# *Acting Like a Gangster, Franco-American Style: Paul Muni's Scarface, Jean Gabin's Pépé le Moko, and Transnational Naturalist Mimicry*

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# Acting Like a Gangster, Franco-American Style :Paul Muni's *Scarface*, Jean Gabin's *Pépé le Moko*, and Transnational Naturalist Mimicry

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Cet article examine le caractère transnational d'un style de jeu d'acteurs masculins franco-américains propre aux films de gangster des années 30 et du début des années 40. Ce style associe l'ancienne tradition théâtrale de la pantomime au jeu naturaliste d'inspiration stanislavskienne. L'interprétation de Tony Camonte par Paul Muni (*Scarface*) génère une forme de « pantomime naturaliste » dont l'hybridité deviendra la caractéristique des rôles masculins d'immigrants. Dans *Pépé le Moko* (1937), film de référence du réalisme poétique français, le jeu de Jean Gabin consiste en une retenue naturaliste ponctuée de moments de théâtralité explosive. Cette interprétation mène à une hybridité accrue du style gangster franco-américain : Charles Boyer dans *Algiers* (1938) - version américaine de *Pépé le Moko* - et Humphrey Bogart dans *Casablanca* (1942). Ces représentations emblématiques de la masculinité des cinémas français et américains, ont donné naissance à une forme de jeu hybride et indubitablement transnational.

This paper examines a transnational, Franco-American gangster style of masculine film performance that developed over the 1930s and early 40s. That style combines an older theatrical tradition of pantomime with naturalist film acting shaped by "Stanislavskian aesthetics." Paul Muni's rendering of Tony Camonte (based on the Italian-American celebrity gangster Al Capone) in *Scarface* (1932) generates this hybridized "naturalist pantomime" as a performance of an ethnic immigrant difference. This hybrid performance of a hyphenated American leads to later performances of "native" masculine nationalism in exile in both France and the U.S. In the landmark film of French Poetic Realism, *Pépé le Moko* (1937), Gabin's performance consists of naturalist reserve punctuated with moments of explosive theatricality, which represents an inversion of Muni's combination of theatrical mimicry punctuated by moments of naturalism. Gabin's performance in *Pépé*, in turn, led to further hybridized, Franco-American gangster-style performances: by French expatriate Charles Boyer in *Algiers* (1938) - Hollywood's remake of *Pépé* - and by Humphrey Bogart as American expatriate Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* (1942). Thus, film performances that would become some of the most iconic representations of nationalized masculinity in the cinematic "golden ages" of both France and the United States also drew from and contributed to a decidedly transnational, hybridized form of acting like a gangster.

When Al Pacino recalled viewing an art house revival screening of the original 1932 *Scarface* in the late 1970s, he explained that "the film just stopped me in my tracks" (Weinraub). In particular, Pacino was struck by Paul Muni's performance as Tony Camonte, a thinly veiled fictionalization of Al Capone and his rise to power as Chicago's most famous

gangster. “All I wanted to do was imitate Paul Muni,” Pacino explains, “His acting went beyond the boundaries of naturalism into another kind of expression. It was almost abstract what he did. It was almost uplifting” (Weinraub). Muni’s performance inspired Pacino’s own as Tony Montana in Brian DePalma’s 1983 *Scarface* remake, a landmark in the latter’s career as an acting auteur. Both versions of *Scarface* were simultaneously infamous and celebrated for their excessive violence and forceful performances rendering murderous immigrant sociopaths driven to rise to the top yet fated to a tragic demise after getting there. Before ever inspiring Pacino, Muni’s early sound-era imitation of an Italian-American gangster initiated a transnational gangster style of masculine film performance that developed over the 1930s and early 1940s. That style combines an older theatrical tradition of pantomime and mimicry with naturalist film acting shaped by “Stanislavskian aesthetics”[1]. What I am calling “naturalist mimicry” in acting can be aptly characterized as “gangster” style given its combination of asserting one’s self while also relying upon and taking (or stealing) from other characteristics of a gangster identity. In the case of Paul Muni’s *Scarface*, his hybridized “naturalist mimicry” generates a performance of ethnic immigrant difference that went on to inspire later performances of “native” nationals in exile by actors who delivered what would become some of the most iconic cinematic representations of nationalized masculinity in both France and the United States during both countries’ cinematic “golden ages.”

The distinctive acting styles of Jean Gabin, Charles Boyer, and Humphrey Bogart share genealogical ties traceable back to Muni’s turn as “Scarface” Tony Camonte. Ginette Vincendeau and others have identified the influence of *Scarface* on Julien Duvivier’s 1937 *Pépé Le Moko*, a foundational text of French poetic realism that helped launch Gabin’s career and establish him as an icon of Popular Front revisions of French masculinity[2]. In turn, Hollywood’s 1938 remake of *Pépé* as *Algiers* (a singularly “faithful” if not plagiaristic version of the original) propelled the Hollywood career of Boyer who replaced Gabin in the lead role. Boyer’s performance as Pépé – which, among other things, inspired the Warner Brother’s infamously amorous cartoon skunk “Pepé Le Pew” – established him as one of Hollywood’s most influential representatives of stereotypical French masculinity. In turn, both versions of the Parisian gangster’s exile in the Casbah of Algiers have been identified as inspirations for *Casablanca* (1942), a film that has long served as a synecdoche for “Classical Hollywood” and is key to Bogart’s mythic status as an icon of Golden Age Hollywood and cinematic American masculinity. While links of influence and inspiration among these four films have been traced out by other film scholars[3], there has been no examination of the lead performances from actor to actor as constituting a transnational performance genealogy. Such a genealogy constitutes a contradictory Franco-American gangster style of film acting and performative masculinity that has both contributed to and transgressed social and cultural

1 My references to a theatrical tradition of pantomime and mimicry versus the Stanislavskian naturalism of most film acting are indebted to James Naremore’s *Acting in the Cinema* where he defines “the mimetic or ‘pantomime’ tradition” as “a performance technique that relies on conventionalized poses to help the actor indicate ‘fear,’ ‘sorrow,’ ‘hope,’ ‘confusion,’ and so forth” (51) as distinct from the naturalism of “Stanislavskian aesthetics,” the phrase he uses to “designate an expressive-realist attitude…[based on] the belief that good acting is ‘true to life’ and at the same time expressive of the actor’s authentic, ‘organic’ self” (Naremore 2).

