NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
Department of Design.
FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART &DESIGN
AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

THE HOLLYWOOD RESPONSE TO THE DEPRESSION

BY HENRY POSKITT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART &
DESIGN AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF Bachelor of Design
INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Plates

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the Hollywood film industry's response to the Depression that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929. It will also show how the response of Hollywood was not homogeneous, but that the films produced in Hollywood throughout the 1930's related to the Depression in different ways.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In March, 1929, President Hoover of the United States stated 'We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land.'[1] This was the view of many American at that time. It was the general belief that the future held the promise of a material prosperity for the general public that had previously only been available to the rich. This optimism caused a rise in share prices and hence Stock Market speculation became widespread. On October 24th, 1929, the bubble burst. Share prices plummeted, causing a run on the stock exchange. The immediate cause of what became known as the Wall Street Crash was over-borrowing by speculators. Using credit to buy shares is only prudent in a stable market. If the market prices drop, however, a speculator who has borrowed money must sell to avoid bankruptcy. If too many people sell at once, confidence is lost and the market panics. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 was caused in this way. The Depression which it triggered off, however, had several deeper causes.

1. U.S. factories were over-producing due to extra capacity which had been necessary during the First World War. Surplus output caused layoffs which reduced consumer demand and exacerbated the problem of over production.
2. In 1929, 78% of the profits of U.S. companies were in the hands of 0.3% of the population. There was a limit to the amount of consumer goods this rich

---

[1] 5, p. 159

minority could purchase and therefore, much of the profit was not returned into the economy.

3. Foreign trade fell in response to tariffs introduced on the import of goods into America.

4. Both industry and private citizens relied heavily on borrowing and hire purchase. When the economy went into recession, many companies and private individuals went bankrupt, deepening the Depression.

5. The shock of seeing what had promised to be a rosy future evaporating overnight caused a general feeling of apathy in the public mind.

The effects of the Depression were devastating. Unemployment rose from 1.5 million in 1928 to 14 million in 1933. Industrial output was halved in the same period. The Republican government of the time, under President Hoover, was blamed for not acting to control the Depression and relieve the population. This political inactivity was not due to incompetence, however, but to the belief of the Republican party and especially Hoover himself that government interference would damage the free market economy.

By the end of 1932, it was obvious that the policies of the Republican government had failed. In that year the public responded to this be electing to office the Democratic candidate for President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt's policies involved direct state intervention in all areas of the economy. The name given to Roosevelt's policies was the New Deal. The New Deal was not one organised plan but a collection of directives based around three major aims.

1. RELIEF. The first objective of the administration was to relieve hardship among the population by opening the banks, providing food and offering financial assistance for the unemployed.

2. RECOVERY. The recovery of the economy was to be achieved not by bank rolling industry, but by ensuring that the public had enough spending power to buy their products.

3. REFORM. The final aim was to ensure that the circumstances which had brought about the Depression were not repeated.

One of the major concerns of the New Deal administration was the re-establishment of public confidence in the economy. This loss of confidence was a major factor in the Wall Street Crash and the subsequent apathy felt by the general public was a hindrance to recovery. Roosevelt himself always took a very optimistic approach. His thinking was that by projecting an air of confidence, public confidence could be raised. It is evident from events that took place that this policy was successful. Within eight days of taking office, Roosevelt had been on the radio assuring the public that all was well and had managed to persuade some of those banks which had been closed for several years to open their doors to the public.

The discussion is divided into four chapters.

1. The developing role of materialism in Hollywood.
2. Films of the early Thirties: before the New Deal and the introduction of the Production Code Administration.
3. Films following the New Deal and the introduction of the Production Code Administration.
4. Films dealing with social issues in the late Thirties.

The 1930's in Hollywood became the Golden Age of glamour. Despite the reduced circumstances of audiences, and indeed the film companies, many films portrayed a level of opulence that was unattainable to all but the very rich. The emphasis was on glamour, fashion and the Jazz Age lifestyle. The seeds of this desire for extravagance were in the Depression itself and the need to escape reality for an hour and a half.

Hollywood rode out the first two years of Depression largely unharmed. The early hope was that the film industry was Depression proof. The introduction of sound was still attracting large audiences and there was even a small rise in box office attendances in 1930. By 1932, however, the honeymoon period was over; unemployment was up to 12 millions and correspondingly, box offices showed a 40% drop in attendances. The effect on the studios was severe, with only one of the eight major studios managing to avoid financial disasters. The banks, however, bailed out the film industry and in return took a more active rôle in the workings of Hollywood. All areas of production were scrutinised for possible savings. Many workers were laid off and wages were cut. These cost cutting measures proved effective in reducing unwarranted overspending, and along with other factors, contributed to a return to profitability in 1934.

What the bank-appointed financial directors soon realised however was that cost cutting did not always increase profit. The problems of film making during the Depression were summarised by producer Lewis J. Selznick in the following statements. 'There are only two kinds of merchandise that can be made profitably in this business - either the very cheap pictures or the very expensive pictures.'[2] The larger studios usually opted for the expensive pictures as is explained by Izod. 'In conflict between the impulse towards cost effectiveness and the contrary belief that

---

2 10, p. 191

extravagant production values sold movies, economic practice was often undercut.'[3] This statement explains the apparent contradiction of movies with 1.5 million dollar sets during a period of strict financial control and cutbacks.

The necessity of having to invest large sums of money at a time of great financial insecurity meant that studios could not afford a box office flop. In all industries, financial crisis usually leads to conservative business decisions and the film industry was no different. To ensure success, the studios relied for their material on film genres which had already proved successful. All that was necessary then was a big name to play lead and some variation of the plot, which remained essentially on the same lines.

