requirements in the decades following the end of the Second World War. Ultimately his conclusions, which shared a number of significant biases with mass communication research findings, could not be reconciled with the dominant tradition because his dismissal of empirical methods and ongoing concern with the broadly cultural impact of the mass media found no correspondence in a field which was dominated by administratively-informed scholarship.

Conclusion

Testifying before the Hendrickson-Kefauver subcommittee hearings in 1954 Paul Lazarsfeld informed the senators that mass communication research could not be seen as a panacea for the nation's problems because

> In the whole matter of the mass media there are questions of convictions and taste which can hardly be settled by research. At least for the time being research cannot decide whether people should read good books rather than bad books, or whether they should listen to good music. One has to have convictions on the dignity of man, on the importance of matters of the mind, and one has to stand up and be counted on these convictions. If I see a cruel picture in a comic, or if I hear a stupid television program, I react negatively, even though I may not be able to back up my conviction with research findings. (Lazarsfeld 1955:249)

Important here is Lazarsfeld's acknowledgment that the aesthetic convictions of the researcher inform scholarly work even in instances where the biases of the scholar are not supported evidentially. Equally crucial, however, was Lazarsfeld's telling qualification "at least for the time being", suggesting his belief that it was possible that the questions which characterized critiques of mass culture might eventually be resolved empirically. In a similar vein Leo Bogart argued the following year that while television "cannot really be blamed for turning children into criminals or neurotics" that this finding of minimal effects was essentially beside the point. Bogart contended that

> a much more serious charge is that television, in the worst aspects of its content, helps to perpetuate moral, cultural and social values which are not in accord with the highest ideals of an enlightened democracy. The cowboy film, the detective thriller and the soap opera, so often identified by critics as the epitome of American mass culture, probably do not represent the heritage which Americans at large want to transmit to posterity (Bogart 1956:273-274).

Bogart's comments contrast what he perceived to be the illegitimate concern that television contributed to juvenile delinquency with his own genuine worry that television might have been leading the United States away from its position as the seat of postwar enlightenment.

J. D. Peters has suggested that the displacement which Bogart described has actually been the driving force behind mass communication research generally: "If you could lay the classic texts of American mass communication research down on a psychoanalytic couch, you would find that they thought themselves talking narrowly about

the mass media and their 'effects', while they were in fact talking about the perils and possibilities of democracy" (Peters 1989:200). It is no coincidence, following this logic, that the study of mass communication in the United States should fully emerge between the wars and further that it should be consecrated as a legitimate field of study in a postwar atmosphere riddled with concern about the corrupting influence of mass culture on democracy. While its roots may reside in a nineteenth-century distrust for mass culture the formation of mass communication research was directed by the needs of the mass media industries and of government agencies which sought to regulate those industries. This development led towards a privileging of ostensibly objective research practices which would obviate the need for mass communication scholars to take a critical stance in relation to the industries which helped to legitimize and fund research in the field. Given such a situation it seems unlikely that an unrepentantly committed reformer like Fredric Wertham could have ever found a place within the dominant traditions in the field.

Conclusion

Shearon Lowery and Melvin De Fleur's 1983 textbook Milestones in *Mass Communication Research: Media Effects* has played a tremendous role in legitimizing the dominant paradigm in communications research. The book defined the importance of eleven key milestones in the history of communications research beginning with the Payne Fund Studies and concluding with the Surgeon General's Report on television violence. Along the way the authors highlight contributions made by Lazarsfeld, Schramm and, curiously, Wertham. Lowery and De Fleur's text is one of the few instances in which Wertham and his work were incorporated into the history of mass communication research. Consequently, the comments of the authors signified a great deal about the way in which his work had been received by generations of scholars writing after his death. Lowery and De Fleur noted that in his day "a few social scientists agreed with Wertham; others disagreed and debated the issue with him in scientific circles; the great majority of social scientists, however, simply ignored him" (1983:234). Their own evaluation of Wertham in the 1980s followed the second option as they worked hard to exclude his contributions from the development and shaping of the field on scientific grounds.