2 Vincendeau cites *Pépé Le Moko*’s many debts to the Hollywood gangster cycle of the early thirties while also arguing that it “reworks the Hollywood gangster figure and genre, producing a new hybrid which incorporates the specific literary and socio-cultural and cinematic features of French adaptations of crime literature and film noir” (1998, 31). In this, she disagrees with George Sadoul’s more dismissive characterization of the film as derivative of Hollywood gangster films like *Scarface* : “The film had no other ambition than to transpose American gangsters to another country. For the characterisation of the gang members, Duvivier was directly inspired by Howard Hawks and *Scarface*” (quoted in Vincendeau 1998, 31).

3 Besides Vincendeau, see Christian Viviani’s “Julien Duvivier entre Paris et Hollywood : le cheminement des images.”

constructions of immigration, emigration, and exile ; national identity and difference as constituted by histories of colonialism and imperial expansion ; and discourses of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in both France and the United States.

Furthermore, the acting genealogy linking Muni, Gabin, Boyer, and Bogart across nationalized masculine performance styles is connected to an even larger history of Franco-American exchange of performance styles existing "beyond the boundaries of naturalism" in film acting and dating back to nineteenth-century formulas of elocution and stage acting developed in France and later exported to the U.S. This Franco-American gangster style of masculine film performance illustrates how cinematic icons of masculinity celebrated as distinctly French – in the case of Gabin and Boyer – and distinctly American – in the case of Bogart – in fact get constituted through transnational cultural flows (in some ways represented by the cases of Muni and Boyer) that contradict common conceptions of fundamental differences between nations and, in particular, between France and the United States. What follows concentrates first on the performance of Muni in *Scarface* followed by a discussion of how Gabin and his performance in *Pépé le Moko* reveals genealogical ties to Muni's *Scarface* while offering more limited references to Boyer and Bogart as further instances of the same transnational acting genealogy (the dynamics of which I hope to explore in greater detail in the future).

Muni's performance in *Scarface*, that Pacino found so compelling for its transgression of the "boundaries of naturalism", came at a moment of transition in acting styles when such boundaries were in their early formation and ascendance. For Pacino, the performance held revisionist promise as a kind of Brechtian modernism in acting that could challenge such boundaries[4]. In the context of Hollywood's early sound era, however, a mix of residual theatrical pantomime and emergent cinematic naturalism together constituted Muni's performance as an ethnic immigrant stage actor seeking success in a cinematic American mainstream. Born Meshilem Meier Weisenfreund, Muni was an Austro-Hungarian born Jew of Polish origins who changed his name and began his acting career in New York's Yiddish theater (where Howard Hawks says he found him while scouting for *Scarface*'s lead) (Hawks 47). Weisenfreund as Muni as Camonte successfully crossed over to film acting by mimicking behaviors, speech patterns, and gestures identifiable as stereotypical of an ethnic-immigrant type (the Italian-American gangster) in pursuit of a transgressive version of the American dream of economic prosperity beyond one's initial means. In other words, Muni performed a mix of himself and a pantomime mimicry of someone else[5].

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4 In 2003, Pacino explained to Bernard Weinraub : "*I had been wanting to see [Scarface] since '74, when I had done a workshop production of 'Arturo Ui,'" said Mr. Pacino, referring to Bertolt Brecht's "Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui," a thinly veiled fable about Hitler's rise to power set in the world of Chicago gangsters. Mr. Pacino said Brecht had been fascinated with American gangster films, especially "Scarface*" (Weinraub).

5 Though I cannot develop it completely here, it is worth mentioning the parallels in the triangular dynamics of appropriative performance of stereotypical ethnic and racial difference as a means of cultural assimilation and advancement in the case of Paul Muni's performance in Scarface and that of Al Jolson's blackface performance in Warner Brother's breakthrough "talkie" *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crossland, 1927). Jolson puts on blackface as a self-conscious performance of racialized difference that temporarily masks and displaces his own ethnic difference and thus enables a process of assimilation and the acquisition of cultural capital as he gains a powerful place in the American entertainment mainstream. Furthermore, Jolson as Jakie Rabinowitz turned Jack Robin achieves this assimilationist crossover in the film that marked the rise of the Jewish family run studio of Warner Brothers as an engine of twentieth-century mass cultural production. Muni, in turn, puts on Italian American "scarface" (i.e. an exaggerated version of an Italian-American immigrant gangster identity) in a self-consciously theatrical performance of ethnic difference that temporarily masks and displaces his own ethnicity and thus enables his crossover success to the mainstream of Hollywood film performance. Furthermore, he does so in the genre that was key to the continued success and distinct studio style of Warner Brothers (though *Scarface* itself was not a Warner Brothers picture, it did launch Muni's career which further prospered while working for that studio). For a detailed examination of these dynamics in the case of The Jazz Singer, see Rogin.

James Naremore and Christophe Damour have both argued for a reconsideration of the influence of the nineteenth-century Parisian elocutionist Francois Delsarte in shaping the early developments of American film acting, and I want to suggest that the contradictory implications of that influence can be discerned in Muni's performance in *Scarface* as well as the ways it contributed to the later acting styles of masculine icons of classical-era cinematic naturalism in both France and the United States. While naturalism in acting, like categories of national film movements and industries, dominates our understanding of how cinema operated in the 1930s and 40s, the residual influence of a theatrical tradition of mimicry and pantomime (that originally came from France to the U.S.) reveals one of the ways transnational cultural flows shaped the development of a hybridized Franco-American masculine gangster style of film performance combining mimicry and naturalism[6].