One film that became a precedent for a whole genre of films, which continued

1. Our Dancing Daughters (M.G.M. 1928), a big hit in 1928 with some of the first Hollywood Art Deco sets.

3 6, p. 94

throughout the Depression years, was Our Dancing Daughters (1928). It followed the M.G.M. policy of selling the Good Life to poor people.As is explained by William K. Everson, 'M.G.M.'s films always aimed at audiences that were rich - or (according to their own philosophy) poor audiences that envied the rich and thus wanted to see glamour and elegance in films rather than reality'.[4]

Films portraying the life of the rich, however, were not new. What made Our Dancing Daughters a great success was the Art Direction of Cedric Gibbons. Gibbons had attended the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industrials Modernes in Paris (1925) and had been greatly impressed by the clean lines and uncluttered spaces of European Interior Design. On his return to Hollywood, Gibbons set about designing a 'Modern' (the term Art Deco was not coined until the 1960's) set for Our Dancing Daughters. Audiences were mesmerized by the soaring Art Deco sets and uncompromising Modern furnishings. In this fantasy world, the well-to-do of the Jazz Age lived out utopian lives uncluttered by the necessity of work and mainly concerned with cocktail parties, cabarets and nightclubs. The film spawned two sequels, both equally successful, dealing with similar themes and including the essential Art Deco sets. On this style of film, Mandelbaum states, 'If movies promised life, liberty and the pursuit of riches then Art Deco provided the perfect setting.'[5]

The use of Art Deco to attract audiences into cinemas started straight away, as these press releases show:

> Modernistic effects in furniture and architecture are being used with a vengeance by Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in Joan Crawford's new picture. Weird beds, almost on the floor, have little woodwork save foot-high boards which conceal the springs and do away with the conventional legs of a bed. These are set against a wall whose only ornamenting is

---

4 From American Silent Movies
5 7, p. 13

> the shape of the doors. Black statues set against gold papered panels form the only ornamental note.[6]

This press release is basically an accurate description of the Modern style before the introduction of streamlining. Its use in this press release shows that the film was primarily sold on its design rather than its dramatic content. The following press release for Ladies Must Live (Columbia 1930) uses a similar line, 'Smart society, gorgeous gowns, polo games, the beach at Newport, modernistic settings - all seen in Ladies Must Live.'[7] Note the use of the catchword of the age, 'modern.'

After the success of Our Dancing Daughters for M.G.M., the other studios soon followed suit with their own glamourous sets using the Modern style. The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers series, starting with Flying Down to Rio (R.K.O. 1933) and continuing throughout the thirties, made extensive use of Art Deco sets.

2. *Rufus T. Firefly (Groucho Marx) in the mythical streamlined kingdom of Freedonia. From Duck Soup (M.G.M. 1933).*

---

6 Press release for Our Dancing Daughters, 1928 - 7, p. 13
7 Press release for Ladies Must Live, 1930 - 7, p. 13

Audiences knew what to expect and came back for each new film. In 1932, innovative Product Designer Norman Bel Geddes published his book Horizons, in which he popularised the concept of streamlining which was to become the main theme of later Art Deco design. In 1933, the Marx Brothers picture Duck Soup (M.G.M. 1933) was set in the mythical kingdom of Freedonia.The interiors were designed in the new streamline Modern Style a full year before the first streamline products became available.

Although Art Deco design had been introduced to help promote extravagance and glamour in movies, especially at M.G.M. and Paramount. It is interesting to note that multimillion dollar investment was not always necessary for Art Deco set design. In 1931, the double bill was introduced into American cinemas to restore flagging box office attendances. Studios soon realised the need for a cheap source of films to pair with the first run features. This gave rise to the B-movie industry, where movies were mass-produced at budget prices following Selznick's prediction that only very cheap

3. A scene from The Black Cat (Universal 1934) featuring the Art Deco mansion of the evil architect Poelzig (Boris Karloff).

or very expensive movies could make a profit. B-movies were often filmed at night to avail of equipment and studios in use during the day on other films. Low light also reduced the cost of sets since very little of them could be seen. Izod suggests that this use of low lighting developed into the later style of Film Noir. In general, the use of Art Deco in B-movies was limited by the lack of funds.However, one excellent example of budget Art Deco does exist. This film, a budget horror movie starring Boris Karloff, was The Black Cat (Edgar G. Ulmar, Universal 1934). The sets were super modern with glass bricks, digital clocks and steel furniture. This set, despite being totally convincing, cost only $3,700.

If the attraction of a picture was to be its portrayal of high society, modern design and glamourous fashion, the environments in which the plot could take place were limited. Modern design was largely involved with interiors, furniture and domestic goods. Glamourous fashion was mainly concentrated around evening wear and night clothes. The later streamline style was associated with transport. This led to a certain narrow group of settings in films of this type. Many films took place in hotels, where full use Art Deco interiors could be made. Another favourite setting was the nightclub, where the enormous dance floors allowed troupes of dancers to do lavish routines, such as those choreographed by Busby Berkeley. The introduction of streamline and the subsequent glamourisation of travel led to a series of films based around airplanes, such as Flying Down to Rio (R.K.O. 1933). The ultimate way to travel according to the movies, however, was by ocean liner. Ships were perfect for this kind of film. They were transport, and hence lent themselves to streamline styles, while the interiors could be designed like expensive hotels. Hollywood used ocean liners as a setting for romances, mysteries, melodramas and comedies - and sometimes for all of these at once, as this review for Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round (1934) shows:

> A blend of Grand Hotel and 42nd Street ... into what specific classification this picture should fall is more than this critic is prepared to decide. It is a drama and a melodrama, a farce and a musical comedy, a mystery story and a romance, a radio revue and a variety show.[8]

A common theme in films of this era is the linkage between ownership of modern goods and success. In Dinner at Eight (M.G.M. 1933) the nouveau riche Mr. Packard assumes Mr. Jordan is going bust because his office is in an old fashioned style. The underlying implication in many films of this era is that designed objects, the trappings of High Society, are a necessity for those hoping to join the 'Smart Set.'

By the late twenties, Hollywood producers were well aware of the effects of their pictures on consumption. Following the success of Gibbons' Art Deco sets in the film Our Dancing Daughters (M.G.M. 1928), a craze was started for redecorating, using venetian blinds, indirect lighting and dancing figurines. It was a small step to purposefully including specific objects in films to boost sales. Initial attempts were very clumsy and caused fears that audiences would become offended. However, when the objects were placed unostentatiously in mainstream features, this form of indirect advertising proved very effective. The first area to utilise the power of Hollywood to increase sales was the fashion industry. In 1930, the Modern Merchandising Bureau was set up to act as an intermediary between the film studios and the fashion industry. The Bureau received sketches of costumes to be worn in future films and contracted out the production of the clothes to manufacturers who could then have the garments on the shelves at the time the films were released. The Bureau also arranged promotional material linking the clothes with the stars who wore them and the films in which they could be seen. The studios received no money for the use of their designs, however, they benefitted from the enormous promotional campaigns paid for by the manufacturers.

---

8 Frank S. Nugent, "The New York Times", 1934

In the product and commodity sectors, manufacturers offered their products free of charge as props to be used in films. Warner Brothers made several deals of this nature which led to a proliferation of Buicks and General Electric fridges in their pictures between 1933 and 1935. Again, no money changed hands in these deals, the studios receiving the benefit of the manufacturers promotional campaigns.