Lowery and De Fleur argued that Wertham's work was "theoretically inconsistent" and that his position shifted at times from an argument rooted in selective influence based on individual differences to a view which stressed uniform effects. To this end they suggested that Wertham's work in *Seduction of the Innocent* was "clearly a version of the old magic bullet theory" (262). They further argued that Wertham's numerous insistences that comic books were not a causative but a contributing factor in juvenile delinquency were a deliberate effort to mislead readers. They suggested that Wertham believed comics to be a causative factor, but accuse him of being unwilling to admit that belief (262). A more serious charge in the eyes of Lowery and De Fleur, however, was the fact that Wertham's writings on comic books failed to live up to accepted standards of scientific validity. They

wrote that "the major weakness of Wertham's position is that it is not supported by scientifically gathered research data" (262). They cite, for instance, Wertham's failure to include a comprehensive content analysis of all comic books published in the 1950s as evidence that his work was "biased, unreliable, and useless" (263). The perception that Wertham failed to provide "systematic evidence" can only be seen as valid if one assumes, as Lowery and De Fleur did, that the clinical methodology which he advocated and utilised was "by no means scientific" (263). These condemnations fail to acknowledge the fact that *Seduction of the Innocent* was in no way presented as a volume which adhered to generally accepted scientific reporting methods. They further dismiss the clinical method as non-scientific as a matter of course. No argument for this dismissal is necessitated or made, it is simply accepted as a matter of course. In this way the received history of the media effects paradigm dismissed non-empirical or critical work from the corpus of mass communication research.

Indeed, for Lowery and De Fleur and other commentators, the legacy of Wertham's contribution to the postwar debates about the effects of mass culture resided not in the way in which they impacted the field but in the effect which they had on the comic book industry in the United States. Lowery and De Fleur suggested that Wertham's ultimate contribution was that he reinforced a "legacy of fear" about mass culture which ultimately led to the Hendrickson-Kefauver Senate hearings, the Comics Code and the decline of comic books as a cultural form (265). This type of simplified reading of the history of both anti-comic book commentary as well as responses from industry and government has been recently challenged by Amy Kiste-Nyberg, whose history of the development of the Comics Code pointed to a more complex interaction of forces. At the same time, however, Nyberg did not refrain from scape-goating Wertham as an opportunist whose lasting contribution to American culture was the diminshment of the comic book form (Nyberg 1998:154). This argument has become a common refrain amongst comic book readers, historians and fans. They persist in regarding Wertham as a malicious figure whose work

destroyed the medium. In a recent profile of the cartoonist Jack Cole in the *New Yorker*, for instance, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman wrote that *Seduction of the Innocent* "triggered the Senate hearings and thereby toppled the industry" (1999:83). This type of scapegoating and name-calling might be a result of fannish anxieties over the comic book's historically degraded position in America's cultural hierarchy. Unfortunately, it remains almost the only way in which Wertham's name surfaces into the contemporary world since he has been obliterated from the history of mass communication research. Indeed, the most recent edition of Lowery and De Fleur's Milestones in *Mass Communication Research: Media Effects* (1995) has shed its chapter on *Seduction of the Innocent*, replacing those pages with new chapters addressing the uses and gratifications approach to the study of daytime serials, and the Iowa study of Hybrid Seed Corn. In this version of the textbook Wertham's name does not appear even in the index and the elision of critical scholarship from the history of empirically-grounded approaches to the study of media effects has been finalized. Indeed, a glance at Wertham's publishing record indicates the degree to which his career is marked by a descent into delegitimation. While he published in some of the most respected mass market publications in the 1940s, including the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *New Republic* and *The Nation*, by the 1960s when he wrote for a lay audience it was almost exclusively in the pages of *Ladies' Home Journal*. It seems, therefore, that for Wertham the process of exclusion from the dominant discourse was lengthy, and begun well before his own retirement.

This neglect has led to the creation of histories of mass communication research which fail to address the ways in which challenges to the orthodoxies of previous eras contributed to the definition of the field. It has been my argument throughout this dissertation that the dominant histories of mass communication research have marginalized a number of important contributions. I have highlighted this assertion by reinserting the figure of Fredric Wertham into those histories. Among those contributions are the important structuring role which literary critics of mass culture had on the framing of

research questions, the importance of postwar concerns about a rising mass society and receding individualism, the place of psychoanalysis and other qualitative methodologies in the history of the field, and the historical neglect of comic books as a medium of communication meriting study. I have argued that each of these factors has been brushed aside in various ways in order to privilege an image of mass communication research as empirically and scientifically based and directed towards the short-term study of the relationship of individuals and the media. Moreover, I have argued that the conclusions generated by these studies — namely that, if effects of the mass media are at all measurable, blame should be placed with "maladjusted" individuals rather than with media industries — reflected a particular conservative bias which was rooted in Cold War thinking. While Wertham's writings on comic books shared a number of common aesthetic assumptions with critics of mass culture generally, his work was distinct from the mainstream of mass communications research insofar as his liberal and reformist politics and qualitative research methodology led him to assert an ongoing insistence that the blame for media-related violence lay with society generally and not with the individual specifically.

