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Introduction

The Great Flight of Culture

In December 1941, just as the events of Pearl Harbor drew the United States into World War II, Henry Luce's *Fortune* magazine ran a feature entitled "The Great Flight of Culture." Its subject was the wave of European migrants that had recently been arriving on American shores: "It may prove to be one of the most significant mass movements in history—not quantitatively, but qualitatively. For this is not just people fleeing famine or oppression toward a traditional asylum. This is a transplantation of a whole culture from one continent to another."¹ The author of the piece saw this flight of intellectuals, writers, and artists from the turmoil across the Atlantic as both a great opportunity and a grave burden for the United States. The question the article posed was "whether, during American trusteeship, Europe's transplanted culture will flourish here with a vigor of its own, or languish for lack of acceptance, or hybridize with American culture, or simply vanish from the earth." The tone of the article and its images of husbandry may seem melodramatic and crude from our current vantage point, but they indicate the stark terms in which the intellectual migration was conceived in its time, and the value attached to the European cultural tradition in US public discourse. The true purpose of the article, it becomes clear as one reads, is to offer its American readers a way of negotiating the alienating forms of European modernist art, which "has developed in certain definite directions that are not generally familiar to or accepted by large portions of the American public." "For some unexplained reason," it ponders, "the American who insists on having his art 'look like something' is the same American who loves the fantasy of Donald Duck and the cartoon strip." The relationship between American mass culture and European modernism was already in 1941 being presented as a dialectical opposition that might be resolved through mutual accommodation. The importance of this

encounter between the European bearers of culture and the popular sensibilities of the New World could not have been stated more boldly—the United States had been given “custodianship for a civilization.”

In this book, I recover the stakes of this crisis moment in transatlantic cultural history by returning to the questions posed by the *Fortune* article. What was the fate of European high culture in the United States at midcentury, and how did its representatives negotiate the dramatic shifts in the cultural field they entered? I argue that, counter to the dominant narrative of the “Intellectual Migration” of the 1930s and early 1940s, the experience of displacement brought about in a range of transatlantic figures a complex engagement with the emergence of a fully fledged mass culture in the United States, which in several cases had a lasting effect on postwar art and literature.² Until relatively recently, the received account of European exiles in midcentury America has been built upon potent emblems of ivory-tower isolation; a prominent example is Theodor Adorno and Thomas Mann working together on *Doktor Faustus* in a suburb of Los Angeles, intent on shutting out the effects of a pernicious culture industry operating around them.³ Alternatively, one might think of French surrealists in New York, blithely indifferent to American culture, waiting for the opportunity to return to Paris as soon as World War II concluded.⁴ Such images have contributed to a persistent misconception by which the United States at midcentury functions as modernism’s banal other, its brash consumerism, burgeoning entertainment industry, and perceived lack of cosmopolitanism forming a backdrop against which European tradition could perform its destiny. This is cultural history as written by Humbert Humbert in Nabokov’s *Lolita*, but without the self-parodic jokes.

In this book, I reorient our perspective on the midcentury cultural field by showing how it was shaped by dynamics that have not been accounted for, occluded as they have been by our inheritance of Cold War literary criticism and art history, with its reified categories of nation and cultural hierarchy. In case studies of C. L. R. James, Theodor Adorno, George Grosz, Raymond Chandler, Vladimir Nabokov, Simone de Beauvoir, and Saul Steinberg, I examine how these figures responded to US mass culture and adapted their aesthetic and intellectual practices to take into account distinctive features of the cultural landscape, such as trips to the drugstore and movie theater, or the dazzling emptiness of neon lights and gigantic billboard advertisements. Mass culture is to be grasped in several different ways if we are to understand its relationship to individuals and their work. It must be

understood both in the terms proposed by American intellectuals of the period—that is, as an abstract stratum defined by its distinction from high art—and as the source of concrete experiences with their own singular aesthetic and affective charges. But we need further to bear in mind the sense in which, in the mid-twentieth-century United States, mass culture emerged as, in Michael Denning's formulation, "the very element in which we all breathe," an indissoluble and unavoidable constituent of variegated life across the nation, whether one's personal hero was Paul Valéry or Rudi Vallée.⁵ In this last sense, we move away from conceiving of mass culture as represented by aesthetic production—best-selling fiction, Hollywood films, billboard advertisements—and entertain a more capacious definition in which it comes to represent the structuring of everyday life by relentless commodification. Only by moving between all three of these culture concepts will we be able to reach a worthwhile understanding of the impact of American exile on the work of intellectuals, artists, and writers.