Another type of deal was struck between M.G.M. and Coca-Cola in 1933. In return for $0.5 million, M.G.M. stars were used to endorse Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola also helped in the promotion of Dinner at Eight (M.G.M. 1933) on a local level, affixing posters that linked Jean Harlow, Coca-Cola and the film to their delivery trucks. It became normal practice for scriptwriters and studio heads to co-ordinate scripts to target sponsorship. In 1934, the small independent Disney studio began selling the merchandising rights on its cartoon characters and derived a third of its profits in that year from this source. One of the beneficiaries, the Ingersoll Watch Company, was saved from bankruptcy by the boost in sales due to Mickey Mouse.

The previous examples of promotion were largely overt. However, in his article Carole Lombard in Macy's Window[9], Charles Eckert highlights another side of Hollywood's dealings with consumerism. Eckert identifies a massive covert campaign to associate products in the minds of the audience with the pleasure derived from movie going. The result was 'the establishment of powerful bonds between the emotional, fantasy-generating substance of films, and the material objects those films contained.'[10]

Eckert concludes that this was the most successful exercise in consumer manipulation until the advent of television. Materialism was transformed into a fetish and the pin-up desires of audiences were expanded to include an emotional response to a set of material objects.

---

9 Charles Eckert, "Quarterly Review of Film Studies", 3.1.Winter 1978, p. 1-21
10 Ibid, p. 20

CONCLUSION

In response to the slump in sales of consumer goods, Hollywood colluded with manufacturers to boost sales. This was achieved by product placement and by a covert campaign to link the purchase of consumer goods with an improvement in the quality of life of the purchaser.

This action was certainly successful in economic terms, and in this way Hollywood was adding its weight to the Federal Government's campaign to beat the Depression. The effects on the audiences, however, are less certain. The levels of riches in many films were obviously out of reach. This constant emphasis on consumerism at a time when a large proportion of the public were struggling to clothe and feed themselves must have reminded audiences of their own reduced circumstances. However, films portraying the fantasy world of the idle rich continued to be popular throughout the Depression era. It must be concluded, therefore, that the desire to escape, however temporarily, from the realities of life at that time overrode the feelings of frustration brought about by the portrayal of a world so far out of reach of the majority of the audience.

One of the effects of the Depression was low box office attendances between 1930 and 1934. This plunged the Hollywood studios into grave financial difficulties. These difficulties were exacerbated by the policy of the studios to own the first-run cinemas. In the 1920's, it was normal for each company to buy or build a cinema in the major towns to ensure a market for their products. When box office attendances fell in 1931, the studios had to cover losses not only on their films, but also on the cinemas that they owned. This led to the closure of 5,000 out of 16,000 cinemas throughout the United States. The remaining cinemas survived by laying off ushers and the introduction of kiosks selling popcorn and soda. The job of luring the audiences back to the cinemas, however, lay with the studios.

The studios dealt with the crisis by offering titillation and excitement, as the following passage explains, 'As the Depression hit the industry some producers reverted to old exploitation tactics, re-introduced sex appeal, and discovered violence.'[11] Sklar confirms this, 'Depression brought vulgarity, lechery and upsetting values back to movies again.'[12] The characteristics of many films of this era were noise, violence, sex and disruption. Noise was still a novelty at this time since sound had only recently been introduced. War films became popular because they allowed directors to make maximum use of the new technology. Lewis Milestones' All Quiet on the Western Front was a big hit in 1930. The rise of the gangster movie in the early Thirties increased the level of violence in cinema and also accustomed the public to the sound of gunfire in movies. A good example of this is Scarface (Howard Hughes, 1932), which includes a long sequence comprising of screeching cars, breaking glass and endless tommy-gunfire. The use of sex in movies in the form of female nudity caught on, especially after Josef Von Sternberg's portrayal of partially disrobed females in dressing rooms in the film The Blue Angel (1930). In his book

---

11 6, p. 105
12 10 p. 181

The Movies Come From America (1937) Gilbert Seldes links the increase in sex and violence in the early Thirties with research at the time which showed a major drop in the proportion of adult males in cinema audiences. He suggests that the inclusion of scantily clad women and violence is more likely to appeal to men than women or children.

Disruption was another characteristic of films in the early Thirties. The rise of organised crime led to public fears that society could break down and anarchy prevail. The gangster movie genre utilised these fears with great effect. Anarchy could also be fun. The masters of anarchic comedy were the Marx Brothers. In their films, they turned morality, convention, and whatever else was available, upside down. In Marx Brothers movies, the heroes were crooks, the villains were worse, and anybody else was fair game. Particular targets in these films were authority, respectability and prosperity.

In Animal Crackers (Paramount 1930), the police, authority, are sent on a wild goose chase by Groucho, posing as an officer from Scotland Yard and are finally knocked out with chloroform by Harpo. Respectability, in the form of a famous art collector, is derided by Harpo and Chico who expose him as a Czechoslovak fishmonger. Prosperity is also assaulted by Groucho who seduces a rich widow in an attempt to secure funds for a bogus expedition. The rich in Marx Brothers movies are usually portrayed as victims of plots to part them from their money, and they are usually surrounded by sycophants. Lawyers and marriage are also parodied since they represent the Establishment. No resolution of the chaos, largely created by Harpo, is offered. The whole cast end up unconscious in a heap.

The Marx Brothers movies followed a similar pattern throughout the Thirties. Monkey Business (Paramount 1931) parodied the gangster movie and Horse Feathers (Paramount 1932) took on the education system. Duck Soup dealt with the ultimate symbol of authority, the State. The State in question, Freedonia, is in severe financial

trouble. Rufus T. Firefly is appointed leader and he gets to work at once by stating his policies. Marriage and honesty are outlawed, as well as dirty jokes and any form of pleasure. He then plunged the country into a senseless war fulfilling his promise that things would get worse. Freedonia wins the war, but not before the country is

4. Duck Soup. The Marx Brothers victorious amid the rubble of Freedonia.

Brothers throwing fruit at Members of State. There are hints throughout the movie that Freedonia represents the United States. Sklar suggests that Freedonia's search for leadership is a direct analogy of the confusion in the U.S. before the election of Roosevelt. Honour and patriotism are also ridiculed. Rufus T. Firefly is against corruption unless he gets a cut, perhaps reflecting a feeling that the Depression had somehow been caused by corruption in high places. Duck Soup was not a box office success, however, and the Marx Brothers movies which followed were far less contentious and more in line with the New Deal spirit.

Probably the most important film genre to be initiated in the early Thirties is the gangster movie. The main theme in these movies is that of an anarchic individual battling with a disordered society. This is similar to the theme running through early Marx Brothers movies, but whereas success or failure is irrelevant in the comedies, the gangster is always doomed to fail.