A generative tension between making self-consciously performative pantomime of someone else's behavior versus "naturally" performing a version of one's self animates Muni's interpretation of Tony Camonte and, more generally, the film's status as a gangster picture. Widely identified, along with *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931) and *Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931), as one of a trio of texts that culminated the gangster cycle of 1930-31, *Scarface* continues to represent a "classical" foundation for the gangster genre thereafter. Unlike the other two touchstone gangster films, however, *Scarface* represents a project of intervention. Relative to the narrative formulas that had taken shape in earlier gangster films, the film was an exercise in deliberate excess combined with aspirations of unprecedented "realism" from drawing directly on current events and the biography of gangster celebrity Al Capone[7]. Muni's performance as Camonte consists of a corresponding excess (so much so that at times Hawks had to instruct him to tone down his accent and gestures as they crossed over into a cartoonish version of an uneducated Italian-American immigrant) crossed with contrasting moments of more "realistic" naturalism. Just as the number of murders and scenes of urban chaos and violence in *Scarface* far exceeded those of earlier gangster films, Muni generated excess in film acting by drawing on his training as a stage actor, first in the Yiddish theater and later on Broadway. As a result, he spends much of the film making Tony's Italian-American accent and facial and other physical gestures as emphatic and exaggerated as possible. At the same time, Muni's own "outsider" status as an ethnic immigrant to the U.S., on the one hand, and a recent Hollywood emigrant from New York theater, on the other, also wound up generating elements of an emerging "naturalist" realism in film as harbinger's of a transnational Franco-American style of masculine film performance.

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6 Damour challenges the way "Delsartean" has come to serve as a pejorative shorthand for the overly formulaic, external mimicry in acting that was superseded by an ostensibly "improved" Stanislavskian naturalism. He points out that Delsarte's acting methods were reduced to formulaic external gestures by his French and American acolytes including Alfred Giraudet and Charles Aubert in France and, in the U.S., Edmund Shaftsbury and Steele Mackaye. that "Delsartean" should, Damour argues, characterize a more hybridized instance of exercises using external mimicry but leading to a naturalist end. Delsarte's approach to acting consisted of resistant engagement with the classical performance formulas of the French academy in favor of a proto-naturalist approach drawing on a mystical sensibility and inspiration from within one self. The expression of an internal self would come once "warmed up" using exercises that would later be misconstrued as a performance end. For Delsarte, these exercises were only the means to a more naturalist performance end. This revision of "Delsartean," acknowledging a blend of mimicry and naturalism, fits with my analysis of gangster performance genealogy also built on a blend of the two (Naremore 52-67; Damour 2007, 20-4).

7 Fran Masson characterizes *Scarface* as an exercise in "everything to excess" and "a parody as well as a summation" of the early gangster cycle (24-26). Screenwriter Ben Hecht's account of deliberately increasing the number of murders far beyond any other gangster picture, along with Hawks and Hughes fashioning themselves as independent outsiders relative to the studio system (and, in particular, *the* gangster studio Warner Brothers with whom Hawks broke his contract to work with Hughes) are indicative of the self-conscious, self-reflexive spirit of the film (Hawks 43-8; McCarthy 131).

A scene in *Scarface* that has become one of its most iconic – when Camonte first obtains and demonstrates a Thompson Machine gun – is also exemplary of the theatrical excesses in Muni's performance. When showing his boss Johnny Lovo (Osgood Perkins) the gun that will serve as the tool of his violent rise to power, Muni-as-Camonte acts like an adolescent barely able to contain his giddiness at the discovery of his new toy[8]. He delivers the line "Look-it, Johnny, you can carry it around like a baby," in a singsong so pronounced it cracks his voice like that of a teenage boy going through puberty. His voice then drops lower as he verbally overpowers Lovo's attempts to give him orders "for the last time." Tapping his fingers on the gun for emphasis, Muni-as-Camonte announces the new order of things : "There's only one thing that gets and gives orders and this is it." Rushing his next lines, Muni offers a kind of manic gangster poetry : "Some little type-writer eh ? I'm gonna write my name all over this town with it in big letters". His delivery is correspondingly big in gesture, volume, and emphasis. Trampling on the attempted interjection by Perkins-as-Lovo ("Hey, stop him somebody"), Muni "spits" out his next lines announcing a seemingly uncontrollable impulse to act – and to act excessively : "Get out of my way Johnny, I'm gonna spit !". Muni fans the machine gun toward the camera as he begins firing. The camera's reverse shots of the shattering destruction are intercut with one of the most famous images of Muni from the film. In an American shot, we see him through a cloud of smoke. Despite the ambient haze and shot distance, the expression of excessive, seemingly psychotic pleasure remains clearly visible. With knees bent and body hunched in order to brace himself against the machine gun's kick, Muni-as-Tony thrusts his chin forward and his eyebrows high. His open-mouthed smile and the downward gaze of his wide eyes – which helps their whites shine through the smoke – make his joy at the sight of destruction disturbingly "over the top" and seemingly out of control. "Over the top" is a phrase frequently used to characterize Muni's acting style in *Scarface* (and, in turn, the performance it inspired in Pacino's reinterpretation of the role in 1983). While that excess served a stereotyped imitation of an Italian American (in the service of Anglo-American billionaire Howard Hughes's film production reflecting nativist xenophobia)[9], it was generated through Muni's stage craft and theatrical training in the Yiddish theater and then on Broadway following performance codes originating from France.

Another sign of Muni's theatrical training and exaggerated performance style, and a revealing instance of the film's self-conscious self-reflexivity, comes in the midst of Tony's courting of his boss's moll, Poppy (Karen Morley). When he first meets her at Lovo's apartment, Tony mimics her eyebrow plucking in an attempt to flirt. Muni raises his eyebrows and generates arm and hand gestures that would have been discernible from the back rows of a playhouse. Later, when showing Poppy the advertisement declaring "The World is Yours" (a tourism message Tony interprets as a personal directive for his gangster ambitions) he tells her in a thick, exaggerated accent, "Some day I look at that sign and I say 'Oh-kay, She's-a mine'". The cartoonish accent is accompanied by Muni thrusting his finger tips upward off of his brow (an exaggerated tick of salutation he performs throughout the film) and waving his thumb toward himself like a fan while opening his eyes wide, arching his eyebrows high, and leaning in uncomfortably close to Morley.