American mass culture is to be contrasted with European culture in the distinctive styles and contents of its practitioners—say, for example, the kitsch realism of Norman Rockwell's celebrations of small-town life in Vermont or the cartoon violence of Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* comic strip—as well as in the sense of uneven development, by which we are reminded of the incremental and often ambivalent awareness in European nations after both World Wars of Americanization as modernity itself, marching inexorably across the globe under the signs of first Fordism and then Hollywood and Coca-Cola. As late as 1958, Dwight Macdonald echoed some of this European perspective back to his own nation, writing on his return from a year in London and Tuscany a vitriolic polemic against the United States, which, he claimed, despite being the wealthiest and most equitable in history, was "a people with no style." "The same *tendencies* exist in Europe," he noted, "the same destruction of the order of the past, physical and social, by the cancerous growth of mass society—but they are much less advanced."⁶ Macdonald's article exemplifies how intellectual discourse of the time often conceptualized mass culture as a problem of style and of modernization, without always fully working through the implications of the move. Atlantic crossings thus tended to cause comparative interferences and disorientations registered in geographical space and historical time, which in their turn had the potential to create some fascinating disjunctive effects. Dostoevsky is discovered haunting a Hollywood musical, the aesthetics of French symbolism flicker rhythmically among the neon signs of a

small town in the dead of night, and echoes of Mondrian's grids are observed not in the Museum of Modern Art but in the form of a boardroom sales chart. The strange afterlives of European modernism and the historical avant-garde, I argue, are to be found in such disorienting and uncanny juxtapositions, which predate the advent of postmodernism, pop art, and counterculture. They inhabit instead those fraught and indeterminate years between the rise of National Socialism and Stalinism in the 1930s, and the birth of the New Left in the late 1950s, the years Kenneth Fearing referred to in 1944 as "this curious interim between two ages, when history has dropped the curtain upon one of them but seems in no hurry to give the next one its shape and color."⁷

One of the great achievements of modernist scholarship over the last twenty years or so has been to establish various ways in which the canonical works of high modernism were always knowingly complicit with their commodified others and took commodity forms of their own.⁸ Thanks to such scholarship, we now understand much more about how Pound and Eliot marketed their poetry using deluxe editions, about Gertrude Stein's entrance into the world of celebrity, and about Picasso's accomplished self-fashioning in the mass media. So pervasive, it transpires, was the modernist entanglement with commodity culture, that it seems unlikely that anyone ever believed it might be otherwise.⁹ And yet this is precisely what happened in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, when a small number of influential critics and scholars managed to shape our understanding of what modernism is by insisting on its radical autonomy from the social and even by using it as a defensive weapon in a heroic struggle against mass culture. As Seth Moglen has shown in an excellent revisionist study, there are narratives of interwar modernism that have been deliberately buried by this postwar critical hegemony.¹⁰ In turning to the émigré art and culture of midcentury, however, we cannot wishfully blank out that moment of New Critical and formalist ascendancy (tempting though it may be) for the simple reason that such a move would also obscure the very object we wish to see. Accordingly, important figures in what we now recognize as the cultural Cold War, such as Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald, are recurring points of reference throughout this book, as are the American institutions that helped them to achieve such widespread legitimacy, such as *Partisan Review*, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). I will not rehearse here the history of the mass culture debates or of the rise of the New York intellectuals, familiar

stories as they are.¹¹ I do want to emphasize, however, that the émigré figures I treat in this book were themselves caught up in this strange moment, being part of a process in which their own artistic and intellectual tradition was reappraised and recreated in a transatlantic light. They found themselves at once to be both creative subjects and premature historical objects, having experienced the era of modernism twice, as it were, as European tragedy in the interwar period and as American farce in the forties and fifties. Kafka and Proust take on different meanings for Adorno once he recognizes them in cheap paperback translations on the shelves of pseudo-Bohemians in postwar Los Angeles. Mondrian is never the same for Steinberg after his official canonization at MoMA at 1945. The photomontage in the United States, as Grosz found out in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, was always both old and new at the same time.