The arrival of the gangster movie in the early Depression era can be explained in two ways. Firstly, it allowed for the inclusion of elements which would inject some excitement into the movie and therefore attract larger audiences. Secondly, it can be said that the gangster movie allowed directors to deal with social problems that could not be approached more directly at the time.

If the studios felt that their films needed violence, the gangster genre was tailor made. The public had become aware of real gangland killings, bootlegging and the racketeering. Real gangsters often had high media profiles and colourful personalities, so transferring them onto film was simple. The gangster movies had common elements such as punishment shootings, reprisals and bodies being dumped out of cars. This, however, gave them very little advantage over other genres. To explain the popularity of gangster movies, one has to look at the underlying social issues with which they dealt.

The three major gangster movies of this period - Little Caesar (Warner 1931), The Public Enemy (Warner 1931), and Scarface (1932) - were all claimed by the studios to portray gangsters as the ruthless thugs they really were in an attempt to counteract the sympathetic media coverage some real-life gangsters were receiving. These films also sought to answer the question of whether a gangster was born or made. At a time when victims of the Depression were asking 'What went wrong?', gangsters represented the forces of chaos which had engendered the sense of insecurity felt by the general population. Many of the films, such as The Public Enemy, start with the hero in his youth, as if to find a social explanation for the rise of

organised crime. Links are made with unemployment after the Great War and, of course, the Prohibition is often blamed for making small time crooks into hardened criminals. There is also, generally, the implication in these films that there is something in the psychological make-up of the gangster which sets him apart, somewhat like the Victorian concept that there is such a thing as a criminal mind. This is evident in The Public Enemy, where the same social conditions produce Tommy Power, the Criminal, and his brother, the Lawyer and upright citizen. In the closing scene in Scarface, Tony Camonte is portrayed as almost insane, suffering under the delusion that he can defend his hideout despite being surrounded by armed policemen.

Gangsters were acknowledged to be, to a greater or lesser extent, the products of a disordered society, against which they fought, and by whose hand they were ultimately destroyed. However, by at the same time portraying them as psychological deviants, film-makers were enabled to highlight social problems without being overly critical of the society which produced them. Generally, this was done by reducing the problems to a personal level as Sklar explains, 'The gangster films condensed social conflicts and disorders into the ambitions and dreams of their heroes.'[13]

For example, in the film Smart Money (Warner 1931), when the film-makers want to highlight the problems of dishonesty among the authorities, the authorities are personified in the form of a District Attorney (D.A.). Nick Venizelos, a Greek gambler, is arrested and brought before the D.A., who tricks him into killing his best friend, the gangster/hero. The D.A. justifies this act by declaring that the end justifies the means. He then compounds his crime by breaking his promise of immunity to the gambler and throwing him in jail. In this way, film-makers were able to criticize the authorities without actually stating anything concrete.

---

13 10, p. 179

The public reaction to the gangster is interesting. Despite the studio's claims that gangsters were always shown in a negative light, the public identified with the characters of the doomed, fallen heroes. Gangsters had few redeeming qualities: they were ruthless, egoistic and violent, but it was these things that the audiences admired. This feeling was expressed in The Public Enemy by a prostitute (Jean Harlow) who said that what she really loved about Tommy Powers (Cagney) was his badness.

In some films the gangster is portrayed as a small-time businessman who, in his efforts to expand his business is forced into using some unconventional methods. In these films, the audience can sympathise with the gangster's misguided attempts to pursue the American Dream.

Rhode explains the popularity of the gangster movie during the Depression era in terms of a reaction to their living and working conditions, 'Adults engaged in the monotony of factory work and children forced to play on the streets should naturally crave for fantasies in which sex, riches and death of enemies are easily obtained.'[14] He also suggested that the portrayal of these things on film, far from being detrimental to society, actually brought relief to a distressed population.

Although the social issues dealt with in the films were largely real enough, the solution offered by Hollywood were simplistic in the extreme. The death of the hero: restricted by the conventions of dramatic narrative the films offered no solutions beyond the elimination of the character of the gangster, therefore there is a resolution of the narrative, but no solution offered to the real social questions raised in the film. The conclusion can be drawn that Hollywood was only interested in social issues as a means of selling films rather than to initiate or contribute to debate.

Throughout the 1920's, the portrayal of sexuality in Hollywood had been largely avoided, reflecting the political conservatism of that decade. It became far

---

14 9, p. 297

more common in the early Thirties and nudity, especially female, became more acceptable. Sex sold movies, and during the box office slump in the early Thirties anything which would increase attendances was used. Introducing semi-clothed females into films, however, limited the studios to certain environments. Films had to include bedrooms, dressing rooms or entertainers. Although many films from this era include bedroom scenes, and Cecil B. DeMille was famous for his bathtub sequences, the best way of packing maximum sex appeal into a film was to base it around a musical show. As John Izod explains, 'The musical with its chorus line ups made a ready vehicle for sexual display; and the cinema could do what the stage could not, combining skimpy costumes with revealing close-ups of the female body.'[15]

Another sexual theme which cropped up repeatedly in the early Thirties was prostitution. The general scheme in these movies was that in hard times, such as the Depression, women - especially showgirls - who were already perceived to be morally weak would be forced to use their bodies to survive. An example of this is Blonde Venus (Sternberg, Paramount 1932) where Marlene Dietrich seduces a millionaire to acquire money for her husband's operation. When he finds out, he rejects her and she goes into hiding to keep her child. In most of these films, order is restored by punishment followed by a marriage which preserves the status quo. As in the gangster movies, these films took on the real dilemmas of the time and resolved them on a personal level. But again, no solution was offered to the social issues which had brought about the problems within the film.

---

15 6, p. 105

CONCLUSION

The most obvious reaction of Hollywood to the early Depression period was the inclusion of sex, violence and lawlessness in movies. Beneath this raucous literal level is a guarded, but often bitter, criticism of the forces of the Establishment. This critical viewpoint was popular with the disenchanted public who were looking for someone to blame for their own personal distress. It is not clear whether or not film-makers consciously knew that this critical viewpoint would be popular. Bergman argues that the film-makers instinctively, as members of the same society as the audience, portrayed what they felt would make audiences buzz without analyzing its content.[16] The lack of attention paid to the real causes behind the problems of the time suggests that where social issue were touched on, it was primarily to increase sales rather than to promote solutions.

---

16 3, p. 130

Hollywood's attempts to destabilise traditional American culture, by portraying sex, violence and anarchy, came to an end in 1933. This is confirmed by Rhode, 'An increased respect for authority and a decline in both social and intellectual freedom were noticeable in Hollywood productions during 1933.'[17] Four factors which led to this change in policy can be isolated: the election of the Roosevelt administration, pressure from audiences, the personal aspirations of the studio bosses and the introduction of the Production Code Administration.