Morley-as-Poppy's reply to this exaggerated performance of Tony's exaggerated ambitions generates a revealing moment of self-reflexive mockery coming at the expense of the speech and gestures of Muni-as-Tony. While grasping the lapel of his silk lounging jacket and feeling the texture with her fingers, Morley mimics Muni's strong accent and his earlier comment

8 Hawks cites this scene in particular when describing how he and screenwriter Ben Hecht "conceived the idea that these fellows were childish, [and] it helped us do some scenes" (Hawks 47).

9 As Richard Maltby has explained, "the simian exaggerations of Paul Muni's performance" generated "caricatured signifiers of ethnicity that led the Italian ambassador and fifty Italian American organizations to denounce *Scarface* as a 'libel on the Italian race'" (Maltby 140).

admiring the very same kind of jacket on Lovo : “Say that’s a puhty hot. Expensive eh ?” Muni-as-Tony takes the mocking imitation in stride offering a hearty laugh while dishing the line right back. “Yeah, com’ere ; I’ll show you something what’s puhty hot,” he answers as he leads her into the bedroom to “try out” his bed. Gerald Mast’s description of the spirit of ‘fun’ that was part of Howard Hawks’s directing and production style helps contextualize this turn to self-reflexive mockery (Mast 86-93). In this glimpse of self-consciousness and overt mimicry, Morley-as-Poppy and Muni-as-Tony are the ones having the fun on camera at the latter’s expense but more specifically at the expense of Tony Camonte as a stereotyped caricature of the Italian-American as a grasping, materialistic brute making laughable attempts to copy the class pretensions of the boss. Earlier, and at the moment we see Poppy’s attitude towards Tony starting to change from repulsion to attraction, she tells him he’s a “funny mixture”. The charisma that she seems to be responding to is tied up in this mixing. Her characterization of Tony’s pinky ring as “kind of effeminate” marks the mixing as one based on gender sensibilities. The “funny mix” of Muni’s and Tony’s self presentation, however, also involves a blend of distinct class sensibilities, immigrant efforts at assimilation, knowing savvy and ignorance, sincerity crossed with subterfuge, and, ultimately, acting “naturally” crossed with self-conscious put on[10].

Over the course of the film’s narrative, Tony gets “smarter” in terms of both his dress and social sensibilities and in his astute, albeit violent, maneuvering within the crime world. With his increased fashion and business smarts comes increased power. Correspondingly, the power of Muni’s performance shifts to a more restrained form of naturalism, the ostensibly more “internalized” film acting method that was in the process of superseding the more “externalized” pantomime tradition of theatrical mimicry that had dominated silent film acting. Just as the manic machine-gunning of Lovo’s office illustrates the theatrical excess of Muni’s gangster performance, a later encounter in the same venue provides a key example of his more restrained performance style. The shift comes when Tony confronts Lovo after narrowly surviving an assassination attempt. In the confrontation, Muni’s gestures as Tony’s become far more minimalist and seemingly Stanislavskian. The scene (along with that of the earlier machine gun “spitting”) is often referenced as one of the most powerful and menacing moments of Muni’s performance in the film. The close-up reaction shot of Tony just after Lovo takes the phone call staged to reveal his treachery is among the most frequently reproduced images from the film[11]. Muni’s hair, which up to this point has been carefully shellacked-back, now hangs down in a more “natural” muss that covers part of his forehead. The same forehead, along with Muni’s eyebrows, that had been so excessively expressive before is now pulled slightly downward while remaining entirely static. Cigarette smoke floats up past Muni’s face generating the only movement in the shot and further highlighting his new performative stasis. With his chin slightly dropped, Muni’s naturally pronounced brow buries his eyes inward as they gaze out menacingly toward Lovo generating an image of chillingly cold-blooded passivity[12]. In the next reaction shot, Perkins performs Lovo as clearly

10 Worth exploring further, but something space does not allow for here, is the way “playing dumb” operates as part of the complicated interpolation of Muni’s performance as Tony and Tony’s own performance within the film’s diegesis.

11 A screen capture of this shot along with the production still modeled on the Tommy Gun “spitting” scene are the two most prominent results of a Google image search : “Paul Muni Scarface.”

12 Versions of this grave brooding gaze from beneath heavy brows would become a trademark of Muni’s, in production stills from *Scarface* but also in the promotional posters and production stills for his later biopic renderings of Louis Pasteur (*The Story of Louis Pasteur*, William Dieterle, 1936) and Emile Zola (*The Life of Emile Zola*, William Dieterle, 1937). It is also worth mentioning that those two films contribute to another thread of Muni’s role in Franco-American performance exchanges and the transnational “gangster style” genealogy. Though Pasteur and Zola were not gangsters, in the two First National/Warner Brothers productions starring Muni, they did serve as exemplary rebellious types challenging the status quo.

shaken by the cool, calm, effortless way Muni as Tony does nothing more than sit and look at him. The result exemplifies Hitchcock's naturalist characterization of the best screen acting coming from someone "who can do nothing extremely well" (Naremore 34). Up to this point, Muni's presence on screen has been excessively, aggressively, and often self-consciously performative. In this scene, Muni-as-Tony sits back and impassively watches someone else perform theatrical excess, namely the hysterical boss for whom he had previously worked so hard.