In the course of this book, then, we stand to learn something about the broad history of modernism itself and in particular about the way the “flight of culture” and the pivotal decade of the 1940s signal both its end and its beginning.¹² I wish to illuminate a historical truth about the cultural field that became obscured once New Criticism and aesthetic formalism became accepted as orthodox early during the Cold War. In the turmoil of the 1940s, it was far from clear what constituted a legitimate aesthetic regime and what didn’t, whether an American crime novel could be considered high literature or a *New Yorker* cartoon be considered high art. This moment is one of the most complex and least understood in modern US cultural history, characterized as it is by a radical instability that poses great challenges to the scholar. Rather than attempt to impose a retrospective order on a fluid midcentury cultural field, my aim here is to use concrete analysis of creators and their works, institutions, and reception to map out shifting patterns and contradictions. In this respect, the book echoes work undertaken by Michael Denning, George Lipsitz, and Alan Wald in their formidable archaeologies of socialist culture in the United States, and indeed their reconstruction of buried class formations in the 1940s has been valuable to my research.¹³ The focus of my analysis, however, is ultimately on transnational rather than national dynamics, in the conviction that the United States’ changing relationship with the rest of the world remains underplayed as a major source of change, not just in particular creative works but in the very structure of the cultural field.¹⁴ When the French novelist and intellectual André Malraux spoke in January 1945 of a new “Atlantic Civilization” being born out of the global crisis, “different from all its begin-

nings, even from the United States," he, like many others, imagined a radically new, transnational configuration of culture.¹⁵ Arguably, his utopian vision never found fruition, and yet it remains necessary to recover and re-examine such flashes of imagination and desire, if only to better understand the part they played in larger transnational patterns of change.¹⁶

The Cultural Field and the Space of Possibles

In using the term *cultural field* periodically throughout the book, I draw on the work of the French thinker Pierre Bourdieu and his legacy in the sociology of culture.¹⁷ In Bourdieu's work, the cultural field serves as a spatial metaphor with which to conceptualize the way artists, writers, and intellectuals assume in their practice certain positions that can only be plotted and understood in relation to one another and in relation to a larger cultural system. Inherent in Bourdieu's theorization of the cultural field is the struggle between its actors to assume positions that will bring them certain rewards, such as success in the market or literary prestige. It is useful to us here because it offers a way of negotiating the thorny question of aesthetic and intellectual autonomy that hangs over every attempt to address the intellectual in exile. The idea of the cultural field belongs to a relational mode of thought by which reality is understood to be constituted primarily by the fluid relations *between* objects, rather than by externally given categories. In dealing with the midcentury United States, a period in which the dominant intellectual discourse was structured by division and containment at the level of both cultural hierarchies and national allegiance, the spatial figure of the cultural field helps us to understand the sense in which a whole system of relations is present in each of its constituent positions. This approach reveals the hierarchical categories imposed by American intellectuals of the period as an effective strategy in the battle for an advantageous position in the field rather than as a legitimate way of ordering culture, but it also demands that we understand the work of exilic figures in a radically contextualized manner that takes into account their relationships both to mass cultural forms and to rarefied elites, whether those relationships are ones of affinity or hostility.

The notion of the cultural field makes some room for the preservation of individual autonomy in the process of aesthetic and intellectual production, but only insofar as the actor makes use of the resources within reach and lays claim to positions that are readily available, which Bourdieu calls the "space of possibles."¹⁸ This limited or relative autonomy is important for this