In March, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt took office as President of the United States. The search for a leader was over. The New Deal administration sought to boost the flagging morale of the population by 'fostering a spirit of patriotism, unity and commitment to national values.'[18]

A cornerstone in the ideas of the New Dealism was the need to regain confidence. The Wall Street Crash had been caused by the sudden loss of confidence in the marketplace. It was thought, therefore, that an outward show of confidence would engender greater confidence and hence aid the national recovery. The National Recovery Agency (NRA) utilised the high profile of Hollywood by including the motion picture industry in new legislation to reduce cut-throat competition and induce more stability in the market. Although the studios willingly complied with the legislation, attempts by the NRA to reduce the wages of highly paid stars, and hence allow the studios to employ larger workforces, were strongly resisted by the actors.

The huge popularity of the New Deal administration and its optimistic outlook made studio bosses aware of a change in their audiences. There was a desire to be released from tension, fear and insecurity, a desire to enter the new spirit of optimism. They soon realised that if this spirit could be introduced into movies, it would increase audiences and therefore profits.

---

17 9, p. 333
18 10, p. 175

Another factor in the change in policy of the Hollywood studios was the introduction of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934. The Production Code had been drawn up in 1930 to limit the increase in vulgarity made possible by the introduction of sound. The Code was ignored, however, due to the more pressing problem of falling box office figures. In April, 1934, the Legion of Decency threatened to boycott cinemas if the Code was not enforced. The Legion, a Catholic organisation, had obtained 11 million signatures in support of this motion. The studio bosses decided that, having lost millions of dollars in 1933, they would have to capitulate. The PCA was set up and authorised to ban any film and to censor any film which contravened the Code, and to impose fines of up to $25,000 on the offending studio.

The Code set limits on the portrayal of anything likely to be sexually arousing, explicitly violent or vulgar. There were also detailed guidelines on the portrayal of good and evil in motion pictures. The distinction between good and evil was never to become blurred, and no doubt was to be left as to which was right and which was wrong. Adherence to the Code was almost universal as a PCA ban would cause expensive re-shooting and cut into profits.

One final reason for the abrupt change in the policy of the Hollywood studios was the personal ambitions of the movie moguls. The New Deal administration offered them greater opportunities for profit and prestige if they would give up their stance as adversaries of the Establishment and become supporters of traditional American culture.

As a result of the pressures of the New Deal administration, public opinion and the American League of Decency, in 1933 and 1934 Hollywood abandoned its disturbing and adversarial role and, as Sklar points out 'directed enormous powers of

persuasion to preserving the basic moral structure and economic tenets of traditional American culture.[19]

Almost immediately after Roosevelt took office in March, 1933, films reflecting the new spirit of optimism such as Stand Up and Cheer and the Disney cartoon The Three Little Pigs were released. Audience attendance began to increase and the industry began to move into profit again. Rhode links this change in public attitude directly with the changes in Hollywood pictures, 'Box office figures imply that the majority of the public welcomed this retreat from disturbing issues.'[20]

The gangster movie genre was hit hard by the PCA. It was all but impossible to make a punchy crime movie while adhering strictly to the Code. The portrayal of evil in an alluring manner was specifically ruled out, therefore characters such as Tommy Camonte in Scarface could no longer be presented as heroes. The studios had been arguing that the gangsters in films had been portrayed in the worst possible light, however, the popularity of the actors who played gangsters proved that the public was identifying with them despite, or perhaps because of, their ruthlessness. A specific clause also ruled out the portrayal of the forces of justice in a negative manner. In the early gangster movies, the police had been portrayed as almost as corrupt and unpleasant as the gangster himself, and this was often used to evoke sympathy for the gangster. The introduction of the PCA forced Hollywood to create a new genre to replace the gangster movie. The cop or G-man movie was basically the same as the gangster movie, although the emphasis had changed and sympathy now lay with the authorities rather than the gangster.

The effects of the PCA on crime pictures can be best shown by comparing examples of earlier crime pictures with those made following the introduction of the PCA in 1934. Scarface (1931) was perhaps the most controversial of the gangster

---

19 10, p. 175
20 9, p. 336

movies. It contained an unprecedented level of violence and was singled out by censorship campaigners as an example of the kind of picture they wished to see banned. Bullets or Ballots (Warner 1936) was one of the later crime movies which adhered to the Production Code.

5. Bullets or Ballots. Edward G. Robinson as Johnny Blake under cover.

Both films emphasize the business element in organised crime, bootlegging in Scarface and the numbers racket in Bullets or Ballots. The change from the traditional bootlegging of earlier gangster movies to racketeering reflects, firstly, the change in the nature of real-life organised crime following the end of Prohibition and, secondly, a clause in the Code (Applications I.4) which precludes the use of liquor in films unless essential to the plot. Johnny Blake (E.G. Robinson) drinks coffee and smokes a pipe rather than the traditional scotch and cigars. The characters have swapped roles in the later film, with Johnny Blake, the hero and ex-cop, pretending to be a gangster and Nick Fenner (Bogart), the ruthless and evil gangster. In the early gangster movies, attempts to link organised crime with the audiences own lives had been half-

hearted. In Bullets or Ballots, however, the opening sequence (which is shot as if part of a documentary film) openly accuses organised criminals of increasing the prices of perishable goods, causing labour disputes and hence exacerbating the problems of the Depression, relating the film directly to the real lives of the audiences.

Violence is also treated differently in the later film. In Scarface, shootings and beatings are portrayed explicitly with guns, blood and bruising much in evidence. In the later film, however, violent acts are not shown in detail. Punches are shown briefly and from a distance, shootings are portrayed without showing the gunman or the gun and the victims show no signs of blood or bullet holes.

Both films end with the death of the hero. In Scarface, the death of Tony Camonte offers no resolution to the problem of organised crime brought to light in the film. There is an implication throughout the film that other equally ruthless gangsters will take his place in the same way as he gained his power in the beginning of the film. In Bullets or Ballots, however, Johnny Blake loses his life to protect the public from the racketeers. The mend behind the rackets, portrayed as bankers and respectable businessmen, are exposed and brought to justice. Unlike Scarface, in Bullets or Ballots the public order is seen to be restored permanently, offering hope in the fight against organised crime.

To summarise, crime movies after 1934 offered a more optimistic view of a society where justice was always seen to be done. Excitement was created within the plot of the film rather than by the portrayal of pure action. No doubt was left as to which characters represented good and which characters represented evil.