After a shot of George Raft's barely perceptible shake of the head as Little Boy Rinaldo, signaling his refusal of the drink Lovo offers him (a gestural minimalism that reinforces Muni's newly restrained performance style), a cut back to Lovo is joined by Tony's trademark whistle from off camera. We hear the soft, haunting Italian opera aria that has preceded his dispatching of other gang leaders. We next see Muni as Tony again, and although his lips are puckered in a whistle, the rest of his face remains static and unchanged. With slow deliberateness he crushes out his cigarette and just as slowly stands to take measured steps away from Lovo and toward the office door where the boss's name is stenciled on the glass. The slow, restrained understatement of Muni's movements is all the more noticeable given the energetic physicality that has dominated his performance up to this point. After a notable pause before the door and another reaction shot of Lovo's increasing anxiety, Muni throws his fist through the glass and breaks the mounting tension of the scene. The punch leaves an impressively precise circular hole eliminating most of Lovo's name. In the same burst of motion, Muni abruptly turns to face Lovo showing no signs of pain or flinching. Instead, his menacing gaze intensifies. Perkins-as-Lovo begins sniveling irrationally as Muni-as-Tony slowly advances toward him. Though no words of accusation have been spoken, Lovo sputters defensive claims of innocence ("It's a lie. I didn't do it. I wouldn't try anything on you Tony. We're pals".). Perkins's verbose, high-speed babbling generates a marked contrast to Muni's slow deliberate movements and stoicism. Earlier, Muni's voice had cracked with the excitement of acquiring the Tommy gun. In this scene, it is Perkins's voice that twice cracks in a high, squeaky "pop" of an empty promise: "Poppy! I'll let you have her. You can have Poppy, Tony". Besides contrasting Perkins-as-Lovo's hysterical sniveling, Muni's calm brooding in this scene also generates a powerful counterpoint to his own earlier performative excesses.

This far more minimalist style of acting comes at a key moment in his character's rise to power. The earlier excess of Muni's theatricality had been accompanied by the destructive excess of the Tommy gun as a tool of modern technology and a prosthetic of Tony's excessively violent persona. In this later sequence, he reverts to the physical violence of one precise punch, thus generating a more "natural," animal minimalism. He goes on to restrain even this atavistic impulse for violence, making an effort *not* to act. After grasping Lovo by the hair and raising a fist, Muni-as-Tony cuts off the gesture. Instead, he pushes Lovo away and mutters with acid contempt : "the boss". This line delivers a dismissal of Lovo's status as such while also resonating as a self-loathing articulation of what he is in the process of becoming. With the murder of Lovo, Tony reaches the summit of his climb to the top and becomes the gang leader of his aspirations. As Rinaldo advances on Lovo while reaching for his gun, the camera cuts to the newly empowered Tony walking stoically out of the office. A passing glance on his way out provides the muted signal for Rinaldo to dispatch Lovo thus replicating the practice for which Tony has condemned his boss (Lovo : "I never did anything to anybody. I never hurt anybody". Tony : "No, you get somebody else to do it for you".) At the very moment Tony achieves "success" in acting like a gangster, he also breaks a key tenant of the "one law you gotta follow to keep out of trouble : Do it first, do it yourself, and keep on doing it". Now at the top, Tony's transgression of his own code immediately signals the beginning of his demise. For Muni's acting, however, the scene represents a turn away

from the codes of his theatrical training on the Yiddish stage (where he had mastered mimicry, pantomime, and elaborate makeup transformations) and a move toward the emerging film performance style of restrained naturalism. While Tony mimics his former boss's practice of getting "somebody else to do it for you", Muni turns to the acting style received as a more authentic form of "doing your self".

Though Tony Camonte ultimately finds himself dead in the gutter "where the horses stand" (as the police chief had predicted), the legacy of *Scarface* and, in particular, Muni's "funny [yet powerful] mixture" of pantomime mimicry and naturalism in acting have lived on. Pacino's Muni-inspired performance in DePalma's remake and the cult following that film has enjoyed among audiences of both white college students and African-American "gangsta-style" hip-hop musicians are only the most recent offspring in a performance genealogy traceable back to Muni's original gangster style[13]. When first screened in U.S. theaters, Muni's mixture of naturalism and mimicry came in the context of ethnic immigrants facing nativist bigotry and xenophobia while managing to both imitate "others" and "be themselves" as a means of accessing American cultural and economic capital and exemplifying American models and myths of upward social mobility and liberal individualism. Immigrants trying to act American, which in the case of Muni's performance in *Scarface* consists of a theatrical pantomime of someone else mixed with a more "internal", "natural" presentation of one's self, reflects the tensions and fault lines in the imagined American national community generated through a history of immigration. What those fault lines open up, however, is transnational accessibility and adaptability that can be discerned in the ostensibly naturalist, nationalist cinematic performances of Jean Gabin's seemingly quintessential Frenchness in the Poetic Realism of Golden Age French cinema and, later, in Charles Boyer's seemingly quintessential "Frenchness" and Humphrey Bogart's seemingly quintessential (non-immigrant) "Americanness" in Golden Age Hollywood.

In 1932, Muni's performance established a powerful precedent for how to act like a gangster on film that helped define the figure as a non-native, ethnic outsider. By the later 1930s and early 1940s, however, that hybrid, hyphenated American performance style would be inverted and refashioned as performances of nativist nationalism[14]. The "funny mixture" of Muni's immigrant performance as Tony Camonte, dominated by excessive mimicry yet punctuated by contrasting moments of naturalist understatement, would reappear in Gabin as an exemplary performances of understated naturalism punctuated by exceptional moments of explosive emotion. This inverted version of Muni's gangster style would become Gabin's acting trademark, so much so that apocryphal stories arose claiming his production contracts included requisite scenes of Gabinian explosion (Vincendeau 2000, 73). Vincendeau, while noting the French critical insistence on the naturalism of Gabin's acting,[15] also points out how

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13 The premise for Weinraub's 2003 New York Times article and interview with Pacino regarding his channeling of Muni's original *Scarface* performance was a reflection on the remake's lasting cult status. African-American "gangsta-style" hip-hop musicians, explains Sean "Puffy" Combs - watch the film repeatedly "for the lessons" (Weinraub).