In many ways Wertham's work on fanzines in the 1970s can be seen as the culmination of this critical tradition. A few critics within comics fandom who took up the book at the time suggested that it amounted to a renunciation by Wertham of his own previous writings (Moore 1973:2-4). However, it is better regarded as the logical extension of the more general argument which guided his work generally. Wertham's clinical methodology stressed the idea that the interaction between audiences and media were the function of complex life histories which could only be evaluated through approaches developed in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. The complexity of that relationship, he suggested, could be seen in the creative responses of fanzine publishers to comic books and science fiction. I would not want to argue that Wertham's comments on this topic were in any way influential. It is important nonetheless to point to the degree to which his work

on fanzines presaged important interventions into communications research. I am referring to critical communications studies in the 1980s which stressed the ways in which individuals derived differing meanings from the same source (Radway 1984). Wertham's work on a different conception of media effects led him in later years to a more nuanced understanding of audience interactions with texts, an understanding which had more in common with the critical concerns of cultural studies than the administrative concerns of American mass communication research as it has been consolidated in the past half century.

This is not, however, an attempt to claim Wertham as a precursor to cultural studies. Nor has this dissertation been an effort to bring Wertham's conception of media effects to the fore in order to suggest that his research methodologies hold the promise for future investigations into the mass media. While I am sympathetic to certain arguments which Wertham made in his day, I would not wish to advocate uncritically his methodology for contemporary scholarship. Indeed, I would suggest that the limitations of Wertham's approach to culture — particularly insofar as he drew upon and reified conservative and elitist discourses about the relative values of high and mass culture — restrict the work's utility. Yet I would also suggest that when it is considered in its proper historical frame of reference Wertham's work was legitimately exciting. In comparison with other researchers, whose work was equally tempered by arguments about the degrading influence of mass culture, his research stands out for its ongoing emphasis on the social causes of societal problems and its commitment to ameliorating those problems through broadly social solutions. This aspect of Wertham's work is one I would like to see positioned centrally in ongoing research into mass communication. By acknowledging the contributions of critical scholars to the definition of the media effects question in the postwar period it should be possible to advance beyond the narrowly administrative and bureaucratic research paradigms which still hold so much sway over the shape of communications studies in the United States.

Everett Rogers has noted that, despite the important interventions which cultural studies and other critical traditions have made into the field of communications, the "heart of communication study is still characterized by quantitative studies of the effects of mass communication" (1994:493). In agreeing with that assessment I would also note that essential questions of the effects of mass culture remain unresolved after more than seventy years of concentrated study. As I was completing this dissertation the high school massacre in Littleton, Colorado placed the question of the effects of mass communication squarely in the public realm once again. That this tragedy was met with the same set of responses which characterized earlier concerns about mass culture indicates the degree to which the debate has not advanced. Post-Littleton commentators reflexively placed the blame for the shootings at the feet of violent television programming, popular music lyrics and video games. Thus, we have seen first-hand that the terms of the debate have not been shifted by decades of dedicated empirical research into the effects of these media. Rather than continue along the trajectory which leaves the central questions in the field unresolved I would suggest that broadening the debate has become a vital necessity. That this broadening would require an effort to come to terms with the specific ways in which the dominant paradigm of mass communication research originated and became consecrated goes without saying. That it would further necessitate an acknowledgment of the often vital yet generally neglected contributions of scholars like Fredric Wertham is similarly evident to me. It is my hope that this undertaking will serve some role in opening a re-evaluation of the history and traditions of American mass communication research. In this way, the field might be redirected towards new trajectories which would integrate critical methodologies into dominant research paradigms. Perhaps at that point it would be possible to resolve some of the crucial questions which spawned the field of communication study and which continue to haunt its existence to this day.

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