The style of Hollywood comedies also changed during the period following the introduction of the PCA and the election of the New Deal administration. The chaotic comedies of the Marx Brothers failed at the box office until they moved to M.G.M. and under the direction of Irving Thalberg, were absorbed into the mainstream of American comedy. Starting with A Night at the Opera (M.G.M. 1935),

their films became progressively less anarchic. Mae West, who had become a major sex symbol following her sexy and comedic performance in She Done Him Wrong (1933) was prevented by the PCA from portraying her previous on-screen persona. Her outspoken approach to women's sexual freedom, in particular, was unacceptable.

The type of comedy which became prevalent in the latter half of the 1930's was called 'screwball' comedy. It differed from earlier comedies in that it generally attempted to create order out of a chaotic series of events. Whereas comedies such as those made previously by the Marx Brothers turned a perfectly ordered situation into chaos, the screwball comedies reflected the spirit of optimism and return to the middleclass values that had been questioned in the early Thirties. These values were, on the whole, very conservative. As Sklar points out, 'The screwball comedies by and large celebrated the sanctity of marriage, class distinction and the domination of women by men.'[21] He also says that screwball comedies encouraged romantic love and discouraged 'gold digging' (the pursuit of marriage for financial gain), careers for women and divorce. The values they portrayed highlight the complete change of face in Hollywood. Only a few years before, the same studios had regularly condoned, or at least not criticised, prostitution, adultery and gold digging in their movies.

One of the most successful directors of these kinds of screwball comedies was Frank Capra. While most of the comedies of the time completely ignored the social effects of the Depression, Frank Capra often acknowledged that these were hard times. His films, however, did not dwell on deprivation and poverty. They offered, instead, hope of better things to come. Capra's heroes represented a new role model to American youth. They were individuals who, through honesty, integrity and determination, triumphed over their cunning enemies. In Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (Columbia 1936), Mr. Deeds - a small town rube and incompetent tuba player -

---

21 10, p. 188

confounds a firm of corrupt East Coast lawyers who plan to get control of his inherited money. His triumph over the lawyers in the final scene is not, however, due to any special craftiness, but to his plain speaking honesty. Capra's films contained many elements of the New Deal, such as patriotism, morality and the benefits of hard work; however, Capra himself disagreed with the involvement of Hollywood in politics. His interest was nationalistic rather than party political. Overall, Capra's films put across the message that something had gone wrong with America, but that a return to the values which the country had been built on would soon put everything right.

6. Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. Mr. Deeds plays tuba - badly.

Another genre of comedy, the musical comedy, appeared in 1933, when box office figures were at an all-time low. They were, as mentioned previously, an easy vehicle for the portrayal of semi-nude female bodies. This, however, does not explain the continued popularity of these films after the introduction of the PCA, nor their

ability to attract a large cross section of society as opposed to a (largely) adult male audience.

The Depression era musicals can be split into two groups: the glamour musicals and the backstage musicals. The glamour musicals are best typified by the Astaire - Rogers series made by R.K.O.. These movies are essentially screwball comedies based around a plot which includes some musical numbers. The attraction of these films was not their relationship to the lives of the audiences, but rather the guarantee of fantasies which were completely isolated from the realities of living in the Depression era. In effect, they offered a temporary escape into another world for audiences tired of their own difficulties. Sex was not used to gain audiences in these films and in fact, Astaire and Rogers only kiss once in all their ten films together. They were, therefore, largely unaffected by the introduction of the PCA.

The second group of musical comedies is the backstage musicals made by Warner Brothers, starting with 42nd Street in 1933. The Warner Brothers studio was strongly in favour of the Roosevelt administration and these films were considered to encapsulate some of the New Deal spirit. In fact, 42nd Street was advertised as 'A New Deal in Entertainment.' The films contain several common threads, the main one being the central theme to all the backstage musicals, the difficulties of producing musical stage shows. In all the films, the characters triumph over all adversities and the shows go on stage, usually received to rave reviews. This narrative cycle is probably one of the main reasons for the overwhelming popularity of backstage musicals. It convinced audiences, who were eager to believe, that through hard work and clear thinking, any obstacle could be overcome. Almost an analogy of the New Deal administration's approach to the Depression. Another theme which regularly came up in these films was finance, contracts and free enterprise. The American belief in the strength of the free enterprise system, which had made the country, was shaken

7. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers

by the Depression. The free enterprise policies of the Hoover administration had been disastrous in the early years of the Depression. It seems likely that the Hollywood

8. 42nd Street. Hoofers.

wanted to restore faith in this, one of the tenets of American culture. One final theme is the debate between romantic love and gold digging. Sub-plots were often based around breach of promise suits. In all these films, audiences were re-assured that romantic love, preferably followed by marriage, was the correct course. Golddiggers were usually seen to be unsuccessful. It can be seen that in these themes, the backstage musical comedies contain all the ingredients likely to appeal to an audience willing to be wood into optimism.

Apart from Golddiggers of 1935 (Warner 1935), the backstage musicals precede the arrival of the PCA. In Footlight Parade (Warner 1933), there are several direct attacks on the calls for censorship. The censorship lobby represented by a lawyer, the spoilt and rather stupid son of a shareholder of the company, calls for

some of the dance sequences to be scrapped on the grounds of vulgarity. He is ignored throughout the film and eventually ejected forcefully from the rehearsal rooms.

In common with Warner Brothers policy, the films in this series tend to project a down market image: the characters are hard working and lower class, the rich are ridiculed and shown to be mean and corrupt. The Depression and hard times are referred to and the implication is that hard work and honest leadership can beat the Depression. The recurring Depression theme of creating confidence also appears in

9. Golddiggers of 1935. The Busby Berkeley look.

this series. The idea that by projecting confidence a new confidence is created, is shown in Footlight Parade when the chorus girls are asked to look prosperous and glamourous on stage. They reply 'How can we look prosperity when he's (the Director) got Depression all over his face?'. In all this series of musicals, Warner Brothers try to support the New Deal administration and create optimism, not by avoiding the Depression, but rather by saying that it can be beaten by hard work.

CONCLUSION

In the period directly following the New Deal, Hollywood moved away from the critical, questioning stance it had previously taken. The question 'What went wrong?' was still asked in films, but the blame had been shifted away from society in general and pointed towards specific groups. The gangster, who had previously been a hero fighting a disordered society, was now specifically accused of helping create the Depression. Charges of corruption, previously aimed at the Establishment in general, were now redirected towards certain greedy financiers. This was despite the lack of any evidence that criminality and corruption had contributed in any major way to the Depression. The real reasons behind the Depression remained unexplored. The increased polarisation of capital towards a rich minority, a major cause of the Depression was ignored to the extent that the rich were often portrayed as benevolent, eccentric and loveable. This refocussing of blame away from the Establishment served the purposes of the New Deal administration whose first priority was to re-establish public trust in government.