14 In *Petrified Forest* (Archie Mayo, 1936), the film that launched Bogart's early film career as a prolific gangster character actor of the late 1930s, Gramp Maple (Charley Grapewin) sums up nativist bigotry and the fusion of "gangster" with "immigrant" while also revealing the way Bogart-as-Duke Mantee (a role he first performed on Broadway) appropriates Muni's theatrical gangster style as a native-born, American actor playing a character modeled on the Anglo-Saxon, native born criminal celebrity John Dillinger as a kind of nativist answer to Capone. When Boze the football player (Dick Foran) calls Duke "A Gangster and a rat", Gramp objects : "He ain't no gangster ! He's a real old time desperaydo. Gangsters is foreigners, and he's an American".

15 "From very early on, Gabin was perceived as illustrating a perfect homology between actor, person and character, the key to stardom. 'Gabin is not an actor, but a force of nature' (Jean Piverd) ; 'Jean Gabin is transparency incarnate, the very evidence of a human being' (Jacques Prevért) ; 'He can only do one thing : exist

that naturalism was "paradoxically, reinforced by its opposite – Gabin's famous 'explosion of violence'. These outbursts became a legendary part of his performance style ; they were moments of mini-spectacle in their own right" (Vincendeau 2000, 73). For Dudley Andrew, the mix of Gabin's "specific style : at once laconic and explosive" was a central component of the "optique" of poetic realism that fostered the imagined community of the French nation in the 1930s : "Arguably the focus of identification for an entire nation, his roles and his style condense the poetic realist optique into a single figure, a body, that moves on screen" (Andrew 1995, 226)[16]. Andrew also argues that Gabin embodies a distinctly French "aesthetic of the criminal" tied to an "ethos of authentic self-projection", and his description of this ethos is nothing short of text book Stanislavskain naturalism : "This veneer of authenticity might go by the name of 'the personal […] the French believed that their films, like their criminals, were not subject to any rules at all except those that came passionately from within" (Andrew 1995, 228-9).

While delineating decidedly French, decidedly naturalist qualities of Gabin's performance style, Andrew also invokes "quite different counterparts in Hollywood", namely James Cagney and Paul Muni. For Andrew, their gangster personas represent a clear contrast to Gabin because they were shaped by "the peculiar dreams of wealth and power that perhaps can only come out of a democracy like that of the United States". Gabin, Andrew insists, is "more traditional: emblem of French film and culture, he is a loner without a gang, in quest of self-determination not self-aggrandizement" (Andrew 1995, 228-9). This insistence on national difference in gangster styles, however, does not square with Gabin's performance in *Pépé le Moko*, the film that Andrew places "at the official entryway of the poetic realist school", that Vincendeau cites as a milestone of French cinema, and that both agree helped launch Gabin's career as a singular cinematic icon of Frenchness and/or French masculinity (Andrew 1995, 258 ; Vincendeau 1985, 18 ; 2000, 60-1).

Noting that "the Hollywood gangster film made a big impact on the French public and critics", Vincendeau succinctly summarizes that influence on *Pépé le Moko*. "[K]ey elements in *Pépé le Moko* are derived from its Hollywood predecessors : the gangster hero and his motley mob of hoodlums, the iconography of guns, sharp suits and felt hats, the glamorous 'moll'". Vincendeau also describes "French gangsters of the 1930s," like Gabin's Pépé, as sporting "the new, Americanised, look of the sharp-suited, slick-haired, 'Latin' mobster typified by Paul Muni's Tony Camonte in *Scarface*" (Vincendeau 1998, 31). Muni's performance style should be added to the list of influences on the performances and presentations of the French gangster, particularly for the ways it contributed to what Vincendeau identifies as the "duality of [Gabin's] characters" (Vincendeau 2000, 72).

Just as Muni's "theatrical" performance in *Scarface* at times included both revealingly self-conscious moments citing that theatrical excess (Morely's echoing of "puhty hot") and other moments of far more minimalist "naturalism" providing powerful counterpoint, so too does Gabin's performance in *Pépé* include self-reflexive presentations revealing both the naturalist and theatrical techniques of his performance. Naturalism as performance is immediately put on display in Gabin's first scene in the film during his conversation with his jewelry fence, Grand Père (Saturnin Fabre), and the other members of his gang. While Grand Père compliments Pépé on his refined tastes reflected in the jewels he has stolen, the gruff, grasping materialism of Pépé's sergeant Carlos, portrayed with emphatic acting by Gabriel Gabrio, generates the scene's tension. Gabin's cool, relaxed demeanor stands in contrast to

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on screen as he is in real life' (Benjamin Fainsibler)" (Vincendeau 2000, 72). Vincendeau also cites Marcel Carné's declaration that Gabin "displays stupefying naturalness and authenticity" (Vincendeau 2000, 65).

16 Andrew argues further that poetic realism's uniquely compelling rapport with its French audiences constitutes an "autoreflective character" built on the "earnest tone Duvivier established in *La Belle Equipe* and *Pépé le Moko.*" For Andrew, Gabin "epitomized that earnestness" (Andrew 1995, 226).

Gabrio's aggressive complaints and impatient insistence on getting the cash for their heist. Pépé and Grand Père bond over criticism of Carlos for his brutish materialism and lack of refinement. Grand Père tells him he "talks like a gardner", and Pépé calls him a "vandal" for cutting up fox stoles with a razor, declaring bluntly "you pain me" ("Tu m'fais mal.") Gabrio-as-Carlos twice challenges Pépé to repeat his criticism, both times leaning forward across Grand Père's desk and shouting the lines in Gabin's face : ("I pain you ? Repeat that !"/ "Je te fais mal ? Répète-le") Gabin-as-Pépé, however, remains unflappable ; with a wry smirk he stares coolly back at Carlos and repeats himself : "Tu m'fais mal". The dynamics of the exchange played out before the camera puts on display Gabin's skill at remaining cool while also providing a glimpse of the demands of naturalist film acting : the ability to repeat lines in multiple takes while maintaining one's composure and presentation with consistency. In one sense, Gabrio plays the role not only of Carlos but of a demanding film director commanding an actor to perform his lines again. Gabin's ease in following such a command serves as a virtuoso performance of naturalism even as the moment puts such a technique on display as an acting technique.