study as a way of understanding the constraints under which certain artists and intellectuals operated, and how those constraints affected their work. In chapter 2, for example, I trace the ways in which George Grosz disavowed his earlier Dada experimentalism once he had emigrated to the United States and chose instead to attempt to reinvent himself as a popular illustrator in the vein of Norman Rockwell. This move was based partly on the historical obsolescence of Dada as an available coordinate in the American cultural field of the 1930s and partly on the need for personal security as the Nazi party labeled his work “degenerate” and destroyed his reputation back in Germany. Nevertheless, Grosz’s painful negotiation of the exigencies of the American cultural field deserves careful attention in order to appreciate the perverse consistency of his Dada principles in resisting the ongoing institutionalization of modernist art in the United States. Grosz’s example demonstrates how a shift in practice can be conceived paradoxically as a way of preserving a consistent orientation in a changing field. One must move in order to remain in the same spot. In a comparable way, the decision Raymond Chandler made in 1934 to relinquish the dream he had nurtured in his youth of being a late romantic poet after Tennyson, and to become instead a writer of pulp detective stories, was determined by the options available to him as an alcoholic, unemployed oil executive living in Depression-era Los Angeles. As I argue in chapter 3, his decision was based largely on the form permitting him certain freedoms to experiment with style, as well as bringing him the immediate if limited financial rewards he required. On the other hand, the pulp genre was at that time unable to provide the intellectual legitimacy he had craved from poetry. My reading of Chandler’s work focuses on how the practice of hardboiled fiction provided an unlikely improvised response to aesthetic and social habits inherited from his days as a private-school boy in Edwardian London. The turn to mass cultural forms in the American work of Grosz and Chandler in midcentury, then, emerge as innovative possible answers to the questions of how to be a New York Dadaist after the historical death of Dada and how to be a fin-de-siècle aesthete in 1930s Los Angeles.

For all its uses, though, Bourdieu’s work is unsatisfactory for my purposes, due to its unacknowledged universalizing of principles derived from mid-nineteenth-century Paris. His notion of an autonomous restricted field for high art, in which economic principles are reversed and the “loser wins,” can be attributed almost directly to Flaubert and does not translate easily into the Arnoldian cultural politics of the British late Victorian period that

influenced James and Chandler, or the eruptions of Dada across Europe during World War I, which played a crucial role in forming the dispositions of Grosz and Steinberg.¹⁹ Neither does the concept of the restricted field offer a way of structuring analysis of the unstable US cultural system in the mid-twentieth century, though we will recognize several of its rhetorical gestures in the high criticism of the period.²⁰ Indeed, Bourdieu's own intellectual habits and preferences can often be noted echoing those of the preeminent American art critic of that period, Clement Greenberg. In particular, Bourdieu's description of the restricted field of high art as one in which the avant-garde gradually refines itself according to its medium, "through a return to sources and to the purity of its origins," making the field "more and more dependent on the specific history of the field, and more and more independent of external history," rehearses with some precision the contours of Greenberg's formalism.²¹ Both critics sought ways to reconcile a fundamentally historicist disposition with an impulse to uncover an exclusively formal logic governing aesthetic decision making among elite artists. In this regard, they were not entirely successful in resolving the contradictions embedded in their own respective habitus—between Trotskyism and aesthetic formalism in Greenberg's case, social anthropology and *l'art pour l'art* in Bourdieu's.²² My larger goal, however, is to point out the critical limitations of a cultural field conceived solely in terms of nation and to show how the introduction of transatlantic dynamics to our understanding of the mid-twentieth-century United States demands a rigorous new interrogation of the internal division of culture between high and low, restricted production and large scale.

In order to grapple with such a challenge, it will be necessary to turn to two more properly dialectical thinkers, C. L. R. James and Theodor Adorno. Both were American émigrés throughout the period in question, arriving in the same year, 1938. In chapter 1, I explore the relationship between their historical experiences of exile and their dialectical theories of culture. Superficially, James and Adorno stand as polar opposites in their attitudes to the idea of an American culture industry, one characterized by extreme pessimism and the other an outspoken promoter of the potential value of mass culture. However, one of the objectives of the chapter is to shed light on important affinities between them. The critical value they shared was a determination to address the division of culture itself as the most pressing social and philosophical problem facing them in the 1940s. Moreover, their ability to grasp it emerged from their transatlantic trajectories, which cre-

ated the foundations from which to launch Hegelian readings of Hollywood, as well as pointed critiques of modernism. Adorno and James sought ways to transform social and intellectual alienation into valuable critical resources but were ultimately driven from the United States altogether, under the increasingly hostile conditions of the early Cold War.