In many ways, the New Deal was a public relations campaign. The actual administrative work could have been handled equally well by the preceding Hoover government, had Hoover himself approved of government intervention. In public relations, it is imperative to have access to the media. This was not achieved by direct pressure, but rather by convincing Hollywood that the New Deal message was what the public wanted to hear.

The effectiveness of post-New Deal film in supporting the national recovery must be viewed in terms of the three aims of the New Deal, relief, recovery and reform. The part played by Hollywood in relieving the population of its apprehensions should not be under-estimated. A. Gifford, head of the Organisation on Unemployment Relief, stated that movies were 'the greatest necessity after food and clothing' and proposed to give out free cinema tickets to the unemployed.

Commenting on a similar situation in England, George Orwell in his book The Road to Wigan Pier, stated that England had been spared from a communist revolution by the cinema and the availability of cheap consumer goods during the Depression. The films that were probably most effective in this respect were those which offered pure fantasy with no reference to contemporary problems - films such as the Astaire - Rogers series or the light hearted screwball comedies.

The part played by movies in the national recovery is less easy to define. It is true, however, that a major cause of the Depression was public apathy following the Wall Street Crash. The role of Hollywood in raising the public morale was specifically acknowledged by Roosevelt. Films which created optimism and assured the public that the Depression could be beaten through hard work must have aided the government in its efforts to revive the economy.

The reform element of the New Deal policies was never put into action. The New Deal administration had concentrated on relief and recovery in the first four years of government and in 1937, a loss of general support prevented the introduction of the radical reform program which had originally been planned.

The Introduction of the PCA had a major effect on the visual and verbal content of movies made after August, 1934. It is likely, however, that it would have been unnecessary had the industry introduced an age rating system similar to the one used now. Fears that the age ratings would reduce box office figures brought about a situation where all films had to be made suitable for all ages, that is to 'P.G.' or 'U' ratings.

Towards the end of the 1930's, Hollywood began to return to some of the disturbing social issues which it had dealt with at the beginning of that decade. The all-important public morale had been restored. The economy, although by no means fully recovered, was in a growth situation. Europe was on the brink of war. The Depression, though it had dragged on longer than expected, was at last showing signs of an end in sight. It was in this atmosphere of the impending return to prosperity that Hollywood deemed it time to examine some of the real effects of the Depression.

Several Hollywood films of this era, the late 1930's, dealt with the problems of inner city slums. The deterioration of tenement buildings in large cities was not a product solely of the Depression. In fact, this problem had existed since the turn of the century. However, the lack of new housing and the scarcity of employment during the Depression era exacerbated the problem to an unprecedented level. Another factor which played a part in bringing the slum problem to the attention was immigration policy. The number of immigrants coming into the United States was vastly reduced due to the lack of employment in the country. This changed the nature of the slums. The populations of the inner city tenement districts were transitory. When a new wave of immigrants arrived in the country, they would naturally gravitate towards the areas with the cheapest accommodation. As the immigrants improved their economic status, they would leave the slums for areas with better housing and leaving room for new immigrants to move in. While this 'system' was operating, the problems of inner-city housing could be ignored since the slums were just a necessary first step on the ladder. However, when the number of emigrants entering the country were reduced and the ability of the population in the inner-city areas to find work and move out was inhibited by the depressed economy, the problem became a permanent one.

The two films which deal with these problems most directly are Dead End (Goldwyn 1937) and Angels With Dirty Faces (Warner 1938). Both films, like the

early gangster movies, play on the public's fear of a wave of organised crime. Both films also use the same basic plot, that of a gangster returning to his old neighbourhood, as a vehicle for the main theme. This theme was the portrayal of the gangster as a product of social conditions. The earlier gangster films had left open the question of whether the gangster was a born criminal or a product of a criminal environment.

In Dead End, the gangster Baby Face Martin (Bogart) is shown to have no redeeming qualities. It is stated, however, that as a youth he was no more criminal

10. Dead End

than his peers. The street gang who hang around the neighbourhood are portrayed as having the potential to be either criminals or honest citizens, depending on how they are influenced. Throughout the film it is stated that the only way to prevent the youths becoming criminal is to remove them from the slums. The paradox is that the only character who has ever managed to leave the neighbourhood and become a success is

Baby Face Martin, and he achieved this by becoming a gangster. Honest hard work is shown to be futile by Dave, an architect who is unable to find work because of the Depression. The authorities are portrayed as punitive and ineffectual. In both Angels With Dirty Faces and Dead End, the reform schools are portrayed as institutions which take in boys for minor offences and turn out hardened criminals.

Angels With Dirty Faces contains many of the same elements as Dead End. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the slum, however, is lost due to the inclusion of sequences which occur outside the neighbourhood. The basic plot is similar to Dead End. Rocky Sullivan, a gangster, returns to the neighbourhood after a spell in jail. He becomes the hero of the local youths who are intent on following his footsteps. Eventually, he ends up condemned to death by electrocution. The parish priest convinces him to feign cowardice in his final moments so that the youths lose their admiration for him and return to the parish youth club.

11. Angels With Dirty Faces. Rocky heads for the chair.

Throughout the film, it is emphasized that the youth club is not enough to keep the boys from crime. The whole environment in which the boys live must be changed to prevent them from turning to crime.

These films highlighting inner-city living conditions and their connection to organised crime coincided with a bill steered through Congress by Senator Wagner allocating half a billion dollars to urban renewal programs. Eric Rhode suggests that it was no coincidence that Sam Goldwyn accompanied Senator Wagner to the opening night of Dead End.[22] Warner Brothers, who made Angels With Dirty Faces, were also very closely aligned to the Democratic party as mentioned earlier. Angels With Dirty Faces was also the forerunner of a new cycle of gangster movies in which there was a good gangster and a bad gangster. In films such as The Roaring Twenties (Warner 1939) and High Sierra (Warner 1941), both the 'honourable' gangster and the out and out 'baddie' were killed. This format gave gangster movies a new lease of life, allowing them to avoid the strictures of the PCA without losing all the punch of earlier films.

An area which had been overlooked by Hollywood throughout the 1930's was the state of affairs in agriculture. Most films were set indoors or in urban areas. When the countryside and farmers were portrayed, they usually conformed to the concept of a pastoral paradise. The standard scenes included sleeping in haystacks, lazy rivers overhung with trees, and friendly farmers wearing dungarees and chewing straw.