The contrasting moment of Gabinian explosion that inevitably comes later also unfolds in an exchange with Grand Père, Carlos, and the other members of the gang. It also includes revealing commentary on Gabin's performance as a performance, this time in regard to its theatricality. After the death of his protégé Pierrot (Gilbert Gil) at the hands of the police, Pépé, somewhat drunk and disheveled, drowns his sorrows in a casbah café. Not being able to attend the funeral services held outside the Casbah makes his mourning all the more painful. Pépé's nemesis, local inspector Slimane (Lucas Gridoux), stops at the café to further feed his suffering with a melodramatic account of the interment. As Slimane speaks, off screen drumming begins as a menacing sign of the Casbah's ambient primitivism. Slimane's story and the drumming prove to be too much for Pépé as Gabin's restraint slips away. In a close-up two shot, Gabin's eyes bulge as his head tilts to one side. Chanting in Arabic joins the drumming, and, as if on cue, Gabin brings both palms to his head covering his eyes and forehead and then drives his fingers up into his scalp further mussing his hair. The gesture constitutes a text-book instance of what Naremore calls the "demonstrative, highly codified style of pantomime" (53). In fact, Gabin's exact gesture of hands to head is one delineated in Charles Aubert's influential training manual for stage and silent film actors, *The Art of Pantomime* (translated into English in 1927). Naremore cites the hands to head gesture specifically as one of those codified in Aubert's guide : "If [a man] grasps both hands to his head, the possible meanings are 'What shall I do ? All is lost ; My head hurts : Despair. It will drive me crazy'" (56)[17]. This classical, formulaic gesture of despair is only the beginning of Gabin's emphatically performative explosion of emotion. When a blind, crippled Casbah resident enters the café begging with a monotonous refrain in Arabic, Gabin-as-Pépé's screen presence becomes more physical and more aggressive as, in a medium shot, we see him launch a clay carafe at the man's head. With the turn to the subject of Gaby, the Parisian woman Pépé desires and who Slimane tells him won't return to the Casbah, the camera moves further back and moves to follow Gabin in a full shot as he forcefully shoves first his native girlfriend Inès (Line Noro) and then his two mute side kicks Max (Roger Legris) and Jimmy (Gaston Modot) out of the camera's frame. The full, trademark Gabinian rage erupts in his exchange with Carlos. In response to his gruff sergeant's complaint that he has bungled the chance to steal Gaby's jewelry, Gabin jumps up, gesturing violently and screaming in

17 Both Boyer in *Algiers* and Bogart in *Casablanca* make this same classical gesture of despair : Boyer as a direct copy of Gabin's Pépé and Bogart in the midst of Rick Blaine's famous drunken remorse after encountering Ilse (Ingrid Bergman) in his café. For an analysis of this hands to head "tragic gesture" of theatrical acting translated into cinema, historically and in relation to Al Pacino in particular, see "Le geste tragique: de la pose à l'emblème" in *Al Pacino: le dernier tragédien* (Damour 2009, 91-103).

repetition, “Foutez-moi le camp !” (a phrase with degree of vulgarity somewhere between “Fuck off !” and “Leave me alone !”). The previously pugnacious Carlos, who had earlier been befuddled by Pépé’s unflappability, is here cowed by his excess and exits declaring “Whoah ! You don’t need to force it, I got it” (“Oh ! T’as pas besoin de forcer, ça va”). Where Gabrio-as-Carlos had earlier functioned like a director cueing Gabin to exhibit his naturalist acting reserve, here he patronizes his theatrical excess by backing down.

At this point Grand Père attempts to appeal to Pépé through the connection he feels he shares with him in contrast to the other gang members. Grand Père’s comments address directly the old-fashioned theatricality of Gabin’s performance : “Your friends lack tact, my dear Pépé,” he begins. “They do not appreciate the charming flow of your suffering. The Shakespearean style is out of fashion nowadays. I understand your disgust in being obliged to live among them”[18]. Fabre delivers Grand Père’s snobbish attempt at calming flattery with a measured formality in his cadence and diction (addressing Pépé in the “vous” form) and with a theatrical hand gesture, all of which reinforce the anachronistically “Shakespearean style” he suggests also belongs to Gabin-as-Pépé. The appeal, however, does not achieve its desired effect, and instead further feeds Gabin’s over-the-top performance of rage. Grand Père receives the same treatment as Carlos : a pair of “Foutez-moi le camp !” screamed at him followed by a longer monologue of rage that may best be characterized as Shakespearean theatricality on Stanislavskian “working-class” performance steroids. After high volume, guttural yells declaring his freedom and independence while pounding emphatically at his chest, Gabin-as-Pépé breaks away from Grand Père who attempts to protect him from himself and the impulse to leave the safety of the Casbah in search of Gaby. Seeing Pépé as he rushes out of the café, Inès manages to stop him before he descends out of his prison/sanctuary. Ultimately, however, he fulfills his desire to leave only to be caught by Slimane and then to take his own life at the close of the film. Like Tony Camonte before him, Pépé’s delusional faith in a myth of unhindered freedom and liberal individualism (and a belief that a “natural” man can do and obtain whatever he desires) ultimately leads to his self-destruction. Gabin’s performance of fateful, French Poetic Realist demise unfolds through a naturalist mimicry with genealogical acting ties to the “funny mixture” of Muni’s Camonte[19].