The remaining chapters of the book deal with writers and artists who negotiated in different ways the division of culture identified by James and Adorno. Chapter 2 traces the misunderstood career of George Grosz from his Dada treatment of American motifs during World War I, through his early attempts to establish himself as a popular illustrator in New York in 1933-34, to his nihilist photomontages of 1957. Chapter 3 carries out a comparable analysis of Raymond Chandler, charting the trajectory from his early English essays and poems through his hardboiled writing of the 1940s and 1950s, conceiving of his fiction as a displaced form of aestheticism in constant dialogue with the shifting grounds of cultural prestige and legitimacy in the period. In both chapters, I show that what emerges from a transatlantic critical perspective is a deep current of continuity coexisting with the visible ruptures in their creative practices. In chapter 4, I turn to two postwar road narratives written by Simone de Beauvoir and Vladimir Nabokov, respectively. In reading *America Day by Day* (1947) and *Lolita* (1955), I understand the road-trip genre to offer a means by which the European high-brow can orient her or himself in the newly commodified landscape of American culture and to plot coordinates in the cultural field. Both works portray the transatlantic intellectual as simultaneously critical of mass-consumer culture and irresistibly seduced by it, entangled in the very system that she or he attempts to objectify. Nevertheless, in taking account of the habitus of the two writers, it becomes possible to grasp the logic of their divergent receptions, including Beauvoir's exclusion from postwar intellectual life in the United States and Nabokov's contrasting prestige. Finally, chapter 5 examines the early American career of the Romanian émigré artist and illustrator Saul Steinberg, from his arrival during World War II to his work for the US pavilion in the Brussels World's Fair of 1958. Here I am interested in Steinberg's remarkable strategies for exploiting changes in the structure of the cultural field, by which he used his émigré status and institutional relationships as means to reach positions of compromise between the seemingly conflicting demands of security and legitimacy.

The diversity of this set of cultural practitioners is intended as one of the strengths of the book. Studies dealing with exilic culture in the United

States in this period tend to deal with more discrete groups organized according to nation, language, or, occasionally, medium. The history of the criticism is dominated by German and Austrian émigrés, the so-called Hitler refugees, who made up the Institute for Social Research in exile and also included literary celebrities such as Thomas Mann and Berthold Brecht.²³ This state of affairs is itself a reflection of the evolution of literary and cultural studies in the postwar period, where the Frankfurt School and critical theory have occupied dominant and prestigious positions. My inclusion of George Grosz, who referred to this group as the “croaking giants of the so-called avant-garde,” serves as one way to unsettle an orthodox pattern, just as the comparative pairing of Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectics with the perverse optimism of the Trinidadian intellectual C. L. R. James is intended to wrench him away from his familiar contexts among like-minded thinkers.²⁴ More broadly, the choice of individuals reflects my desire to uncover structures of correlation concealed by disciplinary policing. What might the work of the Russian novelist Nabokov and that of the Romanian artist Steinberg have in common, for example? (One answer—their wholesale rejection of the possibility of representational authenticity in the American postwar period.) The decision to focus primarily on the practices of writing, drawing, and painting, on the other hand, marks the inevitable limits of my own disciplinary competence. One might imagine a greater study making additional analyses of the music of Igor Stravinsky and the cinema of Fritz Lang, but the task of writing such a book is left for another.

Hardboiled Historicism, Aliens, and Exiles

Complicity, for my émigré figures as for the contemporary scholar of this period, is the starting point from which all understanding of midcentury US culture must depart. There are no dreams of artistic autonomy that are not threatened as soon as they are conceived. There are, ultimately, no clear consciences. If this sounds a little hardboiled, then I make no apology. The contemporary crime novelist Walter Mosley wrote recently that hardboiled existence begins at the moment when one realizes the destruction of one’s ideals: “In a hardboiled world there’s no black and white, no shade of gray, no innocence. In this world there are only choices between evils, and the secret, unobtainable rulebook was written by Satan himself.”²⁵ Raymond Chandler responded to the passing of fin-de-siècle aestheticism—what he called “the age of grace”—by turning to the hardboiled genre, but my other figures are hardboiled, too, in the more oblique sense that the doubled ex-

periences of flight from historical catastrophe in Europe and the near-total commodification of the artwork in the United States left them in a hollowed, fallen world that demanded nevertheless to be inhabited.²⁶ Accommodations had to be made, modes of survival improvised. Aesthetic and intellectual style, at the level of voice and diction, color and line, did not simply register these exigencies but became the medium in which adjustments, resistances, and reorientations were actively worked through. For Mosley, hardboiled language “cuts to the bone because it is the idiom of survival,” and it is precisely this sense of stakes that I have found missing in the sociological turn in literary studies.²⁷