The reality of agriculture in America during the 1930's was completely different. Many farmers were sharecroppers, tenants of large corporations and banks. This system, however, was extremely inefficient in terms of profit for the landowners. Modern technology at this time had advanced far enough to allow totally mechanised

---

22 9, p. 306

farms to be operated very efficiently. The sharecroppers' farms were far too small for mechanisation. The companies which owned the land, spurred on by economic difficulties, evicted large numbers of sharecroppers to make way for larger mechanised farms. The new farmers were employed directly by the landowners, leaving large numbers of sharecroppers unemployed and homeless. The sharecroppers were forced to migrate northwards towards the industrial cities such as Chicago and Detroit and westwards to pick fruit in California.

Throughout the 1930's Hollywood ignored this vast social problem, preferring to make pictures about less controversial topics. This problem was alluded to by Frank Capra in Mr. Deeds Goes To Town (Columbia 1936). Mr. Deeds decides, having heard an emotive tale of woe from one half-starved farmer, to spend his fortune returning evicted farmers to the land. The subject is left completely unexplored in the film, however. The recognition of this problem in a picture shows that Hollywood was aware of it, but that they chose not to make movies about it.

In the last few years of the decade, spurred on by the success of several melancholy social realist novels, some directors began to examine the problems in the rural areas. One of these directors was John Ford. He had made several historical films and had revived the Western, a genre which had been largely ignored throughout the decade, with his excellent movie Stagecoach (1939) starring the young John Wayne. He then made two very pessimistic social problem films - How Green Is My Valley and The Grapes of Wrath (20th Century Fox 1940). The Grapes of Wrath was adapted for film from a novel by John Steinbeck. The film dealt with the plight of a family of Oklahoma sharecroppers who, having been forcibly removed from their land, migrate west to California to find work.

In this film, issues are dealt with in a far more sophisticated manner than was normal in Hollywood movies at the time. For example, take the question of blame. In standard Hollywood narrative, part of the film would be given over to ascertaining the

guilty party, and this party would then be brought to justice, thereby resolving the narrative and ending the film. In the early part of the The Grapes of Wrath, Muley attempts in vain to find somebody to blame so that he can shoot them. The problem is shown to be more complex, however. The estate agent who is evicting him is only an employee of the company that owns the land. The company only wants the extra money to pay the bank and the bank's difficulties are a product of the Depression. Muley then tries to shoot the driver of a caterpillar tractor that is going to demolish his house. The driver explains that he is not to blame, that he has a wife and children to feed, he must do his job.

The film is also ambivalent in its portrayal of the authorities. The police are shown to support the Establishment even when it is clearly not only morally corrupt, but actually acting illegally. On the other hand central government, the ultimate authority, is portrayed as a benign force in the form of a well run halting site with showers and fair democratic administration.

Labour disputes are also dealt with in this film. The fruit pickers are forced out on strike due to low wages. Scab labour is brought in to break the strike. The strike breakers are shown to be guiltless since they must feed their families. The strike is blamed on communist agitators and the strikers are denounced as 'Reds,' while the strikers do not know what a 'Red' is. The implication is that the labourers are forced to organise out of necessity rather than due to any political conviction.

The film ends with Tommy Joad on the run from the police and the rest of the Joad family still looking for work. No resolution to the problem is offered. The film attempts to portray the situation in all its complexity.

CONCLUSIONS

The two films dealing with problems in the urban environment, mentioned in this chapter, are examples of the normal Hollywood approach to social problem films. They are examined only in terms of a familiar narrative structure. The insistence on creating and resolving a narrative limits the effectiveness of many films which include an examination of a social problem. Often, the serious content becomes a backdrop for the story. Of these two films, Dead End is the more successful. It achieves this by including the social issues in the plot. In this way, the cause and effect cycle it wishes to highlight is integral to the narrative. Angels With Dirty Faces highlights similar social problems, however, it is a gangster film with social issues thrown in rather than a social film including gangsters.

The Grapes of Wrath does not follow a standard narrative structure. Freed from the bounds of creating a neat resolution to an interesting story, this film is able to explore in-depth the complexities of a real problem. No solution is offered for the problems portrayed in the film, nor is any solution offered to the problems of the characters within the plot.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR CONCLUSIONS IN EACH CHAPTER

CHAPTER 1

- Hollywood utilised the natural desire of poor people to become rich. Fantasies about the wealthy were more attractive during the Depression due to a general decline in the standard of living.
- Hollywood colluded with manufacturers to increase sales of consumer goods and hence aid the economic recovery.

CHAPTER 2

- In the early Thirties, Hollywood attempted to boost flagging box office figures by breaking convention and attempted to curry favour with audiences by opposing the Establishment.

CHAPTER 3

- Hollywood changed direction and came out in support of the government and traditional American culture.

CHAPTER 4

- In the late Thirties, Hollywood began to take a serious look at some of the real effects of the Depression.

REACTIONS WITHIN THE FILMS TO THE DEPRESSION

1. RELEASE

- In the early Thirties period, some films attempted to exorcize the demon of Depression by reflecting the doubts, fears and frustrations of the audiences.

2. EVASION

- By producing films with no reference to the real-life problems of the Depression era, Hollywood offered a temporary escape from that reality.

3. OPTIMISM

- After the election of the New Deal administration, the Hollywood studios and especially Warner Brothers attempted to aid the administration by convincing the public that the Depression could be beaten by hard work.

EXAMINATION OF THE DEPRESSION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FILMS

In films which acknowledged the existence of the Depression, the Hollywood view was always in terms of effects rather than causes.

MOTIVES

The major motive for all Hollywood films relating to the Depression in whatever way was profit. To some extent politics played a part, especially in the New Deal era, but the major reason Hollywood jumped on the New Deal band wagon was due to its being what the public wanted to hear and hence would pay for.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Babington, Bruce, Blue Skies and Silver Linings, Manchester, University Press, 1985.

2. Bel Geddes, Norman, Horizons, New York, Dover, 1932.

3. Bergman, Andrew, We're in the Money, New York, University Press, 1971.

4. Heskett, John, Industrial Design, London, Thames and Hudson, 1987.

5. Hill, C.P., A History of the United States, London, Edward Arnold, 1974.

6. Izod, John, Hollywood and the Box Office, London, Macmillan, 1988.

7. Mandelbaum, Howard, Screen Deco, New York, St. Martins Press, 1985.

8. Mast, Gerald (Ed.), The Movies in our Midst, Chicago, University Press, 1971.

9. Rhode, Eric, A History of Cinema, England, Penguin, 1976.

10. Sklar, Robert, Movie-Made America