In her discussion of Gabin’s performance style, Vincendeau points out how the “mini-spectacle” of his more theatrical moments of rage contribute, paradoxically, to his ostensibly “natural” authenticity as an actor. “They indicate”, she explains, “a loss of control which, in our culture, also signifies the authentic : since he can’t help it, it really is ‘him’” (Vincendeau 2000, 73). Vincendeau also notes the paradoxical way Gabin managed to embody an archetypal Popular Front, working-class identity (and masculinity in particular) while also maintaining a charismatic distance from that identity, particularly as a stylish man with bourgeois airs emanating from a body type, accent, and physical gestures marked as authentically working class (Vincendeau 1998, 44 ; 2000, 70). She also suggests that Gabin’s post-war performances as a patriarchal, “embourgeoisé” godfather figure stands in “complete

18 “Vos amis manquent de tact mon cher Pépé. Ils ne respectent pas le cours charmant de votre douleur. Le style Shakespearien ne saurait être de mise aujourd’hui. Je comprends votre écœurement d’être obligé de vivre parmi eux”.

19 Andre Bazin’s linking of Gabin and Bogart on the question of fate points to the forward development of the acting genealogy that I am arguing also ties Gabin to Muni (Bazin 98-99). Going further back, these fated protagonists of French and American cinema can be seen not only as legacies of nineteenth-century theatrical codes of pantomime and mimicry, but also of a late nineteenth-century Franco-American literary naturalism launched by Emile Zola and adopted in the works of Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris. Literary naturalism’s blending of pre-determined fate (dictated by environment and biology) with a new emphasis on “realism” parallels a hybridized acting style blending pantomime mimicry (and its predetermined codes) with the aspirations of “realism” and authenticity of the Stanislavskian aesthetic, also labeled “naturalism.”

contrast" to his pre-war films (Vincendeau 2000, 63). An air of stylish bourgeois distance emanating from within a working-class archetype certainly applies to Gabin's Pépé in the harbinger performance of his prewar career. That conflicted combination generates the bind of isolation and alienation Gabin-as-Pépé feels, and rages against, relative to his gangster crew (with their cartoonish American gangster trappings) on the one hand, and, on the other, the smug paternalism and more classical French airs and identity of the appropriately named Grand Père. Much like Muni's Tony Camonte before him, Gabin's gangster performance turns on a "funny (and powerful) mixture" – something Vincendeau describes as Gabin's "Charismatic Ordinariness" (Vincendeau 2000, 69-70) and that I am arguing comes from the hybridized naturalist mimicry of his acting style that manages to generate iconic Frenchness while also borrowing from a national and ethnic performance of doubled American otherness.

It may seem remarkable and unlikely, particularly from within the framing oppositions of French and American national difference and performative mimicry vs. naturalism in acting, that Jean Gabin could successfully take seeds of an early Hollywood sound-era, doubly hyphenated American, immigrant gangster performance dominated by excessive theatricality and ethnic stereotyping and transform it into French cinematic gold of Poetic Realism and a performance style associated with naturalist poise, understatement, and exiled national iconicity constructed in a setting of colonialist, racialized difference. What would seem equally if not even more remarkable, however, is how further transnational genealogical developments would further re-adapt the gangster style of performance back to Hollywood and in the service of its own version of French masculine iconicity in the film *Algiers*. Casting Charles Boyer in the shot-by-shot remake of the *Pépé*, Hollywood replaced Gabin's proletarian authenticity with a far more bourgeois Frenchness – that was characterized dismissively in France as "Pépé le Monsieur" (Vincendeau 1998, 68). Vincendeau contrasts Boyer's and Gabin's respective turns as Pépé characterizing the former as "an actor impersonating a character where Gabin exudes a sense of authenticity" (1998, 68). And yet, it would be difficult to deny the genuine or "authentic" Frenchness that inevitably contributes to Boyer's performance just as Gabin's ostensible naturalism and authenticity involve elements of theatrical mimicry and character "impersonation". Nor is Boyer's Pépé the end of the Franco-American genealogical chain of gangster style naturalist mimicry in acting, for his higher-brow iteration of Pépé served as an inspiration for Humphrey Bogart's Pépé-esque turn as Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*[20]. An overtly propagandistic, and yet also ultimately iconic, Hollywood representation of a romantic American individualist making a self-sacrificing choice to join the French-led international resistance to fascism, Bogart's Blaine (though not officially a "gangster") is also a legacy off-spring of a Franco-American gangster style acting parentage (a full consideration of which requires an article of its own).

The notion of acting "natural" in cinema contributes to the naturalizing and ideological masking of the imagined communities of the nation. When an actor is presumed to simply perform who he or she is in some fundamental way, that performance can help support constructions of national identity and difference. The "boundaries of naturalism" in acting, in other words, facilitate the construction of the boundaries of the nation marking out national difference. The theatrical performance tradition of pantomime and mimicry, on the other hand, while in some ways also contributing to constructions of social difference and, in particular, class distinction[21], has also played a key role in generating performance styles in cinema that transgress both the boundaries of naturalism in acting and, in turn, the boundaries

20 When Warner Brothers producer Hal Wallis sent Philip and Julius Epstein to pitch their story idea for the film to David O. Selznick in order to get him to release Ingrid Bergman for the female lead, Julius finally broke through to the disinterested producer by declaring, "Oh what the hell! It's going to be a lot of shit like *Algiers*" (Sperber and Lax 191).

21 See Naremore pp 53-67.

of national difference. While Jean Gabin and Charles Boyer together represent two of the most influential film icons of decidedly French masculinity of the thirties and forties, and Bogart, in turn, stands among the most influential and celebrated icons of a distinctly American masculinity in Golden Age Hollywood, all three men's presumably natural, national performance styles are indebted to a decidedly transnational Franco-American performance genealogy crossing naturalist ostensiveness (the mainstay of both Golden Age film acting in both Hollywood and France) with the earlier theatrical performance tradition of mimicry and pantomime (elements that dominate Muni's performance as Tony "Scarface" Camonte), a French import to the United States that paralleled the emerging naturalism of Stanislavsky in the 1920s and early 1930s. That their gangster acting style can be traced to a Polish Jew who emigrated to the U.S. from Vienna and mimicked an Italian-American gangster expands the web of identity constructions, reconstructions, and transgressive, hybridized performance styles beyond the realm of Franco-American exchange that is only one piece of larger historical genealogy traceable to much broader ethnic, racial, and transnational histories of migration and cultural exchanges and flows.

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