Lawrence Rainey, in his groundbreaking 1998 book *Institutions of Modernism*, was surely right to criticize the “fairy tales of good and evil” that had theretofore dominated accounts of modernism and consumerism.²⁸ However, I am also wary of the conceptual aridity that sometimes creeps into the sociology of literature and culture after Bourdieu, reflected in the interplay of his two dominant metaphorical tropes, those of abstract economics and games. It seems to me that an untempered dependence on such discourses threatens to become itself a rather empty investment in culture and, ultimately, a derogation of our responsibilities as students and scholars in the humanities. A more hardboiled history of the cultural field, then, would seek to be clear-eyed about the commodification of culture at midcentury and the inevitability of complicity emerging at various levels, while also accounting for the idiom of émigré survival, the concrete world of restricted but necessary choices made by individuals in their lives and work. In a hardboiled sense, then, this book is as much about the practice of cultural coping as it is about the sociology of high and low.

If hardboiled fiction provides one route into understanding the stakes of this book, then the other great mass genre of the mid-twentieth century—science fiction—provides another. The period I am addressing, after all, corresponds to the “golden age” of science fiction, in which the term *alien* took on the popular meaning of extraterrestrial being just as laws such as the 1940 Smith Act and the 1952 McCarran Walter Act gave the US state powers to designate, incarcerate, and deport foreign-born individuals as aliens.²⁹ The convergence between the two meanings of alien was exemplified by the extraordinary reception of Simone de Beauvoir’s *America Day by Day* by the New York intellectuals. Beauvoir, as I discuss in chapter 4, had written an ambivalent account of her 1947 trip around the United States, which expressed personal exhilaration at her experience of the country’s radical

difference to Europe but also grave reservations about its conformist tendencies. William Phillips accused *America Day by Day* of being a “literal-minded fantasy, with just enough semblance of reality to make America seem like a lost planet, recently discovered, a little like earth, but with its own strange ways.”³⁰ Similarly, Mary McCarthy wrote of how Beauvoir had appeared as a modern-day Gulliver updated for the space age, having “descended from the plane as from a space ship, wearing metaphorical goggles.”³¹ The characterization of Beauvoir as alien clearly drew on popular science fiction tropes of the time. The allegorization of the perceived Communist threat as extraterrestrial invasion was being established as McCarthy wrote her review in 1952, following novels such as Robert A. Heinlein’s *The Puppet Masters* (1951) and movies like *Invasion USA* (1952) and *Red Planet Mars* (1952).³² Beauvoir’s failure to publicly denounce Stalin and her criticism of the forms taken by capitalism in the United States meant that she swiftly became aligned with the nation’s Cold War other, becoming not just foreign but radically alien. Beauvoir’s visit to the United States was only ever temporary, but we will see how two other Marxist-influenced émigré intellectuals, Adorno and James, were legally designated aliens by the US state, leading to restrictions on their movement and ultimately to James’s deportation. In this sense, to be an alien—more importantly, to *see* as an alien—was to pose a threat to the integrity and security of the state.

We should not lose sight, however, of the positivity of the alien goggles evoked by the attacks on Beauvoir. Her ability to “make America seem like a lost planet” was intended as a criticism by Phillips, and yet the ability to conceive a tired reality as if for the first time has been a modernist fantasy going back at least as far as Baudelaire’s call for poets to see once again as children.³³ Phillips’s phrase recalls the defamiliarization techniques that Russian Formalists earlier in the century identified as the very essence of the aesthetic.³⁴ Indeed, such formalist influences can be detected in the work of Vladimir Nabokov, who published soon after arrival in the United States his own science fiction tale in the *Atlantic Monthly*.³⁵ In “Time and Ebb” (1945), a ninety-year-old Jewish Holocaust survivor recalls from the vantage point of the distant future his arrival in the United States during World War II. The premise of the story is transparently an excuse for various exercises in defamiliarization. “Time and Ebb” is disarmingly admiring of 1940s America, in the sense that its narrator’s estranged perspective is enabled by the historical distance he perceives between himself and his object, which is described with nostalgic fondness. The dazzling effects of

rendering the familiar iconography of drugstores and skyscrapers as doubly strange—for both the European boy freshly arrived in the United States and for the old man writing in the future—are typical of Nabokov's American work in ways we will see recur in his masterpiece *Lolita*. In a similar way, the ability to see the familiar commodified landscapes of the United States with fresh European eyes, and thus to subject the tawdry and banal to a near-magical revivification, was always the secret to Saul Steinberg's commercial success in the forties and fifties. So long as they were understood to function in a strictly aesthetic sense, estrangements of this type were generally welcome among the tastemakers of the US cultural field in midcentury, performing as they did a re-enchantment of American space at the very moment when it was being homogenized by the mass construction of shopping malls, highways, and suburbs.

The benefits of alien goggles, however, go well beyond such purely aesthetic effects. In this book, I am most interested in those moments when estranging patterns can be understood as closely related to the human experience of alienation and thereby gain some kind of critical traction. As I have suggested, crude notions of the alienated intellectual have become something of a critical cliché in studies of the intellectual migration, and I am keen to avoid the orthodox ivory tower. Edward Said's essays on exile provide an alternative starting point by conceiving of exilic defamiliarization in more productive dialectical terms, offering "a double perspective that never sees things in isolation," an opportunity to "look at situations as contingent, not inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural and god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible."³⁶ Said's investment in compensating the traumatic experience of exilic suffering with such gifts of critical insight results in a deeply ambivalent account of exile, which I find echoing through the lives and works of the figures treated in this book. They are often found paradoxically to internalize and even cultivate painful aspects of their alienation in order to nurture the advantages it confers. The state of being at home, of enjoying domestic comforts, becomes something to be both desired as a memory of distant pleasures and warded off as anodyne and disabling.

Don Siegel's 1956 movie, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, provides one example from science fiction of the polyvalent, reversible function of alienation I have in mind. This picture was largely ignored on release but has since been recognized as a groundbreaking work in science fiction film his-

tory due to the originality of its central conceit, that alien invasion, rather than being staged as a violent and melodramatic event, might instead be imagined as the gradual and insidious displacement of authentic feeling from everyday life. The “pod people” from another planet that take over a small Californian town almost unnoticed are identical to ordinary human beings in every respect, other than that they are incapable of genuine affect. “There’s something missing,” says one character in describing her uncle, who has already been replaced by a pod person. “Always when he talked to me there was a certain look in his eyes. Now it’s gone. There’s no emotion. The words are the same, but there’s no feeling.”³⁷ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has endured, in a way that its contemporaneous alien invasion movies have not, largely because of this innovative presentation of aliens as uncanny, both familiar and threatening. Versions of this trope were to reappear in science fiction and Cold War conspiracy thrillers throughout the late 1950s and into the sixties, most famously in two novels that became successful films—Richard Condon’s *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959) and Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Susan Sontag noted in her perspicacious essay “The Imagination of Disaster” that this narrative subgenre, in which the human body is retained in appearance but emptied of capacities for memory and love, “derives most of its power from a supplementary and historical anxiety, also not experienced *consciously* by most people, about the depersonalizing conditions of modern urban life.”³⁸ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* articulated in a different register the same paradoxical inversion that I want to investigate in émigré art and writing, by which popularly circulated discourses and images of tranquil domesticity and comfortable homeliness in the midcentury United States are revealed through techniques of estrangement to be themselves dehumanizing charades. This function of alienation resonates with Said’s characterization of exile as “constantly being unsettled and unsettling others.” Once the process has begun (as the movie makes very clear), “you cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home.”³⁹

There will be moments when my analysis in these pages comes under pressure from the attempt to undertake simultaneously close and distant reading, synchronic and diachronic analyses, or to understand artworks both on their own terms and in relation to alien cultural formations of various types. Such challenges arise inevitably from the dialectical ambition of the book as a whole, and only its readers will be able to judge whether or not it achieves its objectives in a satisfactory way. It is worth admitting,

however, that from its earliest conception this book was always intended to overcome a tension embedded in my own intellectual development between the history of American Studies as a discrete discipline and the academic study of modernism, both of which find their origins in the period I am discussing and have undergone regeneration as “new” since the late 1990s, when I began my undergraduate studies. It strikes me that the two disciplines, which rarely speak to each other in any of the institutions I have encountered on either side of the Atlantic, have the power not only to complement one other methodologically but also to mutually unsettle their foundational priorities in beneficial ways. This study of transatlantic aliens is by its nature predisposed to do that kind of work, and if there are moments of discomfort or discord in its attempts to read pulp fiction through Pater or Dada through Fenimore Cooper, then it has gone some way toward fulfilling its intended purpose.